

9 December 2024 - Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception

[Gen 3, 9...20; Eph 1, 3...12; Luke 1, 26-38](#)

Homily

This morning's readings are extraordinarily rich. They present us with a grandiose fresco of Salvation History from the moment of creation to the fullness of time. And even the letter to the Ephesians takes us back even further, even before the creation of the world, to the moment when we were all chosen in Christ to be, in love, his sons and daughters, holy and blameless before him.

At the beginning of creation, there was a man and a woman, Adam and Eve, created in the image of God, who unfortunately seriously compromised that image in themselves. When the time is fulfilled, there is yet another woman and man, Mary and Jesus, who restore that image for all humanity. And we know from the great narrative of Revelation that at the end of time, in the heavenly Jerusalem, there will once again be a woman and her son, the woman crowned with twelve stars and her son who will reign on the throne of glory for ever.

The parallels and contrasts between the Genesis account and today's Gospel are striking. In the first case there is the serpent who deceives; in the second there is the angel of God who brings the message of salvation. In the first case there is a curse, in the second a blessing. In the first case there is fear and self-justification; in the second there is trust and abandonment.

The whole story is a hymn to the greatness of humanity as it sprang from the hands of God. He created man and woman to be his children. The beauty of their created being lay in their fragility. They are not gods, they are created beings, limited, and therefore vulnerable to the forces of evil and nothingness. From the very beginning of their existence, everything seems compromised. They seem to be losing the battle. But Eve, the living woman and mother of all the living, will be true to her name and will not let the forces of death defeat the life she holds dear.

God has placed enmity between the woman and the forces of death represented by the serpent. In the end, life will be stronger than death, and after a long evolution and a long wait, Life will know total and definitive victory over death in another woman, another Eve, a very young girl named Mary, who becomes the Mother of the One who is Life itself. Finally, there appears the woman who is totally faithful to her name, the one in whom Life has totally defeated the forces of the serpent, the fully alive, the mother of Life and of all the

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living. It is this victory of Life in her, from the very first moment of her existence, that we celebrate today. The hostility between the serpent and the woman, established by the Creator, ended in the total victory of the Woman.

The story of Genesis is a symbolic representation of the daily struggle in each of our hearts between good and evil, between the life that never ceases to want to grow in fullness and the death that calls us back to nothingness -- between the serpent who has made a nest in us that he does not want to let go of, and the Spirit of God who wants to cover us with his shadow and bring true life to birth in us. In each of us there is Adam, who foolishly allows himself to be led into transgression and who, sheepishly, says: 'I hid because I was naked'. There is also Eve in each of us, who of course let herself be deceived, and even led Adam into her error, but who will keep alive the enmity between herself and the serpent until she crushes his head.

This victory is not hers alone; it is the victory of all humanity. It is ours. And so, from the moment that this victory of Life over the forces of evil has been confirmed by Mary's readiness to let Life penetrate her, the work of our redemption can begin, and Luke's account already shows the birth of the Forerunner.

Luke's account ends with the words. *'Then the angel left her.* Mary is left alone with her secret. She carried it for nine months. Soon she will share this secret with us; that is what we will celebrate at Christmas.

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