

Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Gn 3:9-15, 20

Eph 1:3-6, 11-12

Lk 1:26-38

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Two big things are happening to us now. We are in the season of Advent so we are praying, reflecting and waiting for the Lord's coming. We are probably also anxious and possibly even stressed out as we finish up the semester and prepare for our final exams. But in the midst of all of this is God's enduring love for all of us.

The day after Thanksgiving, I volunteered at a nearby soup kitchen, the Arlington Food Bank, and I was impressed with the atmosphere of cooperation and fellowship among all the people in the dining hall. People were patiently waiting in line to get their turkey dinner; some were eating, talking and laughing; while the volunteers were busy serving. I felt God's presence and love in this dining hall.

Today we celebrate the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, a shining example of God's love in our lives. God made Mary immaculate, born without any trace of sin, so that she could be that perfect vessel in which the Christ would be conceived. In Luke's Gospel, the archangel Gabriel called out to Mary, "Hail, full of grace! The Lord is with you." Mary had reservations about the whole message, but she eventually cooperated with God's will and said, "Yes" to him.

In the first reading from the Book of Genesis, Eve ate the fruit from the forbidden tree and gave some to Adam, who also ate it. By their disobedience, both of them failed to cooperate with God and we therefore inherit this sin and turning away from God. Haven't we experienced this turning away from God in our lives?

And yet God's faithfulness and love for humanity is everlasting. God loved Adam and Eve dearly and He gave them the Garden of Eden with all its fruits, animals and splendor. The original plan was for humanity to inherit eternal life, to be free from sin and thus to be with God always. But that didn't work out, since Adam and Eve failed to love God in return. So God had to find another way for humanity to inherit eternal happiness with him.

God was thinking of us when He made Mary immaculate. In his abundant love and mercy God wanted to save us from our sins, so he decided to give us a Savior. God wanted to give us another chance to inherit eternal life. He therefore gives us Himself directly, in the form of a human being, his Son Jesus Christ. But he needed another human being to bear the Christ so he gave the fullness of grace,

that is God himself, to Mary. By her faith Mary was pleasing to God and in her lowliness she conceived him. God came to us through Christ and it is also through Christ that we return to God. Like Mary, God loves us from beginning to end.

So what do we do with God's love? Like St. Paul in his letter to the Ephesians in the second reading, we can say, "*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavens.*" This Christmas season, we can adopt a poor family and give them gifts and their Christmas dinner. We can also donate new toys to needy children and donate food to a local food bank. Everyday we have to make this decision to love God and others. Like Mary, we too can become bearers of Christ.

In this Eucharistic table, let us ask for Mary's prayers so that we can continue to love God, to love our neighbors and thank God for his eternal love. Let us ask the Blessed Mother, the Immaculate Conception, to lead us to Christ Jesus always.