

# IMMACULATE CONCEPTION OF MARY

**La Libertad**  
**December 8, 1977**

*Genesis 3:9-15, 20*  
*Ephesians 1:3-6, 11-12*  
*Luke 1:26-38*

.... worthy collaboration. <sup>1</sup> I want to take advantage of this opportunity to thank the North American priests who are serving in such an illustrious way that our diocese appears so much greater. I also want to thank the Sisters of Saint Joseph who together with the priests are cultivating this message of God's Word and nourishing our people with this Word.

I also rejoice because together with the priests and religious, there are groups of men and women, people who celebrate the Word of God in their communities because there is no resident priest, catechists, parish groups and Catholics who feel responsible for the Church at this transcendental moment in the history of El Salvador and have not become discouraged in the difficult mission of proclaiming this message of Christ.

As we celebrate the feast of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, we are given an opportunity to draw near to the very mouth of this river that will continue to flow until the end of history. The Church, with her message and Word, will encounter thousands of difficulties like the river that encounters boulders, reefs and immense depths, but the river bears a promise: *Behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age* (a) and *the gates of the nether world shall not prevail* (b) against this will of God. What is God's will? In light of the readings that we have just heard, the mystery of the Immaculate Conception of Mary provides us with some insight into God's plan for humanity.

## **Original sin**

The first reading has reminded us of the great tragedy. Our first parents were created in the grace of God to hand on to us, not only the gift of natural life, but also the gift of divine filiation --- provided that they were obedient to God. They were, however, seduced by the devil and disobeyed God. Eve seduced Adam and the parents of the human race lost this gift of friendship with God because they were disobedient. From that moment, humanity has fallen into a state of what is called original sin, the first sin, the sin that we bear as a result of the disobedience of our first parents. Many people ask: what fault do I have that Adam and Eve sinned and now it is said that I am also a sinner? My sisters and brothers, we must distinguish between two types of sin: original sin and personal sin. Personal sin is committed by individuals with their own will when they disobey one of the commandments of God's law --- you have sinned and you are responsible for this sin. Adam and Eve committed a personal sin when they disobeyed God. What happens when one commits personal sin? The sinner has disobeyed the law of God and breaks that bond of friendship

with God. Everyone who sins breaks this bond of friendship with the Lord because that person preferred to act on his/her own passion rather than live according to the will of God, rather than live according to the law of the Lord.

Thus, Adam and Eve preferred to achieve happiness through the deceits of the devil (and later the devil laughed at this deception) rather than by the paths of the law of God. The devil led them into sin and now, disgraced, they were deprived of God's grace. As a result of this, Adam and Eve, deprived of grace, cannot give birth to children who at the very moment of their conception are also gifted with the gift of divine life for they have lost this gift of God's life and therefore cannot transmit this gift to their offspring. In fact they are only able to transmit to their offspring the gift of natural birth. Thus, the natural life that Adam and Eve began to transmit to their children, the same life that has been transmitted to us through our father and mother at the time of our conception, is a life deprived of God's grace. This does not mean that we have some personal fault in all of this but rather means that we have inherited this state. Let us use the following comparison: suppose the master and the owner of a large estate says to you: *as a reward and as a result of the confidence that I have in you, I will make you the owner of this estate, but you must obey me. All your children will become heirs of this estate as long as you obey me.* Then one day, you, as the administrator of this estate, begin to administer the estate in an evil way and no longer obey the owner. The owner then says to you: *I gave you all of this on the condition that you obey me, but you have disobeyed. I am very sorry but now you must leave my estate. You are no longer my heir.* Naturally, the children who would have shared in the happiness of this estate have also been disinherited and are born outside the boundaries of the estate because they have been cast aside by the owner of the estate.

This is the same situation that occurs with original sin. Adam and Eve committed a personal sin and God cast them out of Paradise. God separated them from this gift of divine friendship and their children would be born, like us, deprived of God's grace. We have no fault in this but original sin comes to us by inheritance. God is not obliged to give us the gift of divine friendship because it was lost --- it was lost for the whole family. In other words, this divine friendship was an inheritance that was lost.

