



The Holy See

SOLEMNITY OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

POPE FRANCIS*ANGELUS* Saint Peter's Square

Friday, 8 December 2017

[Multimedia]

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning and happy Feast Day!

Today we are contemplating the beauty of Mary Immaculate. The Gospel, which recounts the episode of the Annunciation, helps us to understand what we are celebrating, above all through the Angel's greeting. He addresses Mary with a word that is not easy to translate, which means "filled with grace", "created by grace", "full of grace" (Lk 1:28). Before calling her 'Mary', he calls her *full of grace*, and thus reveals the new name that God has given her and which is more becoming to her than the name given to her by her parents. We too call her in this way, with each *Hail Mary*.

What does *full of grace* mean? That Mary is filled with the presence of God. And if she is entirely inhabited by God, there is no room within her for sin. It is an extraordinary thing, because everything in the world, regrettably, is contaminated by evil. Each of us, looking within ourselves, sees dark sides. Even the greatest saints were sinners and everything in reality, even the most beautiful things, are corroded by evil: everything, except Mary. She is the one "evergreen oasis" of humanity, the only one uncontaminated, created immaculate so as to fully welcome, with her 'yes', God who came into the world and thus to begin a new history.

Each time we acknowledge her as *full of grace*, we give her the greatest compliment, the same one God had given her. A beautiful compliment to give to a woman and to tell her, politely, that she looks youthful. When we say *full of grace* to Mary, in a certain sense we are telling her this too, at the highest level. In fact we recognize her as forever youthful, because she never aged through sin. There is only one thing that makes us age, grow old interiorly: not age, but sin. Sin ages, because it *hardens the heart*. It closes it, renders it inert, withers it. But *she, full of grace*, is without sin. So she is always youthful; she is "younger than sin" and is "the youngest of

humankind” (G. Bernanos, *Diario di un curato di campagna*, ii, 1988, p. 175).

The Church today compliments herself with Mary by calling her ‘all fair’, *tota pulchra*. Just as her youth does not lie in age, her beauty does not consist in her outward appearance. Mary, as today’s Gospel reading shows us, does not stand out in appearance: from a simple family, she lived humbly in Nazareth, a village practically unknown. And she wasn’t well-known: even when the Angel visited her, no one knew of it; there were no reporters there that day. Nor did Our Lady have a comfortable life, but worries and fears: she was “greatly troubled” (v. 29), the Gospel says, and when the Angel “departed from her” (v. 38), her troubles mounted.

However, *she, full of grace*, lived *a beautiful life*. What was her secret? We can understand it by looking again at the scene of the Annunciation. In many paintings Mary is depicted as seated before the Angel with a small book in her hand. This book is the Scripture. Thus, Mary was accustomed to listening to God and interacting with him. The Word of God was her secret: close to her heart, it then became flesh in her womb. By dwelling with God, in dialogue with him in every circumstance, Mary made her life beautiful. Not appearances, not what is fleeting, but the heart directed toward God makes life beautiful. Today let us look joyfully at *her, full of grace*. Let us ask her to help us to remain youthful, by saying ‘no’ to sin, and to live a beautiful life, by saying ‘yes’ to God.

After the Angelus:

Dear brothers and sisters, I affectionately greet all of you pilgrims present today, especially the families and parish groups. I greet the confraternity and athletes from Rocca di Papa, and the students from the Salesian Schools of Milan.

On this Feast of Mary Immaculate, Italian Catholic Action experiences the renewal of its association. My thoughts go to its diocesan and parish associations, encouraging everyone to strengthen the formative commitment to being credible witnesses to the Gospel. May the Virgin bless Catholic Action and make fruitful its aim to serve the evangelizing mission of the Church.

This afternoon I will go to Piazza di Spagna to renew the traditional act of homage and prayer at the foot of the monument to Mary Immaculate. I ask you to join me spiritually in this gesture, which expresses filial devotion to our heavenly Mother. Everyone together, in spirit, before Our Lady.

I wish everyone a happy Feast Day and a good Advent journey. Please, do not forget to pray for me. Enjoy your lunch! *Arrivederci!*
