

Feast of the Immaculate Conception-2025

As Catholic Christians, some of us have may have heard of the Miraculous Medal. In 1830, the Blessed Virgin Mary revealed herself to Sister Catherine LaBoure inside an oval frame. She was standing on a globe, wearing many rings of many colors, most of which shone like rays of light over the globe. Around the margin of the frame appeared the words, "O Mary conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee." As Catherine watched, the frame seemed to rotate showing a circle of twelve stars, a large "M" intertwined with a cross, and under the cross were images of the Sacred and Immaculate heart. The Blessed Virgin Mary asked that a medallion with this image be made, and promised that all who wore it would receive great graces.

The inscription "O Mary conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee," summarizes our belief in the Immaculate Conception of Mary. In 1854, twenty-four years after Mary's appearance to

Catherine, Pope Pius IX, defined the Immaculate Conception as divinely revealed dogma that is to be believed by all Catholic Christians. Four years later, in 1858, the truth of the Immaculate Conception was confirmed in an unexpected and humble way when Mary appeared to an innocent fourteen year old girl named Bernadette, in Lourdes, France. She introduced herself by saying, "I am the Immaculate Conception." If you ask me, that sounds like a personal confirmation from heaven.

Even though the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of Mary was not defined until 1854, it was something that was already believed by Christians and increasingly emphasized with the passage of time. There is no scriptural reference to the Immaculate Conception, even though Elizabeth did proclaim Mary to be "full of grace." In reference to Mary, the term "full of grace" means she was uniquely and permanently favored by God. She was permanently graced and prepared to be the mother of Jesus. She was fully filled with God's presence, as her life with completely without sin.

In the first through fifth centuries Mary was frequently referred to as "in all things unstained," "super innocent," "singularly holy," and compared to Eve before the Fall. As the centuries unfolded, belief in the Immaculate Conception grew stronger. It reached the point where there was strong support for this belief within all levels of the church: lay, religious, and clergy.

The definition of the dogma was the final blessing on a belief that had been long held and cherished by the Body of Christ and the People of God. When God reveals something in this matter it is referred to in the church as "sensus fidelium," or the "sense of the faithful." The dogma states: "The Blessed Virgin Mary at the first moment of her conception, by a singular privilege and grace of the Omnipotent God, in virtue of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Savior of mankind, was preserved Immaculate from all stain of Original Sin." Our Catholic faith teaches us that Mary received this "singular privilege" because of her sacred vocation to be the mother of Jesus, and therefore, the mother of God, the 2nd person of the Holy Trinity. The dogmas stresses that even though

Mary received this singular privilege and was preserved from Original Sin, her salvation still came from the merits of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus is her Savior just as much as He is our Savior. Her preservation from Original Sin was in anticipation of the salvation that would eventually come from her Son and the Savior of the world.

Since belief in the Immaculate Conception dates back to the 1st century, why did it take until 1854 to be defined as a dogma? I believe there are two historical reasons. The first involves some of the negative effects of the Enlightenment period. Humanity felt it was enlightened by taking center stage in place of God and becoming totally self-sufficient from Him. This led to increased denial or rejection of the existence of God or to a practical atheism where one theoretically believed in God, but it made no practical difference in their beliefs, behavior, and lifestyle. Mary as the Immaculate Conception was offered as a spiritual lifeline and inspiration to help people remain deeply united with Jesus Christ and His church. Second, the church wanted to clearly define her belief in the Immaculate

Conception in response to the attacks and critiques of the Protestant reformers on issues concerning Mary's role in God's plan of salvation.

Going back to the inscription, "O Mary conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee," by continually asking Mary to pray for us, her powerful prayers before her Son and Savior Jesus, obtain for us the graces need to faithfully love and serve the Lord according to His most Holy Will.

Using imagery from our reading from Genesis, she helps us to resist the trickery and the deception of the Evil One. As Mary assists us as a spiritual mother in growing closer to Christ, she leads us to a Second Innocence. As we grow in Christ, each of us in our own unique way mourns our "lost innocence" because of our past and present sins. Mary does not want us to be enslaved to this spiritual grief. Instead, she wants to lead us to a second innocence that is even more beautiful because it is born of genuine repentance and love of God. In a special way, she desires to do this by means of the rosary. It is a prayer that she has come down from heaven to ask us to pray. Through this second innocence of

repentance and love, we freely respond to the Gospel call to embrace a spiritual childhood that is grounded in a childlike trust in the love, mercy, help, and will of God. By daily placing ourselves within the hands and heart of she who is the "Immaculate Conception, we are in the words of St. Paul, "able to be holy and without blemish before God."

"O Mary conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to you."