### **The redemption of Mary**

The first reading tells us that Mary, a child of Adam, also had to be born as one who was disinherited and separated from God's grace, had to be born as a sinner. Nevertheless, today we are celebrating the fact that Mary was conceived without sin. How can we explain this exception? Today, Saint Paul has given us the explanation. Now as Christians, we have the privilege of returning and finding ourselves once again in God's grace because a priest has administered to us the sacrament of Baptism. The child who is born with original sin, a child like myself, has this sin removed through Baptism, for through Christ's blood that was shed on the cross, original sin is removed and this child is now able to be a child of God and thanks to God, Paradise has been recovered. If after Baptism I should unfortunately commit a personal sin and disobey the law of God, Christ has given us the sacrament of Reconciliation. The priest in the confessional is restoring Paradise to many souls who had lost this bond of friendship with God.

My sisters and brothers, if you have had the pleasure of making a good confession, then you understand what I am saying: it is like returning to Paradise. The young man or woman, the unfaithful spouse, anyone who has committed a sin experiences God's reproach in their

conscience and are unhappy. Those who are gathered here today but are in sin are able to deceive me with an appearance of joy, but in your hearts you are remorseful and filled with guilt. You know that you have lost Paradise and you are not happy until you fulfill the gospel command to repent of your sins and return and ask God for forgiveness. Then in the name of God the priest receives you into the Paradise of the Church. You have returned to Paradise as one who has had a burden removed from your heart, as one who has come out from the tomb where your body was buried in decay and your soul in sin. Why do we have this forgiveness of sins? Because Saint Paul has just told us that only Christ is the redeemer from sin.

My sisters and brothers, a great theological problem arose when theologians studied how the Virgin Mary could be immaculate if Christ is the redeemer of all people. If Christ is the redeemer of all people, if every sin is forgiven through Christ's redemptive action on the cross, then Mary also had to be a sinner in order to be redeemed by Christ. This was a problem that continued for many centuries. It is for this reason that this belief in the Immaculate Conception has a long history. Many theologians, learned men and women and Biblical scholars studied this question. It was only during the last century, on December 8, 1854, that this doctrine was defined. Engrave this date in your minds because as Catholic children, as free children, you should know the origin of this feast of the Immaculate Conception.

It was Pope Pius IX who on December 8, 1854 crowned the study that took place during so many centuries.<sup>2</sup> During the Middle Ages there was a great Franciscan theologian, named John Duns Scotus who provided the key for the solution of this question. Note his argument: Christ is the redeemer of all people and thus Mary is also redeemed. But there are two kinds of redemption, redemption that saves one from the fall (one has fallen into a pit and thus one is saved from the pit into which one has fallen --- one is redeemed). Christ has redeemed all people in this way because we have all fallen into the chasm of original sin. We are all stained with Adam's disobedience. But there is a second type of redemption that is called redemption of preservation, that is, a redemption that consists in not allowing an individual to fall. Thus before an individual falls into an abyss, that person is raised up in my arms and I continue to hold that person up. Like all who have fallen, you too should have fallen, but you have not fallen because I have preserved you through a special love.<sup>3</sup>

Such is the case of Mary who is preserved from sin. She should have fallen into original sin because she is an heir of Adam and Eve. She is also a member of this sinful race but Christ redeems her with a unique redemption, the redemption of preservation. She is the only person who has been redeemed with a redemption so luxurious that she has not fallen into sin. Within a few moments you will listen to us sing the Preface of this Mass of the Immaculate Conception in which the Church says: *the flesh from which the Redeemer of mankind was born had to be pure and immaculate*<sup>4</sup>. Christ desired a mother who would not be shamed by having to say: *I was conceived in sin*. In Mary, Jesus anticipated the merits of his redemption: *I am going to preserve you, my mother, because in your pure womb I, the Redeemer, will become flesh*.

