

Homily for Immaculate Conception:

Movie Critic Roger Ebert used to opine that those writing movies about religions and spiritual themes should at least look up the basic definitions of words. For example, when people die, if they go to heaven they are saints - they do not become angels. Angels are a different form of being – purely spiritual and greater in power and majesty than us.

To that I would add that Purgatory is not a third option when people die – sort of like a limbo, where people wait for a second judgment. Purgatory a final purification, cleansing, for those going to heaven.

And finally, there is today’s Feast. I worry that repeating every year what this Feast is about is boring to everyone sitting in the pew. And then, even this past week, on a new episode of a science fiction television series, a character is explaining (in science-sounding words) how a woman’s body has spontaneously had a cell clone itself and is growing in her womb. The person then immediately calls it, “immaculate conception.” That is not what the Immaculate Conception is.

“Immaculate” means “clean.” There is nothing dirty about the love between husband and wife. The Immaculate Conception is often confused with the Annunciation and the Virgin Birth in the minds of many. Immaculate Conception is the constant belief of the Church that Mary was conceived free from the stain of original sin. She was clean from the moment of her creation.

The reason the Annunciation is used for our gospel reading is because this passage gives us the clues we need to understand the Immaculate Conception. Mary is “full of grace.” That is a unique description in the Bible. Among all God’s creation, Mary is “full of grace” even before the Holy Spirit comes upon her. When we reflect upon this, we begin to understand the special gift she was given at her creation. Through this gift, she was particularly able to say “yes” to God and “no” to sin her entire life. What a fantastic gift for God to give her, who was to give birth and raise God the Son.

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There is something Mary said, not at the Annunciation, but at the Visitation. It is a prayer our Blessed Mother gave. It is called the Canticle of Mary, or the

Magnificat. For those who pray the Liturgy of the Hours, this is prayed every day in the evening.

I offer this prayer to you on this great Solemnity of Our Blessed Mother. It is in your worship aid. You can take it home with you if you do not have it in another prayer book.

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Canticle of Mary - Luke 1:46-55

**My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,
my spirit rejoices in God my Savior
for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant.**

**From this day all generations will call me blessed:
the Almighty has done great things for me,
and holy is his Name.**

**He has mercy on those who fear him
in every generation.**

**He has shown the strength of his arm,
he has scattered the proud in their conceit.**

**He has cast down the mighty from their thrones,
and has lifted up the lowly.**

**He has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich he has sent away empty.**

**He has come to the help of his servant Israel
for he has remembered his promise of mercy,
the promise he made to our fathers,
to Abraham and his children for ever.**

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