

Homily for the Novena in honour of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary

St. Walburge's, Preston, 7th December, 2017



In her great hymn of praise and thanksgiving to God, which we know as the Magnificat, Our Blessed Lady declares that *“All generations will call me blessed, for the Almighty has done great things for me....”* (Lk.1:48-49). Over the centuries the Church has meditated on these words of Mary, and under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, has come to a fuller understanding of their significance. The popular Catholic invocation to the Blessed Virgin, ‘O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee’, indicates one of the great things which God has accomplished in Mary: from the very moment of her conception she was untainted by that sin of Adam which is called original, and which has affected all of us.

This privilege was conferred on Mary because of the merits of the Son she would bear, Jesus Christ. Christ came to deliver humanity from the sin of Adam. He was sinless himself (2Cor.5:21), and so the Church with the insight of faith has come to believe that the Virgin mother of a sinless Son should herself be free from the baleful inheritance of the children of Adam, which has been given the name of original sin. Interestingly, when St. Bernadette of Lourdes asked her name, Our Lady replied that she was the Immaculate Conception. Pope Pius IX in 1854 declared the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary to be a dogma of the Church, an integral part of the Catholic faith. However, the belief in Mary’s Immaculate Conception goes back many centuries in the history of the Church.

This sublime doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of Our Blessed Lady does not place Mary on a pedestal, as it were, far above us ordinary mortals. Part of the great things which the Lord has done for her is to give her as a mother to believers of every generation. As he hung dying on the cross, he gave his mother to the Beloved Disciple, John, and by implication to everyone who believes in her Son. The interests of Christ are equally the interests of Mary. In recent times we have come to honour her with the title ‘Mother of the Church’, for the Church realises that just as she watched over Jesus for many years in Nazareth, so now she does the same for the baptised brothers and sisters of her divine Son.

The solemnity of the Immaculate Conception should remind us of the wonders God has wrought for our salvation. Mary was his chosen one, specially prepared in the fullness of time to give the world its Saviour. And although chosen, she had to give her consent to the Angel Gabriel so that God’s plan should be fulfilled. We too have been chosen by God, but like Mary, we are called upon each day to make the right decisions and say yes to God in whatever circumstances we find ourselves. We therefore need to make our own and say often that venerable prayer to our Blessed Mother: “O Mary conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee!”

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