My sisters and brothers, who among us, if we had the power to choose a mother according to our pleasure, would not have made our mothers the most beautiful, pure, and holy women. None of us was able to choose our mothers. We are born to the mother that God has given us. The Eternal God, however, chose a mother according to his pleasure and was able to form her with the extravagance of his generosity, redemption and love. For this reason, my

sisters and brothers, we can say that the Immaculate Conception of Mary, the feast that we are celebrating in this parish of La Libertad this morning, we can say that this is a celebration of God's love, the celebration of a son's great love, a love so great that he chose the most blessed of women. Therefore, children and mothers, let us rejoice this morning because there was at least one case in which a child like us became an immaculate and pure mother, formed according to the desire and pleasure of Christ.

### **Mary, the beginning and image of the Church**

My sisters and brothers, I have already told you that to draw near to this mystery of original sin and of Mary's redemption is to draw near to the source of the Church. You are also going to hear in the Preface hymn of today's Mass that Mary is the beginning and image of the Church. Saint Paul tells us that Christ was nailed to the cross to bring to life a spouse: the Church. The Church: immaculate, without spot or wrinkle, the beautiful spouse for all eternity. Mary Immaculate is the image of what we all are, namely, the Church. You, my sisters and brothers who have been baptized, we who have been baptized and ordained priests, we are the Church that is guided by the word that the bishop preaches, guided by the word that the priests proclaims and the same word that catechists teach and that is proclaimed by those who lead the community in the celebration of the Word where there is no resident priest. Indeed we do nothing more than proclaim Christ's redemption and denounce sin.

Note, my sisters and brothers, if the greatest person had chosen Christ's mother, that person might have thought that human greatness resides in economic wealth and therefore might have chosen a rich woman. If Christ had focused on political power, he would have made Mary a great queen who ruled over a vast empire. If Jesus had viewed beauty from the perspective of so many women and men --- a beautiful face and body --- he would have made Mary the most beautiful woman. But Christ focused on saving from sin all those things that are beautiful and so he made Mary without any stain of sin. Indeed, this was Christ's concern and he charged his Church with the same concern: be careful with sin! Jesus died on the cross in order to denounce sin! He died on the cross because he accepted the responsibility for the sins of humanity and thus all people obtained forgiveness. God chastised Jesus with the horrible torments of the crucifixion for as we read in the prophet Isaiah: *Upon him was the chastisement that makes us whole, by his stripes we were healed ... the Lord laid upon him the guilt of us all* (c). Jesus has given the Church the task of purifying the world of sin.

This is the great mission of the Church and for this reason Mary was conceived without sin and desires that her Church take charge of purifying herself and the world of sin. This is why the Church has great conflicts. She accuses people of sin. She says to the rich: *Do not sin by misusing your money!* She says to the powerful: *Do not misuse your political influence! Do not misuse your weaponry! Do you not see that is a sin?* She says to the torturers: *Do not torture! You are sinning! You are doing wrong! You are establishing the reign of hell on earth!* The Church condemns everything that is sinful and as a result the Church must confront great conflicts. But the Church cannot remain silent, my sisters and brothers, and yet the Church will be more authentic and more persecuted to the degree that, like Mary Immaculate, she is without sin. Then from this sinless state the Church attempts to purify and cleanse others from sin so that they are not condemned. For as Jesus said: *God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him* (d). God desires that those who manage money and politics and weapons, those who manage power and the earth's beauty --- God wants to save all these people. God does not want people to abuse these things but to manage them according to his desires and

without sinning. Indeed, one can be rich and not sin, one can be a politician and not sin and one can bear arms and not sin. The Church desires to purify from sin all those persons who many times have made their positions an art of sinfulness and vulgarity and inhumanness.

It is not enough that the Church struggles against sin. In Mary, the Church not only looks at the absence of sin, but what is most beautiful about Mary is that she is filled with grace. (e) To be filled with grace means that Mary has recovered the gift of friendship with God. Mary is blessed among all women and is like that woman upon whom God has poured all his perfume of divine holiness. There is no woman more filled with grace than Mary Immaculate. This is what the Church also desires for men and women and children and young men and women. The Church desires that they develop themselves and not become slaves and even less that they become slaves of sin and evil and all those vices that are derived from sin. Sinful persons are not beautiful for even though their faces appear radiant and their bodies beautiful, yet their souls are a hell for they have not developed their souls and their hearts are like a great void.

