

“Imitating Our Lady to Advance God’s Plan of Salvation”
Homily for the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary
December 8, 2021

We always celebrate the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary as we’re starting to get into the second period of the season of Advent. Advent has these three sequential themes as we go through this brief season. However, although sequential, if we look closely at the prayers of the Mass and the Divine Office, the themes are actually rather intertwined all throughout Advent. But the focus is on the coming of the Lord. We start out thinking about His Second Coming, when He will return at the end of time to be the judge of the living and the dead. It’s not until the last week of Advent that Our Lady gets a greater focus, a greater prominence, as we then concentrate on preparing to celebrate His first coming in lowliness in His birth in Bethlehem.

Here in this middle part of the season of Advent, more prominent is – if we look at the readings for the weekday Masses, and for the second and third Sundays of Advent – more prominent is the figure of St. John the Baptist, who’s the one who alerts us to what we could call the “intermediary” comings of our Lord. These are the times that He seeks to enter into our hearts during this life; it means being alert to the ways He comes to visit us, St. John the Baptist being the one who always calls out to us to prepare a way for the Lord.

Yet we celebrate this great mystery of our salvation in the life of Our Lady, the Immaculate Conception, which is so central to and tied up with the whole Christmas mystery, here in the second period of Advent, not toward the end of Advent. It tells us that God has a plan and God is always preparing to carry out that plan. St. John the Baptist certainly plays a key part in that plan, as he calls out to us to prepare the way of the Lord.

The plan, though, began from the very beginning, as we heard in the prophecy from the third chapter of the Book of Genesis in our first reading, the famous story about the fall of our first parents, Adam and Eve. Right at the moment of the fall, we hear this prophecy that the lady and her offspring will crush the head of the serpent. So, already God is envisioning this plan for our salvation, and He begins unraveling the plan, carrying it out, all through that period of preparation in the Old Testament times, by choosing the people of Israel, choosing their great leaders, eventually allowing them to have their kingdom, which was eventually destroyed, then later they returned from the exile – the whole history of the ancient people of Israel.

All of this history: He’s preparing throughout the ages to carry out this plan. And now we see the plan has come to its apex here, with the visitation of the Archangel Gabriel to Mary, to convey to her this news, that God is asking her to be the mother of His Son. And yet notice how with all of these centuries, all of these ages, all of this plan coming to this point, God still preserves Mary’s free will. He preserves her free from sin, so she’s, of course, inclined to do everything she can to please God, but He allows her free will in responding to His call. He does not force that upon her.

God acts this way in our own lives as well. And I think we can often understand that better when we look back in retrospect, look back at times when we didn’t understand why God

allowed something to happen in our lives or why God seemed to be so absent, or we went through a time of trial, a dark night of the soul. It's when we come through it that we can see that God was working out a plan that was beyond anything we could have devised, beyond our own imagining. God carries out this great plan of salvation, revealed in the Scriptures, fulfilled in Mary's "yes" to the angel, so His Son might come into the world.

This here, her response to the Archangel Gabriel, her one utterance, is the utterance of all of Christian discipleship. She summed up all of Christian discipleship in her response to the Archangel: "I am the handmaid of the Lord. Let it be done unto me according to your word." Let us thank God for the great gift He has given us of His Son, for the gift of His Mother, who is Our Mother. Let us ask her intercession for us, that we might imitate her example of perfect discipleship, so that God might work out His loving plan of salvation in our lives as well.