

**DECEMBER 8**  
**THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION**

Gen 3:9-15,20; Ps 98:1-4; Eph 1:3-6,11-12; Lk 1:26-38

***HAIL MARY, THE LORD IS WITH YOU,  
YOU HAVE FOUND FAVOR WITH GOD***

Homily by Fr. Michael A. Van Sloun

Thursday, December 8, 2011, 9:30 a.m. (School Mass) and 7:30 p.m.

**Today** is the great feast of the **Immaculate Conception**.

It features the **holiness of Mary**,  
that Mary was from **holy** from the **first instant of her life**,  
and that she remained holy the rest of her life.

While we have a **major feast** day for **Mary**,  
today's feast, and every feast, is really **about Jesus**.

**Mary's birth** and Mary's **holiness** were part of **God's plan** for her,  
that she should be the **mother of Jesus**.

And, when we go to **Mary**, as we should (Jn 19:27a),  
she always **leads us to Jesus**, where we belong.

In the gospel that we just heard, Mary was in a certain town.

Q: What **town** was the place where Mary was?

A: **Nazareth** (Lk 1:26).

When Mary was in Nazareth, she received an appearance.

Q: **Who** appeared to Mary?

A: **Gabriel** (Lk 1:26).

Q: **What** is Gabriel?

A: An **angel** (or an archangel) (Lk 1:26).

Q: Who does an angel **represent**?

A: **God**. Gabriel "was sent from God" (Lk 1:26).

Q: When Gabriel spoke, who was Gabriel speaking for?

A: God. Gabriel is **God's messenger**.

So, whatever Gabriel has to say about Mary  
is really what God thinks about Mary,  
what God has to say about Mary.

Q: How did Gabriel begin his address Mary?

A: “**Hail, favored one**” (Lk 1:28a),  
or as translated in the Hail Mary, “**Hail Mary, full of grace.**”  
If a person is “favored” or “full of grace,”  
such a person is “all holy,” pure, sinless, entirely good.

Q: If a person is **full of grace**,  
jam-packing with goodness,  
what is there no room for, what is missing?

A: Sin. Evil.

When God says that Mary is “**favored**” or “**full of grace**,”  
she is **all good** and **no bad**.

Q: What did the archangel Gabriel have to say about Mary next?

A: “**The Lord is with you**” (Lk 1:28b).

The Lord is with you and me.

God has taken up residence within our hearts and souls (see Rom 8:11; Eph 2:22),  
in a special way on the day that we were baptized.

In Baptism we become temples of God (1 Cor 3:16,17; 2 Cor 6:16),  
temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:19).

“The Lord is with us” in Baptism, a Catholic sacrament,  
and “**The Lord was with Mary**” in the comparable Jewish ritual: **Presentation**.  
Mary’s parent’s, **St. Anne** and **St. Joachim**,  
**presented** their **daughter** in the **Temple** after she was born,  
and they **consecrated** their infant daughter Mary to God,  
and she became a **dwelling place** for **God**,  
a dwelling place for the **Holy Spirit**.

Q: What is the next thing that the archangel Gabriel had to say about Mary?

A: “**You have found favor with God**” (Lk 1:30b).

Q: What does it mean to be “**favorable**” in God’s estimation?

A: Mary was **pleasing to God**. Mary **did God’s will**.

Q: How did **Mary** find **favor with God**?

A: Mary obeyed and respected her parents.

St. Anne taught her the Bible and the truths of the Jewish faith,  
and Mary was an eager student, learning and living the faith.

St. Anne and St. Joachim lived close to the Temple and went there often to pray,  
and Mary went to the Temple often to pray.

Mary was a good person, a virtuous person.

She did her chores at home, her speech was decent.

She was cheerful, had positive things to say, and did not complain.

She was friendly and got along well with others.

She was joyful and generous and truthful (see Gal 5:22).

Q: Knowing all of these things about Mary,

that she is “**full of grace**,”

that “**the Lord is with her**,”

that she is “**avored by God**,”

what does all of this mean for us?

A: Mary is “**a model of holiness**” (Preface),  
a good example, an inspiration.

If Mary can be holy, we can be holy, too.

Let’s make a big shift now.

We have spoken about the great woman of the gospel.

But there was another woman mentioned in the first reading from the Book of Genesis.

Q: Who is the **woman** mentioned in the **first reading**?

A: **Eve** (Gen 3:20).

Q: What was **Eve’s husband’s** name?

A: **Adam** (Gen 4:25; 5:1,3,4,5).

Q: **Where** were they **living**?

A: The **Garden of Eden**. The Garden of Paradise (Gen 2:15; 3:23,24).

Q: When it came to doing what God wants, **what did Eve do**?

A: God said, “From the tree of knowledge of good and bad you shall not eat” (Gen 2:17),  
but, “she took some of its fruit and ate it” (Gen 3:6)

“and she also gave some to her husband” (Gen 3:6).

Eve disobeyed.

My friends, please notice:

both **Eve** and **Mary** had **free will**.

**Eve** exercised her free will poorly and chose to do **evil**.

**Mary** exercised her free will in an excellent manner and chose to do **good**.

Let's try to demonstrate this.

[Demonstration with mini candy bars and altar servers.

Show the candy bar to the server and the congregation.

Homilist puts hands behind his back,

closes his fist, puts them out front and has the server choose.

If the server chooses correctly, the server gets the candy bar;

if not, the server sits down without a reward.]

These **servers** exercised their **free will**.

They could choose the right hand or the left hand.

No one forced them; they picked on their own.

And they had to live with the consequences,

**choose correctly** and get a **candy bar**,

**choose incorrectly** and get sent away with **nothing**.

Eve and Mary also exercised their free will.

No one forced Eve to disobey.

**Eve** wanted things her way, "my will," she sinned,

and she was forced to **leave paradise** (Gen 3:23-24).

On the other hand **Mary** obeyed.

She said, "Let it be done according to your will" (paraphrase, Lk 1:38),

and she was assumed to heaven, she **entered paradise**.

My friends, **all of us have free will**.

On this great feast of the Immaculate Conception

the Church gives us these **two readings** and these **two women, Eve and Mary**,

to highlight the fact that all of us have a **free will**,

and that there is a **wrong way** to exercise our freedom

and a **right way** to exercise our freedom.

Our freedoms go far beyond picking well to get a candy bar.

**Mary is featured** on the Immaculate Conception

as an example for **how to exercise our free will correctly**.

Remember, **Mary leads us to Jesus**.

If we **exercise our free will** according to God's desire,

if we **choose** to do the **good things, decide to obey God's plan**,

we, like Mary, will **find favor with God**,

and we will **find favor with** God's Son, our Lord **Jesus Christ**.