

Solemnity of the Immac. Conception – C
December 8, 2009 – Holy Angels Church
Homilist: Rev. Roland M. LaPlante
Readings: Gn 3:9-15; Eph 1:3-6,11-12; Lk 1:26-38

DEAR FRIENDS IN CHRIST: I would like to talk to you today about Original Sin and its effect on the human condition. You will see in a moment how this ties in with today's feast. Original sin means the consequence of Adam's first sin, the hereditary stain into which we're all born. From the beginning of the world God has given us a choice: we can either choose what God wants, or we can choose what we want. Clearly Adam chose what he wanted. It was a selfish choice; and since he was the first man, that choice continues to affect all of us...and so we are all born with the same weakness to make selfish choices. As Adam was a broken vessel; we as Adam's children saw nothing better.

When I was the assistant pastor of St. Mary Church in Union City, Naugatuck, the pastor there, Fr. Edward Donnelly, used to complain that once a person missed Mass for the first time, and wasn't hit by lightning for it, it became easier to continue to miss Mass. In other words, he or she had developed a weakness for missing it. And then, how easy it was

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for that example to cause the rest of his or her family to miss Mass. Sin creates weakness.

Last August, A new bishop was installed for the Archdiocese of New Orleans...he's Archbishop Gregory Aymond. At his installation he was asked about some of the challenges we face...as a church, as individuals, and as a country. His answer was instructive. He said: we live in a time when social structures and busy lives can squeeze God out of life. And don't we see that happening? You can't say a prayer in the public schools anymore, or even mention the name of God. The 10 Commandments, upon which all law is based can't be displayed in a court of law. Crèche sets can't be displayed on city property at Christmastime...and on and on. That's the first thing...God is getting squeezed out of public life.

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Second, to express faith in God is often not “politically correct” today. Third, family life needs our quality time and attention. Fourth, it has to be said that some have been hurt by the Church and have left it. Fifth, violence and crime and racism are sins that are present in our world and our community today. And finally, human life is often not held as a precious gift from God, therefore we must be a voice for the unborn, but also for the born: the poor, those with disabilities, those on death row, the terminally ill. These problems are all the result of Original sin...they’re consequences...and they’re the reason Jesus had to come.

So Original sin is the burden of weakness we’ve inherited, and that’s been building up over many generations since the time of Adam with the addition of our own failings. However, WE were created for paradise...for life with God. So, God started over again...and this feast we celebrate today reminds us of that.

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As Adam’s life taught us about sin; Mary’s life teaches us about grace. The earliest Christians had a dilemma. If Jesus Christ was truly the Son of God, then how was it he could be born of a sinful mother? This wasn’t possible. Somehow God had to act to remedy that...and he did.

The earliest Christians believed that the death of Jesus freed us from sin; and God simply gave Mary the gift of this grace ahead of time, at her conception, so that she could remain free from sin, and thus be a worthy mother of her son. That’s what our opening prayer said today: “You let her share **beforehand** in the salvation Christ would bring by his death, and kept her sinless from the first moment of her conception.” The angel says the same thing in today’s Gospel: “Hail, full of grace! The Lord is with you.” That was before she said her “yes” to God’s request.

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Of course, this grace was no guarantee that Mary wouldn't sin later...or that she would say "yes" to God when he requested that she be the mother of Jesus. However, this grace gave Mary an opportunity to choose what God wanted that was unaffected by the choice of Adam and Eve...she didn't have that built-in weakness we all have. And so, the consequence of her choice was that Jesus would be born to save us. His plan for our salvation could move forward. That's why we call Mary the new Eve; and Jesus the new Adam.

The remarkable thing is that we're offered the same gift at our baptism. Mary received it at the moment of her conception, which is the feast we celebrate today. We receive that gift at our baptism. We are cleansed of Original sin.

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Because Mary received the gift of grace, she was able to put herself at God's service at the Annunciation, saying "I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your Word." Every time we choose God over ourselves, we're doing the same thing...and saying the same thing. We're choosing God over anyone or anything else...and we participate in the re-making of God's creation...we become co-creators with God.

So, to get back to Archbishop Aymond's question. How do we address the challenges of our time? The answer is easy. WE choose to be holy. We choose God.

The answer is easy, but the choice is hard. Grace, however, can help us see the consequences of holiness...because just as sin created weakness, virtue can created strength: it helps us to find the time for God because

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we experience God as love. We become unashamed of our faith and feel compelled to share it. We see more clearly the people we love around us...violence lessens, and human life becomes more precious. As more people see these positive consequences in us, more are attracted to what God offers: all this because we make the right choice...which is God. Our goodness begets goodness in others, just as our sinfulness begets sin in others. We can change the world by the way we choose.

We are in Advent, and God calls us to welcome him on Christmas Day, but also in our hearts NOW. When we choose God, we choose life for ourselves and for others.