

Immaculate Conception

Like many of you, I contribute to a number of charitable organizations. At times I've had to think through whether or not I wanted my gift made public. In parishes like this one, we normally do not publish a list of donors to the Sunday collection, figuring most members like to keep their gift anonymous - though for special campaigns parishes often do. Many charities and arts organizations publish lists of donors by quantity of gift because the donors want to make themselves known. They like to give, and they like it when people thank them. The thanks they receive motivates them to give again. Even if you don't contribute to charities, you know from the charitable acts you perform for the people you love that it's easier to keep giving your love if people know what you've done and say thanks.

We believe it's no different with God. God has given us generous gifts - life, love, faith, family, community, country, and ethnicity. The greatest gift of all was the gift of himself, the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ. In making this gift known, God gave us a reason to say thanks. When we do, we hope it inspires God to give generously again and again, especially when we have special needs.

The solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary falls coincidentally during Advent each year. It pertains to the conception of Mary by her parents, not directly to the birth of Jesus. We believe that before Mary was born, she was conceived without sin - even without original sin. She thus became a pure vessel in which the Word could become flesh. The Prayer over the Offerings that you'll hear me say today calls this miracle a "prevenient grace": It was already filled with the gift of our salvation, even before the birth of Jesus, the author of our salvation. We believe this because of the way that the archangel Gabriel greets the adult Mary in today's gospel: "Hail, full of grace." If she was full of grace, then she had to be immaculate - without stain - from the time of her conception.

Today commemorates the day when God quietly began to unveil the gift of our salvation, later making it known through the annunciation of Gabriel to Mary and the incarnation of Jesus Christ. As with any donor who makes a gift known, God probably appreciates our thanks. We say that most solemnly in this eucharist.

In Psalm 98, we sing about this public donation: "The Lord has made salvation known." So, we "Sing to the Lord a new song, for God has done wonderful deeds." Our new song accompanies a new gift from God: salvation through Christ and through Mary.

One way to celebrate the Immaculate Conception is to reflect on the many people who have shown us their loving heart by donating to us their time, their talent and their treasure. When we say thanks to them, we are thanking also God, the giver of every good gift.

Friday, December 8, 2017