



Feast of the Immaculate Conception Homily

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St Mary's Cathedral, Perth

In a special prayer which has been written for the Year of Mercy, we find the expression that Jesus Christ is the visible face of the invisible God. And, in the letter Pope Francis wrote to inaugurate the Year of Mercy, he begins by saying that "*Jesus Christ, is the face of the Father's mercy*". This Year of Mercy, which we inaugurate in our Archdiocese in this Mass, is the year in which we will be invited, as we were some years ago during the Year of Grace, to fix our eyes firmly on Jesus.

But, this year, we are being invited to look into the eyes of Jesus and discover there the look of mercy: to see in the eyes of Jesus the compassion, the forgiveness and the love which the Father has for each one of us. And, in the light of that contemplation, gazing into the face of Jesus, we are also being asked, and challenged, to unite ourselves with Jesus so that, in Him, we too can be to each other the face of the Father's mercy.

For the next twelve months, when we gather together as a community, all across the Archdiocese, we will be constantly be reminded that we are in a Year of Mercy.

Those of you who regularly attend the Cathedral, although you will not be able to do so today, will be able to enter and leave the Cathedral through our special Holy Door. But, even though the Holy Door will not be opened until the Vigil Mass for the Third Sunday of Advent, we still can today, as we celebrate the Feast of the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady, reflect for just a moment on the way in which Mary was caught up in this mystery of the Mercy of God.

The book of Genesis reminds us that, when God created humanity, He created humanity free from sin. The Bible story will tell us that the first man and the first woman, created in the image and likeness of God, were created free from sin. The great tragedy and the great mystery of the origins of the human race, lost as they are in the mists of time, is that, with that untainted freedom, humanity, at the very beginnings of our history, turned away from God and distanced itself from God, creating a barrier between ourselves and God.



Ever since, including now, we all struggle with this reality in our own personal lives and in the lives of our communities. The first human beings, in full freedom, rejected God. But God never rejected us.

And, as the scriptures say, in the fullness of time, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born a subject of the Lord, to redeem the subjects of the Lord.

Even though we freely rejected God, God was determined to give us a chance to freely accept Him again and, therefore, He chose and called Mary, and He prepared her for the challenge that she would encounter when the angel visited her, as we have just heard in today's Gospel. In choosing Mary, and in calling her, God gave her a particular gift: the gift we call the Immaculate Conception.

Mary, through the power of the grace of God, was protected from the distorting and disabling effects of sin which we all carry with us. And why? Because when God came to offer the gift of His mercy in His Son - to offer the gift of salvation - we needed someone who could, in perfect freedom, say "yes" to the gift that our first parents rejected.

This is the great mystery of the Immaculate Conception: that Mary had full and perfect freedom, undiminished, untainted and undistorted by any trace of sin, and therefore could speak on our behalf and in full freedom. In that freedom, and in the name of each one of us, Mary accepted the gift of Jesus, the gift of the Father's mercy, the One who brings us our salvation.

The Immaculate Conception was indeed a great moment of God's mercy: mercy for Mary, mercy for us, mercy for all God's people. Choosing her to be the one who could speak on our behalf because no-one else, because of sin, could have found it possible to say yes to God in full freedom, God has opened to all of us the richness of His love and compassion.

And so it is no coincidence that Pope Francis has chosen this day to inaugurate the Year of Mercy. It is no coincidence that he invites us to direct our attention, at least at the beginning of this Jubilee Year, to Mary. He leads us to see in her, our sister and our mother, a companion on our journey through life. He encourages us to see in her the One through whose generosity and courage, faith and freedom, the gift of God in Jesus has come to us.

As we now set out on this journey for the Jubilee Year of Mercy, let us ask Mary to be with us, and to accompany us with her prayers and with her presence, so that she might show us how to let go of sin, how to put it behind us, how to open ourselves to the power of God's transforming grace. Let us ask her to help us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, the face of the Father's mercy.