

[Genesis 3:9-15, 20; Psalm 98; Ephesians 1:3-6, 11-12; Luke 1:26-38]

I have heard it said more than once, when a married couple talks about the possibility of the wife being pregnant, the comment is made: "Well it must have been an immaculate conception!" Even my own parents jokingly said this. But they are confusing today's feast of the Immaculate Conception with the Catholic teaching, the "dogma" of the "Virgin Conception" (celebrated on March 25<sup>th</sup>, the Feast of the Annunciation) leading to the "Virgin Birth" of Jesus at Christmas on December 25<sup>th</sup>.

There is no scripture, no bible passage that gives us historical certainty about the mystery we celebrate today: the conception of Mary without any stain of sin in the womb of HER mother, whom tradition calls "Good St. Anne."

Mary had to be a perfect vessel for the reception of the Word Made Flesh, so she was given "prevenient grace" – the grace "before the coming" of Jesus Christ in her womb. Throughout her life, she was tempted, as all humans are tempted, but because of her free will and being "full of grace," she never committed sin. She stands in contrast to Eve, who in our First Reading, along with Adam, commits the two-fold sin of pride and disobedience.

Life has shown me, and my personal journal of faith as shown me, that the key to a deeper spirituality and to a closer relationship with the Lord and His Church is the virtue of humility. Real humility is not putting ourselves down, or thinking of ourselves as worthless, or allowing others to use us as a door mat.

Real humility is thinking about God more than we think of ourselves, and thinking of others before thinking of ourselves. THAT is true humility.

This is what Mary does in today's Gospel. She freely chooses to say "Yes" to the will of God in her life. She freely chooses to say "Yes" to the new life God wants to create in her womb. The three key phrases Mary says in the Gospel of Luke are these: "Let it be done unto me as you say," (at the Annunciation), "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord," (At the Visitation of Mary and Elizabeth on May 31<sup>st</sup>), and my favorite: "Do whatever he tells you." This is said at the Wedding Feast at Cana. It is a good rule of thumb for life!

Can you think of “humbling moments” in your life, where you were knocked down a couple of notches? Many would call them humiliating experiences. Like with our first human parents, they start with pride.

Trust me, I can name dozens, if not hundreds of times when I acted like I was better than someone else, put down someone else, and then within seconds, minutes, or hours, the exact thing was done to me. The Polish expression for this is “Boza Grozy!” or, loosely translated, “God will get you!” Putting it another way, Karma – what goes around, comes around!

That’s the negative way of looking at humility. Pride and ego are humbled by humiliating experiences. Looking at it positively, be open to God’s will in your life. What do we say every time we pray the Lord’s Prayer? “THY will be done.”

The positive way of looking at humility is found in the Prayer of Abandonment by St. Charles de Foucault. I shared this prayer when I first arrived at St. Martin de Porres Parish, and I think it bears repeating. I pray this prayer every morning, before leaving the rectory. Imagine Mary saying this prayer in today’s Gospel:

*Father,  
I abandon myself into your hands;  
do with me what you will.  
Whatever you may do, I thank you:  
I am ready for all, I accept all.  
Let only your will be done in me,  
and in all your creatures –  
I wish no more than this, O Lord.  
Into your hands I commend my soul:  
I offer it to you with all the love of my heart,  
for I love you, Lord, and so need to give myself,  
to surrender myself into your hands without reserve,  
and with boundless confidence,  
for you are my Father. AMEN!*