

2021 Immaculate Conception

1. **Jesus wants us to be happy** because we were created to be happy. Today's Solemnity targets that longing and nostalgia perhaps more than any other feast day. It brings out the specifically Christian character of happiness as contrasted with that of any other religion. The first reading throws us into a scene where our eternal and interior happiness is at risk. In fact, **it has just irretrievably slipped out of the grip of Adam and Eve's hands forever.** The loss of happiness and the rapid growth of pain and fear and isolation are at the heart of the Church's understanding of the experience of original sin. **In the heart of this world, which touches each of us, we celebrate the Immaculate Conception.**

2. **Mary's Immaculate Conception is God's assurance and proof that happiness, fear and abandonment by God were never God's plan and intention for anyone.** But how can we come to a greater appreciation of this most beautiful of catholic truths? On the one hand there is God's piercing question: "Where are you?" Most of **our lives are spent outside God's GPS,** his promise of happiness. We struggle to identify ourselves permanently with beatitude, with being God's own adopted son or daughter even while we are drawn ineluctably to joy and happiness. Our answer to God in such situations can be Eve's, "The serpent tricked me and I ate it." (Gen 3:13) The last thing the serpent wants us to remember is that the goal and gift of life is heaven not pain, not fear, not separation. **We forget easily and we are tricked easily.**

3. **One of the most frequent ways he deceives us is by lies about who we are in our heavenly Father's eyes.** From conception, when the embryo in the womb is developing those first neurological synapses that will govern all its physical, emotional, psychic and spiritual growth, the shadow of original sin is at work to subvert the

Father's original work. The verse from Ephesians describes the Father's immutable intention: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him **before the foundation of the world,** that we should be holy and blameless before him." (Eph 1:3-4) This text is unlike any other in the whole Bible. It should be memorized and become a prayer like the Hail Mary, full of grace! It is God's unalterable plan for our personal joy and happiness – the first neurological synapse of the spiritual life! **Before the Fall, God intended each of us to be immaculate and holy from our conception and our birth.**

4. **After the Fall, not one conception, not one birth, could boast of carrying this holy and immaculate watermark of the Father's love.** With the conception and birth of Mary, God restarts this process of creation again. **For the devil this is bad news.** He has inundated the world with forgetfulness of God, fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, the experience of pain and separation and isolation. So foreign is the Immaculate Conception to him that he wishes to destroy it: **he fears the new norm of the Immaculate Conception in creation.** This, then, is the meaning of "I will put enmity between you and the woman and between her offspring and yours; he will strike your head and you will strike his heel." (Gen 3:15)

5. **"He will strike your head" refers to Jesus** and to us by extension, since we are offspring of mother Church. When Jesus strikes the head of the serpent on the Cross, he defeats him forever. When the serpent strikes the heel of Christ or of Mary, **he wounds the Church.** The Church is wounded but not defeated, above all by mistrust of God and his works and ways. But it is also wounded by despair, discouragement, mutual suspicion, violence, abuse, hatred and

separation that the devil can insinuate into our hearts and daily life and the life of our families and communities.

6. This is where and why the Immaculate Conception is so important. Formerly, because of original grace and innocence, our physical, emotional, psychic and spiritual development, our reactions and learned dispositions unerringly bypassed fear, pain, and separation. But now **they easily slip into negativity,** aggressiveness, domination, self-pity, self-hatred, and pessimism, to name a few ill effects. We blame ourselves, we blame others, we blame God. Indeed, the first two are unwitting collaborators in original sin: “The woman whom you gave to be with me” ...she did it! And she says: “The serpent tricked me and I ate it.”

7. The feast of the Immaculate Conception assures us today that our identity as human beings begins with God’s design for our happiness. He wants us to be immaculate again like Mary. And her immaculate state, like the “new norm” for the whole of creation and history, points to Jesus who pre-redeemed her. Jesus has the same plan for us. We learn from her today that to remain on the path of happiness, of the Immaculate Conception, **we must be disciples of discernment** who can uncover the deception of the devil: “The serpent tricked me and I ate it.” We must uncover it with regard to how God our Father understands us. Interiorly, we learn to separate light from darkness, truth from lies, deception from God’s original word: Immaculate. Hail full of grace! **This immaculateness is enshrined in the Eucharist.**