Tell me if this is not true. God does not want anyone to live in sin, therefore, you who are in sin: tell me if you are happy with this void that you carry in your conscience. Mary challenges us this morning to see who is happier: she who is full of grace or the sinner, rejoicing in this world while abusing the things of the earth. Mary, full of grace, is most happy. Indeed, there is no greater happiness than that of Mary who experiences herself filled with God. It is for this reason that the gospel presents us with her beautiful hymn when she meets her cousin Elizabeth. Mary, as a poet and a prophetess, as one who praises God, sings a beautiful hymn: *My soul glorifies the Lord and I am filled with the joy of God, my savior, because my soul is filled with the Mighty One. My soul is filled with a perfume that cannot be compared to any other earthly perfume* (f).

The perfume of heaven and the almost infinite holiness of Mary is the beauty toward which the Church wishes to lead humanity. When the Church denounces sin, she does so in order to tell men and women: *do not take delight in the things of this world but elevate yourselves and develop yourselves so that you focus on the things of heaven. With the realities of this world, gain for yourselves the friendship of God and manage these earthly realities according to God's will. Repent of your sins and, instead of seeking joy in the pleasure of sex and the flesh and vices and alcohol and all those things that make human beings like animals and beasts, lift yourselves up to become women and men of the truth, children of God like Mary who never sought delight in earthly pleasures but rather sought delight in the happiness of heaven.*

This is the process of human development that the Church is carrying out. My sisters and brothers, for this reason someday, the Church will become visible as the purest source that is Mary Immaculate and from the perspective of the soul of this woman, without sin, full of grace, she will recall that her mission is to root out sin from the world and to fill humanity with grace and the Church will thus be filled with consolation and strength. And so I say to my beloved priests, women religious, to those who celebrate the Word where there are no resident priests, to catechists: *take courage and let us move forward in our great task of cleansing the world of sin and filling it with the grace of God. There is no task that is similar to ours.*

I also want to speak to those who misunderstand the mission of the Church, to those who spy on us because you believe that we are subversives or communists, to those who persecute

and slander us: *Notice whom you are persecuting! You are persecuting Christ who continues to preach the redemption of humanity! Do not hinder him and allow him to preach! He is preaching for your benefit, you our government officials! He is preaching for your benefit, you who are powerful! Become developed Christians and then as people filled with grace, root out all sin from our world. For when the true message of the Church is heard, the Church, that works for the true good and the great truth of the country, will see that there is greater honesty and no more terror or crime or vice. Ah! If only people would understand and assist the Church instead of hindering her. For indeed the people who receive the greatest benefit of the Church's message should be our country, our rulers, our people. We will all be happy when, like Mary, we become less sinful and more filled with the grace of the Lord.*

My dear sisters and brothers, I am most happy to be able to communicate, from the Port of La Libertad, a message that, because of the radio, is being transmitted throughout the Archdiocese. I am happy to communicate a word of encouragement to all the ministers of the Church, a word from the heart of Mary Immaculate, a word that invites you to be pure and clean as you communicate your message, a word that invites you to clothe yourselves in the same ideals as Mary. Cloth yourself in the ideal of distancing yourself from sin and do all you can to prevent sin from entering into the world. Clothe yourselves with the ideal of filling yourselves more and more with the life of God, with sanctifying grace. This is what was decided on December 8, 1854 and so every year, like today, the 8<sup>th</sup> of December, 1977, the Church gathers together in her communities, communities like this beautiful scenic Church of La Libertad, and we celebrate this feast of Mary and thus we become inspired by her to carry on this great work of the Church.

---

<sup>1</sup> The greeting and opening words of homily not recorded on the tape.

<sup>2</sup> Reference to the solemn proclamation of the Immaculate Conception of Mary in the bull *Ineffabilis Deus*.

<sup>3</sup> See Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio*, 3, d.3, q.1.

<sup>4</sup> See *Roman Missal, Preface of the Immaculate Conception*.

*Margin References* (a) Mt 28,20: (b) Mt 16,18: (c) Is 53,4-5: (d) Jn 3,17: (e) Lk 1,28: (f) Lk 1,46-49.