



The Holy See

ACT OF VENERATION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY ON THE OCCASION OF THE FEAST OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary
Saturday, 8 December 2012

[\[Video\]](#)

[Photo gallery](#)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

It is always a special joy to meet here in Piazza di Spagna, on the Feast of Mary Immaculate. Gathering together — Romans, pilgrims and visitors — at the foot of the statue of our spiritual Mother makes us feel united in the faith. I am pleased to emphasize in the [Year of Faith](#) that the entire Church is living. I greet you with deep affection and I would like to share a few simple thoughts with you, suggested by the Gospel for this Solemnity: the Gospel of the Annunciation.

First of all, we are always struck by and made to reflect on the fact that this moment crucial to humanity's destiny, the moment in which God was made man, is shrouded in deep silence. The encounter between the divine messenger and the Immaculate Virgin takes place completely unnoticed; nobody knows and nobody talks about it. It is an event which, were it to happen in our time, would leave no trace in the newspapers and magazines, because it is a mystery that happens in silence. What is truly great often goes unnoticed and peaceful silence proves more fruitful than the frenetic restlessness characteristic of our cities, but which — by comparison — people were already experiencing in important cities such as Jerusalem at that time; the pressure that makes us unable to stop, to be calm, to listen to the silence in which the Lord enables us to hear his discreet voice.

Mary, on the day she received the announcement of the Angel, was in deep recollection and at the same time open to listening to God. In her there was no obstacle, no screen, nothing that

separated her from God. This is the meaning of her being without original sin: her relation with God was free from even the slightest flaw; there is no separation, there is not a shadow of selfishness, but perfect harmony; her small human heart is perfectly “centred” in the great heart of God. So it is, dear brothers and sisters, that coming here to this monument to Mary in the heart of Rome reminds us primarily that God’s voice is not recognized in noise and bustle; his plan for our personal and social life is not perceived by remaining on the surface but rather by descending to a deeper level, where the active power is not economic or political but moral and spiritual. There Mary invites us to come down and to put ourselves in tune with God’s action.

There is something else, something even more important which Mary Immaculate tells us when we come here, and it is that the world’s salvation is not the work of human beings — of science, of technology, of an ideology — but it comes from Grace. What does this word mean? Grace means Love in its purity and beauty, it is God himself as he revealed himself in salvation history, recounted in the Bible and in its fulfillment in Jesus Christ. Mary is called “full of grace” (Lk 1:28) and with her specific identity she reminds us of God’s primacy in our life and in the history of the world, she reminds us that the power of God’s love is stronger than evil, that it can fill the void that selfishness creates in the history of individuals, families, nations and the world.

These forms of emptiness can become hells where human life is drawn downwards and towards nothingness, losing its meaning and its light. The world suggests filling this emptiness with false remedies — drugs are emblematic — that in reality only broaden the abyss. Only love can prevent this fall, but not just any kind of love: a love that contains the purity of Grace — of God who transforms and renews — and can thus fill the intoxicated lungs with fresh oxygen, clean air, new energy for life. Mary tells us that however low man may fall it is never too low for God, who descended even into hell; however far astray our heart may have gone, God is always “greater than our hearts” (1 Jn 3:20). The gentle breath of Grace can dispel the darkest cloud and can make life beautiful and rich in meaning even in the most inhuman situations.

And from this derives the third thing that Mary Immaculate tells us. She speaks of joy, that authentic joy which spreads in hearts freed from sin. Sin brings with it a negative sadness that leads to withdrawal into self. Grace brings true joy that does not depend on possessions but is rooted in the innermost self, in the depths of the person, and nothing and no one can remove it. Christianity is essentially an “evangelo”, “Good News”, whereas some think of it as an obstacle to joy because they see it as a collection of prohibitions and rules.

Christianity is actually the proclamation of the victory of Grace over sin, of life over death. And if it entails self-denial and discipline of the mind, of the heart and of behaviour, it is precisely because in the human being there is a poisonous root of selfishness which does evil to oneself and to others. It is thus necessary to learn to say “no” to the voice of selfishness and “yes” to that of genuine love. Mary’s joy is complete, for in her heart there is not a shadow of sin. This joy coincides with the presence of Jesus in her life: Jesus conceived and carried in her womb, then as

a child entrusted to her motherly care, as an adolescent, a young man and an adult; Jesus seen leaving home, followed at a distance with faith even to the Cross and to the Resurrection; Jesus is Mary's joy and is the joy of the Church, of us all.

In this Season of Advent Mary Immaculate teaches us to listen to the voice of God who speaks in silence; to welcome his Grace that sets us free from sin and from all selfishness in order thereby to taste true joy. Mary, full of grace, pray for us!