

Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception – December 8, 2018 – Very Rev. Bryan Jerabek, J.C.L.
Cathedral of St. Paul, Birmingham, Ala. – [5:30pm Vigil], 8:30 and 11am Masses – 475 words

The archangel Gabriel greeted Mary with mysterious words: “Hail, full of grace!” And we pray to her making those words our own: “Hail Mary, full of grace...”. When we pray that, we mean that she was full of grace not just from the moment that she gave birth to Jesus Christ, nor from when she conceived him in her womb by the power of the Holy Spirit. No, we mean – or at least we should – that she was full of grace from the first moment of her own conception; from the very first instant of her existence. Our Lady was conceived immaculately – and this was due to the plan and direct intervention of God.

Through her immaculate conception Mary became a forerunner of Christ, our Lord and Savior. St. John the Baptist was his immediate herald by his witness and preaching; Mary was his herald in the order of grace. She was the fitting channel to bring him into the world – but not only that; she would also nurture him, teach him, raise him, release him, suffer with him, and truly die with him... then be assumed into heaven by him. Her entire life revolved around Christ, her son. This was ultimately because she was his first and most faithful disciple, leaving us an example to follow and helping us do so by her prayers.

What joy it gives us to celebrate Our Lady’s feast day! In doing so we must consider that her origin is our destiny: she started out – and certainly also ended – immaculate; we began in sin but are meant to end in purity, immaculate also, having been transformed by God’s saving grace. “He chose us in [Christ]”, St. Paul said in our second reading, “before the foundation of the world, to be holy and without blemish” (immaculate) “before him”. The Blessed Virgin Mary is our great encouragement and support along this, our journey. Her perfection can in no way be tainted by our many shortcomings – and she does not hesitate to accompany us on the way.

We should ask for a special grace on this important Solemnity. What do we wish for our Blessed Mother to obtain from God for us? We all labor under the effects of the sin of Adam and Eve, narrated in our first reading. We have eaten of the forbidden fruit ourselves, so many times throughout our lives, through our sinful choices. What grace shall we seek? Our Lady, standing before God in radiant beauty and sublime purity, will obtain all that we need and more besides. We can never fail in entrusting ourselves to her in matters great and small. It would do her honor on her feast day to ask something great of her. Let us make bold and ask confidently!

O Mary, conceived without sin: pray for us, who have recourse to thee!