



## THE PASTOR'S DESK

December 6, 2009 - Immaculate Conception

### Dear Parishioners,

On Tuesday the Church will celebrate the Feast of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. This is, probably, the most misunderstood event in the faith of the Church.

The dogma of the Immaculate Conception simply states that Mary, from the first moment of her conception in the womb of St. Ann, her mother, was free from Original Sin. The Church has come to recognize this truth, this dogma, from what is revealed to us in Tradition and Scripture. It follows from who Jesus is and who Mary is. How so? The best statement I have found is from *The Mother of the Saviour* by Fr. Garrigou-LaGrange, O.P. Before giving you his statement, we need to consider what theologians call the "Economic Trinity." No, this is not about God's investments or monetary policy, it came from the Greek word for "plan." In this sense it refers to the Trinity and God's plan for creation and salvation. From all eternity, the Father and the Son agreed to create the world and the Son agreed to become man and to die on the Cross as a remedy for Original Sin. In this way, God predestined man not just to be created but also to be redeemed from sin in the sacrificial death of His Incarnate Son. In this agreement, the man, Jesus, was also predestined for natural divine sonship. That is, as a man, he would be the Son of God.

Because of this, Mary was also predestined to divine maternity. As Fr. Garrigou-LaGrange said:

*"Pius IX affirmed it in effect in the Bull Ineffabilis Deus, by which he defined the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, when he said that God the Father predestined Jesus to natural divine sonship (in his human nature he would be Son of God) and Mary to be Mother of God, in one and the same divine decree. The eternal predestination of Jesus included not only the Incarnation itself. . .but also all the circumstances of time and place in which it would be realized, and especially the one expressed by the Nicene Creed in the words: "Et incarnatus est de Spiritu Sancto ex Maria Virgine" (and he was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary). By the same eternal decree, therefore, Jesus was predestined to be the Son of the Most High and Mary to be the Mother of God."*

From this truth, come other statements about the Blessed Virgin Mary. We can appreciate and meditate on these truths also. As Fr. Garrigou-LaGrange also tells us:

*"The reason why Mary was given a fullness of grace from the first instant was that she might be enabled to conceive the Man of God in holiness, by uttering her fiat [let be done to me] with the utmost generosity on the day of the Annunciation in spite of the sufferings which she knew had been foretold of the Messiah; it was given to her, too, that she might bring*

*forth her child while remaining a virgin, that she might surround Him with the motherly and most holy devotion; it was given her, finally, that she might unite herself to Him in closest conformity of will, as only a most holy mother can, during His hidden life, His apostolic life, and His suffering life—that she might utter her second fiat [let it be done] most heroically at the foot of the Cross, with Him, by Him, and in Him."*

As Fr. Hugon has so well put it: *"The divine maternity postulates intimate friendship with God. Since a mother is bound both by a law of nature and an express precept to love her son, and he to love her, Mary and Jesus love each other mutually; and since the maternity in question here is supernatural, the love must be of the same order."*

With all this in mind, we still have the problem that kept this dogma from being proclaimed for so long. Mary still depended on the graces of her divine Son, which he merited on the Cross, in order to be conceived without original sin. The conception of Mary occurred long before her Son died on the Cross. Here we look to the Medieval theologian Duns Scotus. He drew a distinction between "preservative" and "liberative" redemption. All are in need of salvation through Jesus Christ. This is clear. But, the sanctifying grace which saves from original sin can come in two different ways. For all of us, it comes as a liberative redemption, which frees us from original sin already contracted at our conception. In the case of Mary, though, this sanctifying grace was preservative, that is, it preserved her from contracting original sin at the moment of her conception.

One last problem that can hinder our appreciation of this dogma is the inability to conceive of the holiness to which we are called by our baptism. Can we think of ourselves as ever becoming "not sinners." The Immaculate Conception means, above all things, that Mary was NOT a sinner. She was, from the moment of her conception, what we will be in Heaven. This is truly the image of what we shall be. Also, there are times even during our lives on earth, where we can be NOT sinners. This does not mean that we cease to need the grace of the Cross of Christ; rather, it means that the grace of the Cross of Christ is having its effect, our sanctification. Indeed, it can be said that we receive sanctifying grace in both the liberative and preservative ways. In the liberative way, at our baptism, and in the preservative way, as we persevere in sanctifying grace.

Celebrate this great Feast on Tuesday. We can thank God for so great a mother as we thank Him for the grace of salvation given to us through her Divine Son. Mass schedule are as follows: Vigil at 7:30 pm and Day of the Feast at 9:00 am, 5:30 pm and 7:30 pm.

**God bless,  
Fr. Lahood**