



**8. December 2021**

**Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception  
"Destined to the praise of God"**

*Eph 1:3-6.11-12*

*Blessed be God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with all the spiritual blessings of heaven in Christ. Thus he chose us in Christ before the world was made to be holy and faultless before him in love, marking us out for himself beforehand, to be adopted sons, through Jesus Christ. Such was his purpose and good pleasure, to the praise of the glory of his grace, his free gift to us in the Beloved, and it is in him that we have received our heritage, marked out beforehand as we were, under the plan of the One who guides all things as he decides by his own will, chosen to be, for the praise of his glory, the people who would put their hopes in Christ before he came.*

The Church is right to celebrate with such solemnity the Immaculate Conception of Mary, for all that we have heard in today's reading regarding our predestination is eminently fulfilled in the Blessed Virgin Mary, who gave her YES to God's Will and was thus directly included in His plan of salvation for mankind.

Therefore, as we prepare for the Great Feast of the Nativity of the Lord, it is fitting that, on today's Solemnity, we turn our gaze to the Mother of the Lord... In her, we can discover the beauty of Creation in its original integrity and innocence, for, as this day's Feast makes us see, the Virgin Mary was conceived without the stain of original sin and received all the graces of her Son.

In Mary we can see what it means to live according to God's predestination, because she undoubtedly corresponded perfectly and with her whole being to God's plan for her life.

The concept of predestination that today's text presents to us makes it clear that our life is in God's hands and in God's plans. The ultimate goal is to become heirs of God and destined for the praise of his glory. To reach this goal, each of us has been given a unique and unmistakable plan of how and in what mission we are to glorify God. That is why it is also important to be open to a deeper calling that may be addressed to us. To find it, we do not have to wander around, trying this and that; rather, in the concrete following of Christ, we can allow ourselves to be led by God to that which He has laid out for us from all eternity.

According to His Wisdom, the Lord knows how to integrate even our wanderings into His plans, when we surrender ourselves to Him. In a meditation I wrote some time ago

on the gifts of the Holy Spirit, I had said that the plan for our life comes to light when the gift of knowledge is at work in us, which helps us to recognise that our home is in God alone and not in the created, and thus invites us to detach ourselves in the right way from all disordered attachment to the created. Then we will be able to see more clearly what God has in mind for our life, and thus to assume our vocation more deeply. *"You did not choose me, no, I chose you; and I commissioned you to go out and to bear fruit, fruit that will last"* -the Lord tells us in the so-called "farewell discourse" (Jn 15:16). Prior to this, he had called his disciples "friends" (cf. Jn 15:15), to whom he entrusts everything... We know the way the disciples went afterwards, taking the gospel to the world as apostles of the Lord. We also know that their fruit indeed remained: to this day we live by their words and the example they left us! In them God's plan was fulfilled and through them we praise Him.

Today, when people seek their personal happiness, they often ignore this dimension, that only in conformity with God, living according to what He has given and entrusted to them, can true happiness be found. To use the language of today's reading, we would say that it is a matter of corresponding to our deepest destiny.

When one does not yet know God well and does not really trust Him, it can even happen that the fact that He has predestined us for something creates a feeling that one is as if one were obliged to do and fulfil something that one has not chosen oneself. Paradoxically, one might even have the impression that this predestination would limit one's personal freedom. However, such thoughts show that the true freedom of man has not been properly understood either. For there can be no greater freedom than to consciously and lovingly fulfil God's Will, thus entering into our own predestination.

In the Virgin Mary we can see that the great joy and fulfilment of her life consists in fulfilling her predestination. She wants nothing for herself; everything must serve the glory of God. Her happiness lies in being able to respond to God's love with her self-giving and to abandon herself to his Providence: *"You see before you the Lord's servant, let it happen to me as you have said."* (Lk 1:38). Mary was destined to the praise of God's glory: *"For the Almighty has done great things for me. Holy is his name."* (Lk 1:49).