

Ten After Ten: Session 23 --- Conceived by the Power of the Holy Spirit and Born of the Virgin Mary

484 The Annunciation to Mary inaugurates “the fullness of time,” the time of the fulfillment of God’s promises and preparations. Mary was invited to conceive him in whom the “whole fullness of deity” would dwell bodily. The divine response to her question, “How can this be, since I know not man?” was given by the power of the Spirit: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you.”

485 The mission of the Holy Spirit is always conjoined and ordered to that of the Son. The Holy Spirit, “the Lord, the giver of Life,” is sent to sanctify the womb of the Virgin Mary and divinely fecundate it, causing her to conceive the eternal Son of the Father in a humanity drawn from her own.

486 The Father’s only Son, conceived as man in the womb of the Virgin Mary, is “Christ,” that is to say, anointed by the Holy Spirit, from the beginning of his human existence, though the manifestation of this fact takes place only progressively: to the shepherds, to the magi, to John the Baptist, to the disciples.

487 What the Catholic faith believes about Mary is based on what it believes about Christ, and what it teaches about Mary illumines in turn its faith in Christ.

488 “God sent forth his Son,” but to prepare a body for him, he wanted the free cooperation of a creature. For this, from all eternity God chose for the mother of his Son a daughter of Israel... Mary:

The Father of mercies willed that the Incarnation should be preceded by assent on the part of the predestined mother, so that just as a woman had a share in the coming of death, so also should a woman contribute to the coming of life. (LG 56)

489 Throughout the Old Covenant the mission of many holy women prepared for that of Mary. At the very beginning there was Eve; despite her disobedience, she receives the promise of a posterity that will be victorious over the evil one... by virtue of this promise, Sarah conceives a son in spite of her old age. Against all human expectation God chooses those who were considered powerless and weak to show forth his faithfulness to his promises: Hannah, the mother of Samuel; Deborah; Ruth; Judith and Esther; and many other women.

490 The angel Gabriel at the moment of the annunciation salutes Mary as “full of grace.” In fact, in order for Mary to be able to give the free assent of her faith to the announcement of her vocation, it was necessary that she be wholly borne by God’s grace.

491 Through the centuries the Church has become ever more aware that Mary, “full of grace” through God, was redeemed from the moment of her conception. That is what the dogma of the Immaculate Conception confesses, as Pope Pius IX proclaimed in 1854:

The most Blessed Virgin Mary was, from the first moment of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege of almighty God and by virtue of the merits of Jesus Christ, Savior of the human race, preserved immune from all stain of original sin.

492 The splendor of an entirely unique holiness by which Mary is enriched from the first instant of her conception comes wholly from Christ: she is redeemed, in a more exalted fashion, by reason of the merits of her Son.

493 The Fathers of the Eastern tradition call the Mother of God “the All-Holy” (*Panagia*) and celebrate her as “free from any stain of sin, as though fashioned by the Holy Spirit and formed as a new creature.” By the grace of God Mary remained free of every personal sin her whole life long.

494 At the announcement that she would give birth to “the Son of the Most High” without knowing man, by the power of the Holy Spirit, Mary responded with the obedience of faith... “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be [done] to me according to your word.”...Espousing the divine will for salvation wholeheartedly, without a single sin to restrain her, she gave herself entirely to the person and to the work of her Son; she did so in order to serve the mystery of redemption with him and dependent on him, by God’s grace.

495 Called in the Gospels “the mother of Jesus,” Mary is acclaimed by Elizabeth, at the prompting of the Spirit and even before the birth of her son, as “the mother of my Lord.” In fact, the One whom she conceived as man by the Holy Spirit, who truly became her Son according to the flesh, was none other than the Father’s eternal Son, the second person of the Holy Trinity. Hence the Church confesses that Mary is truly “Mother of God” (*Theotokos*).