

## The Immaculate Conception 2007

We are continuing to celebrate Mary's Immaculate Conception with the Mass today because both North and South America are dedicated to her under this beautiful title. Mary is the Patroness of the Americas.

God speaks to us today thru these words of scripture. God tells us that we are created for paradise - for life with God forever. All God wants of us is our love. The difficulty is that love, if not true love, must be freely given. If we have no choice, then we can't really love. Love exists only when there is a chance to say "No!" No freedom, no love. We have to make a choice to love. This is described in the book of Genesis. Adam and Eve are stand-ins for all of us. They represent us and they make a choice. They could love God and do what God asked or they could choose themselves over God and do what they want, disobeying God. This freedom of choice continues for us, since that's the way God made us all. We exercise that choice when we choose to serve God or choose to sin. This first "NO" to God that Adam and Eve uttered is surprising and sad, considering all the blessings God had given them. However, it did not stop God's plan of salvation. God began a new creation. He planned to send a new Adam, Jesus, and he created a new Eve, Mary. The first Christians reasoned rightly that a sinful woman could not be the Mother of Jesus, who was without sin.

God extended to Mary the saving grace of Jesus' death, even before, Jesus was born. God blessed Mary in a special way from the first moment she was conceived in the womb of St. Anne. This truth of faith is called "The Immaculate Conception." It means that Mary was full of grace and free from sin by God's favor and grace. Throughout her life, Mary responded to God's grace. She was God's humble servant. Mary represents God's people who have struggled with faithfulness. But, at last, with Mary, humanity, Israel, God's people, choose God over self, and the stage is set for the doors of paradise to re-open for all people. Without God's gracious act toward Mary and her loving response of 'yes', we would not be celebrating Christmas in less than three weeks.

Mary listened to God's call thru His messenger, Gabriel, who reminded her that God was with her and she should not be afraid. Mary at first was puzzled by the angel's words and she asked: "How could this happen", since she had not yet married Joseph. Mary did not understand everything. All she could say was: "Let it be done to me as you say." That's quite an amazing response! Mary did not know all the details about what God was asking of her; but she just said "Yes." She trusted God and believed that "Whatever God wanted of her, she wanted as well. All God wanted of Mary was her faithful love and her love of God was innocent, unspoiled, constant, and single-hearted. Mary was probably only thirteen or fourteen years old, when she made her commitment to God to bear Jesus within her. All God wants of us is our faithful love. God has blessed each of us in our Baptism and has given us the special grace of being his own people. Just as God in love destined Mary for adoption to Himself thru Jesus; so, St. Paul states, God destined us in love for adoption to himself thru Jesus. In Jesus, God has given us every spiritual blessing, thru our Baptism, so we can be holy as He is holy.

In Mary, we see what happened when just one person chose God over self: the world began to change. God showed us the value a "yes" made to Him in live: the Savior began to live among us. Perhaps, our faithful response of loving service will bring the Savior's peace we desire for our fractured world and for ourselves. "nothing will be impossible for God!"

Here are three questions for our prayer and reflection this week: are you listening to God?

He certainly has a plan for you. Will you say “yes” to God as Mary did? Will you trust that God can transform you thru Christ’s presence in you, just as He did in Mary?