

IMMACULATE CONCEPTION 2018

What does the solemnity of the Immaculate Conception celebrate? It does not celebrate Jesus' conception, nor his virgin birth. According to Pope Pius IX's definition of this dogma in 1854, it celebrates Mary's deliverance from sin. The doctrine states that in view of the merits of Jesus, who saved all people, Mary was kept free from sin from the very moment her life began.

The teaching was promulgated after Pius' inquiry of the bishops around the world of the people's faith ("sensus fidelium") concerning Mary. The bishop's responses about the people's beliefs and devotion assured him that further explanation of Mary was needed. So Pope Pius IX declared the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception.

Because of the sin of Adam and Eve, Mary needed to be redeemed just as all the descendants of Adam and Eve need redemption. We were all conceived in that state of alienation from God *except Mary*. By God's grace, because she was to be the mother of Jesus Christ, Mary was herself kept sinless from the moment of her conception. The Church therefore celebrates her immaculate conception, her conception free of Original Sin.

Mary was pure, totally pure. Moreover, because Jesus is our brother and Mary is our mother, we should take a look at our own purity, purity beyond sensual purity. Mary was pure in all that she thought, in all that she chose, and in all that she did. She is the model to which we should all aspire in the many aspects of our own personal lives. God has brought us His presence, power, and love. With His gifts we can strive with hope to live our own lives in greater purity.

What about purity of intention? How pure are we in our intentions, in our intended purposes, and in our intended decisions? St. Paul recognized that our movement to making a decision is found in our thoughts. What is constantly on our mind will lead toward a decision to act on those thoughts. It is important to keep our thoughts focused, directed, and pure. Our intentions come from them. Pure water, after all, only comes from a pure well.

What follows our intentions? Our decisions! Our decisions do not arise from a void in a vacuum. They do not come into action from nothing. Here again, purity, the purity modeled by Mary our mother, plays out its important role in our everyday lives. Purity is important in terms of what we allow into our imaginations in the images we allow into our brains in what moves from our minds into our hearts and souls. Junk food is bad for our bodies. It weakens them, even bringing sickness to them. Lack of good hygiene and cleanliness can likewise bring sickness and disease into our bodies. Impurities in thought and imagination have a parallel effect in our hearts and souls. They can likewise lead to indecisiveness in our relationships with others along with misunderstandings and the troubles that accompany them.

Purity in our intention is important when it comes to protecting the beauty in nature that surrounds us. If we are to protect this world's environment and conserve its resources, we cannot allow our intentions to be corrupted. If we are to treat others justly and not discriminate against them we likewise cannot allow our intentions to be corrupted.

If we are to love our spouses and our children, we must love them with pure love, uncorrupted by selfishness and self-centeredness. What we are honoring here today is not some esoteric Catholic doctrine. What we honor here today is our humanity, a humanity given us by God to bring beauty into this world's ugliness purity into its foulness and love into its lusts. What we honor is human nature freed from the corruption and degradation of this world's sinfulness human nature filled with the purity of God's love.

I leave you now with the words of St. Paul found in his Letter to the Philippians:

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. (Philippians 4:8)