

The Solemnity of The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary

August 15, 2021

Year of the Eucharist and Parish (Reflection #31)

“And the angel being come in, said unto her: ‘Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women.’” (Luke 1:28) Douay-Rheims Edition.

As I was preparing for the reflection this weekend, a funny realization occurred while reading the Gospel of Saint Luke. For as long as I can remember, I had assumed that the opening line of the “Hail Mary” prayer (*Hail Mary, full of grace*) was taken directly from the Gospel of Saint Luke. Instead, even after reading varied translations, I found the angel addressing her with the words “*full of grace*” before ever using her given name, Mary. As stated above, saint Luke records the angel’s greeting to have been: “*Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you.*” This led me to seek out an explanation for the difference. And, this difference was able to assist in furthering my understanding of our Catholic Church’s deep and abiding love for and appreciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Immaculate Conception.

To better assist us with our reflection concerning Mary as the Immaculate Conception, I would ask that you substitute the word “Joy” for the word “Grace” in the angelic salutation in Saint Luke’s Gospel. If we do this, then the angel, upon entering the home at Nazareth would have greeted Mary with these words: “Hail, one who is full of joy (or made full of joy).” Pope Saint John Paul II, in his General Audience of May 8, 1996, highlighted this point by reminding us “Full of Joy” is the name God has given to Mary. She is for all eternity made in and with the fullness of His joy.

For many Christians, this name given to Mary may seem a bit excessive. For how could God see His joy reflected in Mary when she, using Saint Paul’s Letter to the Romans, *all* men have sinned (Romans 5:12). In every way, except one, Saint Paul is totally and undeniably correct. By the sin of Adam, all men have sinned. This is the original sin first committed in the Garden, which is passed down from parent to child. Yet, how could this young girl, not a man nor a priest, nor anyone of influence, but a girl from an insignificant village be filled with the joy of God? The answer is found in the famous passage John 3:16 which states: “For God so *loved* the world. . .” When Adam and Eve fell into sin in the Garden, God so loved them and everyone who would come after them that He chose to put into motion a plan which would, once for all, free mankind from the slavery of sin which leads to death. To accomplish this plan, He willed that His Word, His Son would come, offering Himself back to His Father as a supreme act of obedience and love. This act would repair the relationship between God and man and allow man to return home after his earthly journey had ended.

With an eternity of love in His heart for His wayward children, a Father fashioned a dwelling for His Son. This new dwelling had to be created different from every other dwelling a Father could provide for the Son He so dearly loved. It must be perfect, fully capable for both His Son to dwell in, and, at the same time, fully free from the power of the serpent whose strike had poisoned His children from early on. This dwelling would become the bane of the serpent for her Son; His Son would put an end to the reign of the serpent. To do this, the joy of the Father, not bound by man’s laws of time, would redeem the dwelling, “The Woman,” through the saving merits of the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of His Son who would one day be given to her as her son. The Immaculate Conception of Mary is the fullness of the love and joy God has for all of His children poured into one special, one Blessed Mother. Whose own loving heart would be so fully united with His divine plan, that she would consent to bear His Son, raise His/her Son, and stand mournfully with His/her Son as He freely chose to offer His life as ours and her means to salvation. Oh happy, oh necessary fault of Adam which allowed God to give to His Son and to us so wonderful a treasure as Our Blessed Mother, the Immaculate Conception, Mary.

The Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time
August 15, 2021
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*“I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and hers;
he will strike your head, and you will strike his heel.” (Genesis 3:15)*

In our reflections, we have seen several strong women in the service of YAHWEH. First, we witnessed Eve, the first woman, who even though she stumbled and fell, went on to be the first mother of us all. Next came Noah’s wife who, alongside her husband braved the storms that would come, also going on to be the mother of the new world. Then came Sarah, Abraham’s wife, who in her old age bore one of God’s greatest servants, Isaac.

Our reflections have also seen the evolution of the temple of God, from the Garden of Eden, to Noah’s ark, to the meeting tent of Moses, to Solomon’s temple. Finally, last week, we were introduced to the image of a new temple—a temple of flesh and bone—a temple like no other in all of history. This temple would be a young Jewish girl, a virgin blessed by God, who would bring change to Israel and the world forever.

How can this be? Is a temple not a place of sacrifice? Is it not a place of holiness? How can this woman, this human, complete this definition of a temple?

In the verse at the top of this handout, from Genesis chapter three, God begins to prepare the world for the coming of this new temple. This verse predicts the one who will be the vessel to bring the source of the defeat of Satan and the salvation of man. This vessel—yes, this woman—must be purer than pure, must be free from the stain of sin. The Church proclaims that the Blessed Ever-Virgin Mary was this vessel—that she was, from the moment of her conception, without sin, forever incorrupt. We call this the “IMMACULATE CONCEPTION”. The fact of Mary’s “Immaculate Conception” has been the belief of Christ’s Church from the very early days of the Church.

St. Paul told the Romans, “All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” Was this also true of Jesus’ mother? Did Mary, like all humankind, need a Redeemer, a Savior? The answer is, at once, “YES, she did!” Then how can we explain the “Immaculate Conception”? To send His only begotten Son to redeem the world, God first sent a pure, holy, virgin mother, free from the stain of Original Sin, *full of grace*—proclaimed by the Angel Gabriel at the Annunciation (Luke 1:28). The Blessed Virgin Mary was chosen to be this pure and holy mother before the foundations of the world. We all know that God is timeless, while we exist within time. By the grace of God—coupled with the merits of Christ’s Passion, Death and Resurrection—Mary received her redemption at the very instant of her conception. No, this was not a virgin birth—there has only been one. God, in his timelessness, reached back through the time of man, to give Mary the grace of the redemption his only Son would give to the world in Mary’s future.

Mary—the daughter of Zion, the Most Blessed Virgin, the Mother of God (Theotokos), the first tabernacle and temple of Christ—was, at the first moment of life, the first beneficiary of what her Son came to bring into the world—the fulfillment of God’s words to Eve many years before.