

Immaculate Conception, 2023

(OSF)

The feast of the Immaculate Conception is often misunderstood... I'll bet that at least 50% of Catholics think this is about **Jesus'** conception or virgin birth. Of course, you all know that it's not. This feast celebrates **Mary's** sinlessness from the moment of her conception. This dogma of the faith was defined by Pope Pius IX on this date in 1854.

Mary's sinlessness is what it's all about, but even that can be confusing. What does Mary's sinless conception have to do with us? As a miracle it may be something of note. But how does it touch our lives?

I don't think that's really a fair question because it is looking at the feast from the wrong direction. Let's change the focus, and say that today we celebrate, not so much Mary's sinlessness, true as that is, but more than that we celebrate *God's love*.

When the angel spoke to Mary about Elizabeth's pregnancy, he told her that "nothing is impossible with God." Nothing. His love and mercy have conquered sin and death. And not only does that love reach beyond the grave, but it also extends, as in Mary's case, before birth.

Nothing is impossible with God. That is a message for all time, and especially for our time—we who are so intrigued and captivated by human power. Our generation has more control over life and death than any preceding generation of human beings. But oddly enough, that power seems to have made us more *vulnerable* than any other generation in history.

One single 30-minute newscast can jolt our hearts and boggle our minds with the accumulated disasters of an ordinary weekday. There is war in Ukraine and Gaza, just to name two places, where

innocent people are killed, injured or rendered homeless. Mass shootings in our own country are happening at a pace never before seen. Violence seems to be a way of life in our world, even our city. This on top of the other “ordinary” evils of everyday—more people die from starvation each day than ever before in the history of the world. More people die unborn than in all the wars of our country’s history. It all looks so bleak. Has Satan really gotten the upper hand?

We can never **unlearn** evil, but we **can** get beyond it. *Nothing is impossible with God.* These days we are almost consumed with tracking down and destroying Hamas and terrorists of all sorts. I think that quest is something like what God is doing. God hunts us down in our sin, but not to kill us; God hunts us down to **capture** us. The God against whom we sin calls us by name; he seeks us out; he reconciles us to himself. *Nothing is impossible with God.* His mercy triumphs over our sin. The failures that seem to paralyze us are no match for his power... Our lives are a blend of good intentions and dismal failures. But God’s everlasting, incredible love sets the pieces right.

Like Mary, we can cooperate with God’s plan. We work for God—for goodness, for life, for beauty, for wholeness. *Nothing is impossible with God.*

As Roman Catholic citizens of the United States of America, we have Mary, immaculately conceived, as our patroness. I think, besides having a powerful intercessor, that puts a responsibility on *us*. As she did, we must experience more closely and more deeply the overwhelming power of God’s transforming love, so that we can more easily proclaim it and more truthfully express it to our fellow citizens, our brother and sister Americans.

In death and life, in war and peace, in darkness and light, everything we are and do must prove that *nothing is impossible with God.*