

Today's Gospel does not *directly* refer to today's *feast* of the *Immaculate Conception*
Of the *Blessed Virgin Mary*.

Today's Gospel tells of that moment when Mary freely said *yes* to God's plan to save humanity,
By *Himself* entering into it in the *flesh* –

It's the story of the Angel *Gabriel* announcing that the Holy Spirit
Desires to empower Mary to *conceive* the Son of God.

And *that's* probably why so many *devoted* Christians make a very *common* mistake –

The mistake of thinking the Immaculate Conception refers to *Jesus*' conception in Mary's womb.

But the Immaculate Conception we celebrate today is the conception of Mary *herself* –

In *her* mother's womb – the womb of St. Anne.

But the Gospel of the Annunciation we heard *does* point
to the Immaculate Conception of Mary in Gabriel's *addressing* Mary
as *full of grace* –
as if that was her *name* –
her core *identity*.

Every time we *pray* the *Hail Mary* –

We *echo* that address –

Avowing that Mary, the Mother of God,

Was conceived *free* from original sin.

She was *full* of that special grace from the *moment* she was conceived.

And she was *so* preserved – *saved* –

In a *unique* way – *before* the human experience of *falling* into sin –

So that humanity *can* be saved by her *Son*.

We heard of the *birth* of that original sin in the *first* reading –

Adam and Eve were *also* created *free* from sin –

Created in a state of complete *oneness* with God's *love* –

Yet the sin of *pride* – *slithered* into their perfect state –

And they *surrendered* that status,

Giving *in* to temptation to become gods *themselves*.

And *so*, a great *rift* was introduced into the human *experience* –

A rift *tearing* us away from the best *version* of ourselves –

And a *lack* of the *freedom-of-being* –

Being *one* with our God.

And so, what happened?

Adam *hid* from God,

Afraid of Him as if He was Adam's *enemy* or powerful *rival*.

That *oneness* – that *peace* –

That *gift*, that *grace* of living in complete *communion* with the love of God

Was *forsaken*.

And his *shame* *stung* him –

And so, he *hid* –

Like most *anyone* might desire to *hide* from the *truth* when it *hurts*.

Adam's *relationship* was *broken* and his view of *reality* – *warped*.

He blamed *Eve* for *showing* him the proverbial *apple* –

And Adam even blamed *God* –

Accusing *Him* of being the troublemaker by *gifting* Adam with Eve in the *first* place.

And *Eve*?

She blames the *serpent*.

But as good old Sister *Teresa* told me back in *primary* school –

The ***devil*** *didn't* make you do it!

You did it!

Eve as the mother of the living,

Along with *Adam* –

Chose a disobedience that *tainted* the free will of all humanity.

But with *Mary* –

God *intervened* against that poisonous aspect of our *inheritance*.

She *never* had to suffer the effects of original sin –

She was *always* kept in full communion with the life of *God* –

And so, she became the *New Eve* –

The mother of all those whose lives are *restored* in Christ Jesus' saving love on the *cross*.

She never was compelled to *hide* –

So *uniquely* united to God's life –

So that *all* of us can be restored to such a harmonious state as was enjoyed before

We *hid* from God in the *garden*.

May we not *hide*.

Let's *ask* Mary – *filled* with God's grace –

To *help* us to choose her *Son* above all other temptations to *spit out* God's grace

In a sickness that pulls us to prefer *poison*.

May we stand *humbly* before our God –

Unafraid to be *seen* by our life and our love –

And, like *Mary*,

Say *yes* Lord,

I *love* you.

I *need* you above all other things.

I *can't* do it on my *own*.

But *You* can do it *for* me.

So '*let* it be done to me, according to your *Word*.'

With the *help* of Mary,

We can *accept* Jesus' *gift* of salvation from the *pit* humanity fell into with original sin.

Mary – by her Immaculate *Conception* –

Was *saved* from that pit by Jesus even *before* she could fall *into* it.

Let us *call* upon our *new* Mother of our *new* life as Christ's *Body* on earth *now*.

May our *Patroness* deliver the Churches of the United States –

And the Church of *Albany* –

And our new Bishop *Mark* –

Into the *freedom* of becoming *one* with the life and love of our *God*.