



IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

Homily of the Right Reverend Dom Jean PATEAU
Abbot of Our Lady of Fontgombault
(Fontgombault, December 8th, 2025)

Advocatam gratiæ et sanctitatis exemplar.
Advocate of grace and model of holiness.
(Preface of the Immaculate Conception)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,
My dearly beloved Sons,

WHEREAS Advent has just begun, and we are expecting the birth of the Emmanuel, the Church celebrates today the mystery of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, a truth of faith defined in 1854. The purple vestments yield before the white of great feasts. In Mary, God honours the promise He made on the dawn of creation, in these words He addressed to the devil:

I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; he shall bruise thy head, and thou shall bruise his heel.^a

a. Gn 3:15.

And this promise was taken up by Isaiah the Prophet:

Behold a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Emmanuel [*namely, God with us*].^b

b. Is 7:14.

Mary's conception heralds for mankind the time of salvation. Yet, was it necessary to break in favour of Mary the terrible power of the curse — the original sin — that since Adam has held in its dominion every man coming into this world, and

made of him from his very conception, without any personal act, a son of wrath? This is an evil, the transmission of which remains a mystery. It also is a truth of faith. Blaise Pascal said about it:

Without this mystery, the most incomprehensible of all, we are incomprehensible to ourselves. The knot of our condition takes its twists and turns in this abyss, so that man is more inconceivable without this mystery than this mystery is inconceivable to man.^c

c. *Pensées*,
n. 434 (Brunschvicg).

Christ might have been born from a woman tainted by original sin. God did not deem that fitting. He took pleasure in clothing Mary with a unique plenitude of grace.

How could we not see in her an echo of the first words
d. *Gn 1:3*. God pronounced at dawn of time: “Let there be light”^d?

But could the new words God pronounced for the conception of Mary be merely an echo? No, they are truly new words, unheard until then, they are the fruit of Christ’s Passion, Who in Mary anticipates a new era.

The preface of today’s Mass, addressing God the Father, evokes this in poetical terms:

Thou didst not allow any stain of Adam’s sin
to touch the most blessed Virgin Mary,
so that enriched with the plenitude of Thy grace,
Thou didst prepare her as a worthy mother for Thy Son,
and didst manifest in her the origin of the Church,
Thy Son’s bride without spot or wrinkle,
splendid with beauty.

Purest of virgins, she was to bring forth Thy Son,
the innocent Lamb Who takes away our sins,
and Thou didst choose her from all women
to be our advocate of grace and model of holiness.

After stating the privilege, the text draws the consequences: Mary is full of a plenitude of grace. That is the name with which the Angel Gabriel will call her on the day of the Annunciation, and with which we so often address her. She is the “full of grace.” Her heart is limpid, more than any springwell, and St. Anselm affirmed of her:

It was fitting that this virgin should be of such a purity that none greater could ever be imagined in any other creature.

In her, God prepared a mother truly worthy of His Son, a most pure virgin who was to give birth to the innocent Lamb. The fulness of the time has now come, and God will soon send His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to make of us sons by adoption.^e

e. *Gal* 4:4-5.

In Mary is also made manifest the origin of the Church, a Bride without spot or wrinkle, and shining with the splendid beauty of the Bridegroom, Christ. St. Paul VI wanted to honour Mary under the sweet title of “Mother of the Church.” After mentioning the privilege granted to Mary, the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium*^f pursues:

f. *LG*, n. 53.

She is truly “the mother of the members of Christ [...] having cooperated by her charity that the faithful might be born in the Church, who are members of that Head.”^g

g. St. AUGUSTINE,
De s. virginitate, 6
(*PL* 40:399).

Pope Benedict XVI summed up in a few words this twofold motherhood:

God was attracted by the humility of Mary, who found favour in his eyes.^h She thus became the Mother of God, the image and model of the Church, chosen among the peoples to receive the Lord’s blessing and communicate it to the entire human family. This “blessing” is none other than Jesus Christ Himself. He is the source of the grace which filled Mary from the very first moment of her existence.ⁱ

h. Cf. *Lk* 1:30.

i. BENEDICT XVI, *Angelus*,
December 8, 2006.

As the Jubilee Year of hope is soon to be concluded, let us quote the words of homage paid by the same Pope to the Immaculate at the Spanish Steps on December 8th, 2007:

The Church looks to Mary and calls on her as a “star of hope”.^j [...] And who could be a better “Star of Hope” for us than Mary? With her “yes”, with the generous offering of freedom received from the Creator, she enabled the hope of the millennia to become reality, to enter this world and its history. Through her God took flesh, became one of us and pitched His tent among us.

j. BENEDICT XVI,
Encycl. Spe salvi, n. 49.

Thus, inspired by filial trust, we say to her: “Teach us, O Mary, to believe, to hope, to love with thee; show us the way that leads to peace, the way to the Kingdom of Jesus. Thou, Star of Hope, who waitest for us anxiously in the everlasting light of the eternal Homeland, shine upon us and guide us through daily events, now and at the hour of our death. Amen!^k

k. BENEDICT XVI,
Act of veneration
to the Immaculate,
December 8, 2007.

Amen.

