

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

Today's homily is going to be part reflection, part classroom teaching, and part action.

Child behavior psychologists tell us that almost unanimously, there is one word a child learns before any other words. Anybody care to raise your hand and guess? It isn't Ma-ma and it isn't Da-da. It's 'NO!' Why is that?

A toddler is walking dangerously close to a hot stove. Out of concern, you look at the child and yell, "NO!" The word and the manner of its delivery startles the toddler, and it walks away from the stove. Later that day, the toddler finds a kitchen knife and begins to play with it. You shout, "NO!" The child, startled, drops the knife and you run and pick it up to hide it in a safer place. Then the toddler, with a natural curiosity, puts something in its mouth that shouldn't be in it. We notice it and we shout, "NO!". The child spits it out.

Any wonder then, why when it's time to feed the child, it looks in the direction of the spoon and says, "NO!" Or when it's bed time and you lay the child in its crib and it shouts, "NO!"

Today's Feast Day of the Immaculate Conception celebrates a "NO!" and a "YES!" "NO!" is what Adam and Eve say to God when they disobey the order not to seek something which is not rightfully theirs. "NO!" is what you and I say every time we sin, every time we let our pride define and defeat us, every time we are invited to do the will of God and we turn our heads, looking away.

Mary of Nazareth, who would become the Blessed Mother of Jesus Christ, is the "New Eve" as the Church Fathers call her. When Eve said, "NO!", Mary said, "YES!" Did Mary have all the facts before her? No. Did she know how the Divine Plan of God was going to work itself out? No. My educated guess is that Mary knew God knew better than she! Because of her "YES!" Mary is preserved from the stain of Original Sin so that her womb would become a suitable home for her Messiah and Redeemer. Because of her "YES!" Mary would assume body and soul into Heaven.

Now the classroom lecture. Cliff Clavin from the TV show *Cheers*, often would precede his words of wisdom with these words: "It's a little known fact."

Here are some little-known facts about today's feast:

1) The feast of the Immaculate Conception (December 8) was first approved in 1476 and extended to the whole Church by Pope St. Pius V in 1568.

2) A commission of 20 theologians, launched by Pope Pius IX to study the issue and issue a final definition, met in 1848. The next year, the pope asked for input from the world's bishops, who responded almost entirely in favor of the doctrine.

3) The formal doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, affirming the freedom of the Blessed Virgin from sin from the very moment of her conception, was proclaimed by Pius IX on Dec. 8, 1854. The document included the following statement (translated from the Latin): "We declare, pronounce, and define that the doctrine which holds that the most Blessed Virgin Mary, in the first instance of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege granted by Almighty God, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the human race, was preserved free from all stain of original sin, is a doctrine revealed by God and therefore to be believed firmly and constantly by all the faithful."

4) In her apparitions in both Fatima, Portugal, and Lourdes, France, Mary referenced the Immaculate Conception. To St. Bernadette Soubirous in Lourdes, she identified herself saying, "I am the Immaculate Conception."

5) St. John Henry Newman, fourth bishop of Philadelphia and the first (and so far only) canonized American bishop, was invited to Rome by Pope Pius IX in 1854 to take part in the formal definition of the dogma on the Immaculate Conception.

6) Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception is the patroness of the United States. *Source: Information taken from [the Encyclopedia of Catholic History](#)*

And now we come to the action item of today's agenda. God has chosen each one of us, you and me, to be His modern-day Christ-bearers. God wants to birth His Son in each of our lives, our families, our homes. God sends to us modern-day Angel Gabriels with a greeting, an invitation requiring a response,

and a response that will be life-changing and unpredictable.

What will YOUR “first word” be to God? “NO!” or “YES?”

“O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to you!”

AMEN!