

Homily for the Feast of Immaculate Conception

Among the many gifts with which God graces our lives, time is one of the most precious. It is time that defines the boundaries of our lives. It is time that gives us a beginning and an end. It is time that offers us countless opportunities to be the person whom God has called us to be. And it is time that catapults us into that eternity of God's love where time is endless.

Time is so important to us that we celebrate it. Each year on January 1st we hold festive the first day of a New Year. Our Jewish sisters and brothers recently celebrated their New Year in the solemn festivities of Rosh Hashanah. Two weeks ago we celebrated not only the introduction to the new translation of the Roman Missal but much more importantly the beginning of the Church year, the Year of Grace. We journey once more from a time of waiting to a celebration of Redemption and the implementation of the teachings of Christ in the ordinary events of our lives.

It is time that is central to this Feast of the Immaculate Conception. For in our gathering we enter into the mystery of time as we recall the conceiving of Mary in the loving union of Joachim and Anna,

the most beautiful union of man and woman in love that history has ever known. A truly and totally unique moment in history.

The Church has honored this sacred time for in this moment when Mary's life began, we enter into a new time. We enter into God's time. We enter into the God's work of redemption where Mary becomes the doorway to the New Covenant with God in which the drama of salvation, of our salvation takes place. In the purity of her conception, Mary is now destined to become the new Ark of the Covenant as she will carry in her womb the Son of God made flesh.

But the importance of Mary is not limited to what she did in carrying and giving birth to the word of God. Mary's importance to us is that in both her beginning and in her end, in her Immaculate Conception and in her Assumption, she is the anticipation of what God desires to do for all of us. Mary embodies the love that God wants to pour into each one of our hearts and our lives.

This is what we are about as we celebrate this Feast of the Immaculate Conception. The rebellion of Eve in the Garden of Paradise is now replaced by the words of Mary "let what you have said be done to me." In Eve we entered into a time of banishment and separation from God's love. In Mary we enter into God's time of salvation and deliverance.

May we who prepare to celebrate the Birth of Christ learn from Mary, the Immaculate Conception, that what we await is not simply the birth of a child. Rather what we await is the coming of the incarnate Word of God in and through whom God redeems the world and brings the light of God's love into our lives.