

FEAST OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION—December 8, 2016

01. This is it—my very favourite Feast Day—the *Immaculate Conception*; and my favourite Gospel reading—the *Annunciation*. Lasting only a mere few moments, the power of these two events in salvation history echo throughout the ages with an undeniable force — with a force that changed our collective and personal histories forever. For the power of these two moments made it possible for the God of love, and the God of life, to enter our broken, wounded, and lonely reality — and free us from our collective and personal hell.
02. It's hard to put into words what this Feast and this Gospel mean to me — **for me**, the fact that Mary was sinless, and that She (unlike **any other creature**) said yes to God at every moment of Her existence, so perfectly, and so completely — is the greatest source **of awe, of joy, of comfort, and of hope**.
03. And it's not just that Mary received an **extraordinary grace**; it's that She cooperated with this grace in an **extraordinary way** — for both Eve and Mary came into this world sinless; but Mary cooperated with the grace in a way that Eve never did. Indeed, without Mary's total yes to God (on behalf of all humanity) the coming of God as Man would not have been possible — for there would have been no one worthy and willing enough to receive Him on our behalf; and to allow Him to assume our human nature — thus undoing all the evil initiated by Eve's rejection of God. And it's not that God needed Mary to accomplish His will — it's that He **chose** to give Her that kind of power.
04. We tend to think of Mary's **sinlessness** more in terms of the **absence of vice**; but really, it's more about the **presence of virtue** — because it's not only that Mary was free from sin; but that She was **full of hope, full of faith, full of love, and full of grace**.
05. In fact, Mary is the created perfection of **all** the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love. Consider, for example, how Mary immediately hurried to visit Elizabeth when hearing about her cousin's pregnancy — it was not to boast about Her own visitation from the Angel Gabriel; but rather, out of pure, unselfish love and concern, to **be there** for Elizabeth and to share in her cousin's joy.
06. Mary is **also** the created perfection of all **the cardinal virtues** — of prudence, justice, temperance, and courage. Consider Mary's tremendous courage when She stood beneath the Cross, undergoing **unimaginable** suffering — experiencing internally, every ounce of suffering Jesus was enduring both physically and emotionally on the Cross; undergoing an excruciating crucifixion of Her own; and yet, just like Her Son, She did so without sin — persevering in

faith, hope, and love against **overwhelming odds**. So much so, that She merited the title: **Queen of Martyrs**, although she did not physically experience a martyr's death — but underwent a suffering **far greater** than any physical martyrdom She could have endured.

07. As well, Mary is the created perfection of the fruits of the Holy Spirit, such as joy, peace, patience, kindness, and faithfulness. She is **also** the created perfection of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, such as understanding, right judgment, knowledge, piety and reverence. Consider how, at the Birth of Jesus, Mary, rather than boasting about this great privilege of being the Mother of the Messiah, instead pondered these mysteries in Her Heart—in perfect, silent, devout veneration.
08. Mary is the created perfection of the Beatitudes — being perfectly poor in spirit, merciful, peaceful, sorrowful, meek, and humble of heart. Consider Her great humility and poverty of spirit when She declared: *I am the handmaid of the Lord, be done unto me, according to your word.*
09. Mary is **also** the created perfection of all the commandments; including the greatest — **to love God with all of one's mind, heart, soul and strength**. In other words, Mary is the perfection of that total, self-less love for God to which we are ALL called — loving God perfectly on behalf of ALL mankind; with Her entire **mind, heart, soul, and strength**. For Mary alone returned God's infinite love for humanity with absolute perfection; without the slightest hint of **selfishness or self-centredness** — with all the totality and perfection possible in someone who is **pure creature**. So much so, that **in Mary**, all of humanity loves God the same way He loves us; with an all-consuming intensity and totality.
10. In Mary, we have the perfect love story between the Creator and His Creation — for it is not possible for God to love humanity any more than He does; in the same way, it is not possible for a creature to love God any more **than Mary does**. For, in Mary we see God's total and complete self-giving to all of humanity; and in Mary, we see the perfection of that love returned by the best of humanity **to** God.
11. In Christ, all of humanity loves the Father the way He deserves to be loved — with complete and utter devotion and abandon. In Mary, all of humanity **loves Christ the way He deserves to be loved** — with perfect trust, fervor and surrender.
12. At Lourdes, when Mary said *I am the Immaculate Conception*; what She was really saying is: **I am the embodiment of God's immaculate vision for the Church, for the world and for each and every one of us**. In other words, what God did for Mary, God wants to do for all of us; and through Mary, He has

made it possible for His Love, His Power, and His Grace, to heal and transform our broken, wounded humanity; so that we too may participate in His Divine Life, and in His Divine Work, to our fullest potential.

13. I remember a priest once saying that the true meaning of the Immaculate Conception is the power of God to triumph completely in a human being. And so, once again, in Mary, **we see everything that God desires for each of us.** In other words, God wishes to accomplish for all of us, what He first and foremost, accomplished for Mary, at the moment of Her Conception — granting Her complete victory over sin and death the moment She came into existence. Thus the Feast of the Immaculate Conception reflects **God's power, and God's desire,** to conquer and overcome evil in all of us.
14. And so, Mary is **the archetype of all the redeemed** — first to be redeemed by Her Son, She participates in His Divine Life, and in His Divine Work, like no other creature. Indeed, Mary is the archetype and perfection of **everything God intends for the Church, for the world, and for each and every one of us.**
15. It may sound like I'm putting Mary above Christ, but everything we **say** about Mary is **always a mere** reflection of everything we **believe** about Jesus — so that the more we honour Mary, the more we glorify Jesus. Just like the moon gives no light of its own, but only reflects the light of the sun — so too Mary's glory is a mere reflection of the glory of Her Son.
16. In Mary, God's hope for humanity, God's faith in humanity, and God's love for humanity is perfectly reflected and realized — and likewise, in Mary, we find the created perfection of humanity's faith in God, hope in God, and love of God; so much so, that the Eternal Word **could not resist becoming flesh** within Her. And through Mary, the Eternal Word cannot resist taking flesh in all of us.
17. Because, again, God wants for all of us, what He has done first and foremost for Mary — for through Mary, God wants to make each of us full of grace, highly favoured, blessed among women and men; so that we may also proclaim with Her, *My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God My Saviour, for He has looked with favour upon His lowly servant. From this day forward, all generations will call me blessed; for the Almighty has done great things for me, and holy is His Name.*