

Fr. Nick Dant's Homily, Saint Matthew Catholic Church, Indianapolis  
Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, Dec. 8, 2018, Cycle C

We read the Gospel passage from Luke of the Annunciation this day, not only because there is no Gospel story about Mary's Conception, but because the Annunciation story portrays so well the result of Mary's sinlessness, her total obedience to God. For the key to today's feast, honoring Mary as free from sin from the moment she was conceived, lies in the purifying force of obedience to God's will.

The Gospel passage from Luke concludes with Mary telling Gabriel: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word." However, Mary's total obedience to God's will would not have been possible without her Son's total obedience to God's will.

As the great Christological hymn in Paul's letter to the Philippians proclaims: Christ Jesus "humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross. Because of this, God exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name..."

Jesus' obedience won life for us and freedom from sin, and God decided that the death and Resurrection of Jesus would be effective in Mary's life from the first moment she was conceived in the womb of his mother – because God chose Mary from all women to be the mother of His Son – who would be our Savior.

Mary's "yes" to God then, was unencumbered by sin. When the will of God was presented to Mary, she could see clearly what the good was. Mary may have been perplexed, but she could see clearly what God's will was.

In baptism – Jesus' death and Resurrection become effective in our lives too – and we became like Mary – free from sin, but our struggle to free ourselves from sin continues, for unlike Mary, we were not created in the Resurrection of Jesus from the moment we were conceived. Mary's was a singular privilege, again, because God had decided to call Mary to be the mother of the Word made flesh.

However, we should not feel cheated – for Mary is a sign of hope for what God intends us to become. God needs the rest of the Human Race to be part of sin, in order – with Jesus' grace to battle sin, until all evil is overcome by Jesus through us.

Mary, then being a sign of hope, is a prime Advent figure for us – calling us to renew ourselves in our mission of watching, waiting and preparing for that day Jesus comes in glory, and we all fully share in Jesus' resurrection as Mary does!