



The Holy See

HOLY MASS WITH THE NEW CARDINALS AND THE COLLEGE OF CARDINALS

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

Saint Peter's Basilica

Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Sunday, 8 December 2024

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“Hail, full of grace” (*Lk* 1:28). With these words of greeting in the lowly house of Nazareth, the Angel revealed to Mary the mystery of her immaculate heart, “preserved free from all stain of original sin” from the moment of her conception (BL. PIUS IX, *Ineffabilis Deus*, 8 December 1854). In a variety of ways, down the centuries, Christians have sought to describe that gift in words and images, emphasizing the tenderness and grace of Our Lady, “blessed among all women” (cf. *Lk* 1:42) by portraying her with the native features and characteristics of any number of different peoples and cultures.

As [Saint Paul VI](#) observed, the Mother of God shows us “what all of us have deep in our hearts: the authentic image of humanity... innocent and holy... Mary’s being is pure harmony, candour, simplicity; it is complete transparency, kindness, perfection; it is utter beauty” (*Homily on the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception*, 8 December 1963). Mary is pure harmony, candour and simplicity.

Let us pause for a moment to contemplate Mary’s beauty in the light of the Word of God, focusing on three aspects of her life that remind us of her closeness to us. What are these three aspects? Mary as *daughter*, *bride* and *mother*.

First, let us consider the Immaculate Virgin as *daughter*. Sacred Scripture does not speak of Mary’s childhood. The Gospel presents her to us as she enters upon the stage of history: a young

girl of deep faith, humble and simple. Mary is the “virgin” (cf. *Lk* 1:27) whose gaze reflects the Father’s love. Within Mary’s pure heart, her gratuitous love and thankfulness give colour and fragrance to her holiness. Our Lady appears before us as a beautiful flower that grew unnoticed until it finally blossomed in the gift of self. Mary’s life is a continuous gift of self-giving.

This brings us to the second dimension of Mary’s beauty: that of a *bride*, chosen by God as a companion for his plan of salvation (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 61). This is what the Council said: God chose Mary. He chose a woman as his helper to carry out the plan of salvation. There is no salvation without a woman since the Church herself is also woman. She responded “Yes” by saying, “Behold the handmaid of the Lord” (*Lk* 1:38). She is a “handmaid” not in the sense of being “servile” and “humiliated”, but in the sense that she was “trusted” and “esteemed” as one to whom the Lord entrusted his dearest treasures and the most important missions. Mary’s beauty, multifaceted like that of a diamond, reveals a new face: one of fidelity, loyalty and loving concern, all of which are typical of the mutual love of spouses. *Saint John Paul II* understood just this when he wrote that the Immaculate Virgin “accepted her election as Mother of the Son of God, guided by spousal love, the love which totally ‘consecrates’ a human being to God” (*Redemptoris Mater*, 39).

We now come to the third dimension of Mary’s beauty. What is this third dimension? Mary as *mother*. She is most often depicted as a mother with the Child Jesus in her arms or bending over the Son of God as he lay in the manger (cf. *Lk* 2:7). She was present beside her Son throughout his life, ever close in her maternal care yet hidden in her humility. We witness this closeness at Cana, where she interceded for the bride and groom (cf. *Jn* 2:3-5), at Capernaum, where she was praised for listening to the Word of God (cf. *Lk* 11:27-28) and finally at the foot of the cross – the mother of a condemned man –, where Jesus himself gave her to us as our mother (cf. *Jn* 19:25-27). There, at the foot of the cross, the Immaculate Virgin is beautiful in her fruitfulness, since she recognizes that she must die to herself in order to give life, forget herself in order to care for the poor and vulnerable who turn to her.

All these things are contained in Mary’s pure Heart, a heart that is free from sin, docile to the working of the Holy Spirit (cf. *Redemptoris Mater*, 13) and ready to offer to God, out of love, “the full submission of intellect and will” (*Dei Verbum*, 5; cf. *Dei Filius*, 3).

There is the risk, however, of thinking that Mary’s beauty is somehow remote, out of reach, unattainable. That is not the case. We too have received this beauty as a gift in Baptism, when we were freed from sin and became sons and daughters of God. Like the Virgin Mary, we are called to cultivate this beauty with a filial, spousal and maternal love. Like her, may we be grateful for what we have received and generous in what we give back. May we be men and women who are ready to say “Thank you” and “Yes”, not just with our words, but above all by our actions – it is a beautiful thing to find men and women who say “Thank you” and “Yes” through their actions – ever ready to make room for the Lord in our plans and aspirations, eager to embrace with maternal tenderness the brothers and sisters we encounter on our way. The Immaculate Virgin is not a

myth, an abstract doctrine or an impossible ideal. She is the model of a beautiful and concrete project, the perfect example of our humanity. As we imitate her, may all of us, by God's grace, help to change our world for the better.

Sadly, if we look around us, we realize that the presumption that we can be "like God" (cf. *Gen* 3:1-6), which led to the first sin, continues to wound our human family. Neither love nor happiness can arise from this presumption of self-sufficiency. Those who see the rejection of any stable and lasting bond in life as progress do not grant freedom. Those who deprive fathers and mothers of respect, those who do not want children, those who reduce others to mere objects or treat them as nuisances, those who consider sharing with others a waste, and solidarity an impoverishment, cannot spread joy or build a future. What is the use of having a full bank account, a comfortable home, unreal virtual relationships, if our hearts remain cold, empty and closed? What is the use of achieving great financial growth in privileged countries if half the world is starving or ravaged by war, and the others look on with indifference? What is the use of travelling around the world if every encounter is reduced to a passing impression or a photograph that no one will remember in a few days or months?

Brothers and sisters, let us look to Mary Immaculate and ask her to conquer us through her loving Heart. May she convert us and make us a community in which filial, spousal and maternal love may be a rule and criterion of life. Only then will families be united, will spouses truly share everything, will parents be physically present and close to their children and children will take care of their parents. That is the beauty we see in the Immaculate Virgin; that is the "beauty that saves the world". Like Mary, we too want to respond by saying to the Lord: "Behold... Let it be to me according to your word" (*Lk* 1:38).

We are celebrating this Eucharist with the new Cardinals. I have asked them, my brothers, to help me in my pastoral service to the Universal Church. They have come from many parts of the world, bringing great wisdom, in order to contribute to the growth and spread of the Kingdom of God. Let us now entrust them in a special way to the intercession of the Mother of our Saviour.