

Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception

There is something very basic, very fundamental about this wonderful solemnity of Our Lady. Yes, we believe that she was born without the stain of original sin, and we celebrate this today. But there is a deeper meaning for our own lives in today's readings.

The Man and the Woman in the Garden of Eden are anxious. They had wanted to be like God -- instead of trusting in his love for them. They had eaten the forbidden fruit and now are anxious, trying to hide from God. When he calls, "Where are you," the Man replies "I was afraid, so I hid." But there is no place to hide! How can we run away and hide from God?! We learn from this story that there are boundaries of human life, and, when we cross those boundaries, we become anxious, alienated -- from the dignity of our true selves, estranged from one another, distant from God. We find ourselves in a wilderness, no longer in the Garden that God has intended for us. We discover death, not life.

How different is the gospel! The angel tells the Virgin Mary **not** to be afraid because God is with her. God has chosen her, and all she has to do is trust God. This could not have been easy for a young woman who was not yet married to become pregnant -- a single parent -- yes, by the power of the Holy Spirit, but who will believe this in her town, in her family?! Can you even begin to imagine the depth of Mary's trust in God when she says Yes to God's call to be the mother of the Savior: Yes, let it be done to me as you have said.

At this moment of profound trust in God and courage, the Virgin receives the word of God into her heart and into her body and gives

life, not death, to the whole world. Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life! The Lord is conceived by the power of the same Holy Spirit who hovered over the waters of chaos at the beginning of creation – the same Spirit that God breathed into the nostrils of the Man whom he had created out of the clay of the earth – “and the Man became a living being.” Trust in God! Life! This is at the very heart of the Gospel – the good news of our salvation!

St. Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians reminds us that our lives are totally in God’s loving hands. It is God who chose us, destined us for eternal life, gave us his grace and favor, and made known his purpose for the human family. As his creatures, we are merely recipients: we receive, we hear his word, we believe. God’s gifts are so many -- forgiveness, redemption, adoption as God’s sons and daughters, salvation, the Holy Spirit, the Gospel, the word of truth.

It is easy for us to be anxious and fearful about many things today. There is so much distrust among people, so much hatred and violence. Human life is too often considered “cheap” and expendable – snuffed out without much thought. It is very easy to cross boundaries in our daily lives – boundaries that invade other people’s space and privacy -- dominating others, using them for our pleasure, competing with them to acquire more and more “stuff” while so many people are poor and needy. Pope Francis has identified ours as a “throwaway” culture in which we discard, for example, unborn children and the elderly as easily as we dispose of food that has become rancid or moldy. We have a lot to be anxious about – we have much to fear.

However, my dear sisters and brothers, we are called today to move beyond our anxieties and fears into trust of, and gratitude to, God. Today, Mary's story becomes our story. Today, God greets each of us! Today, God reassures each of us of his abiding presence in our lives. Today, we become aware of the dignity that God has bestowed upon us and upon every human person. Today, we are called to bear God's Son in our hearts and in our bodies through the power of the Spirit of God Most High. Today, we are challenged to be servants of the Lord. Today, we are challenged to allow God to lead us out of the wilderness into his garden, to walk in his ways and not the ways of the world, to experience new life, not death!

May Our Lady, the Immaculate Conception, the Patroness of the United States, the Star of the New Evangelization, the Queen of the Universe, show us how to trust God and to bear within ourselves the Lord Jesus who is the Light and the Life of the world!