



Metropolitan Archbishop of Izmir

WAITING CHRISTMAS WITH THE IMMACULATE VIRGIN MARY

Letter of the Archbishop for the Advent Season

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. (CCC 491)

Through the merits of her Son, Jesus Christ, Son of God and Savior of the human race, the Virgin Mary was preserved from original sin and from every stain that derives from the wounded condition of human nature. This is the truth proclaimed by the Church and celebrated on December 8, during the Advent season. The solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, at the beginning of Advent, prepares us to relive the mystery of the Incarnation of the Word, which we will celebrate at Holy Christmas.

With Mary Immaculate we live the season of Advent, a time of waiting, when we open our hearts to the longing and desire for the Lord's nearness. Our hearts are already at the manger with Jesus, but our minds are fixed on the place where the Lord will call us at the moment of His final coming.

Advent ushers us into a new liturgical year: this also means the beginning of life that sprouts through the work of God despite the tragic story of humanity. The essential space of the Incarnation is the heart of the Virgin Mary, her inner readiness to receive the gift of the Spirit. She receives the Word of God, accepting His plan for her life, for the history of redemption, and for the story of each one of us.

Mary was made holy by the work of God, so as to be worthy to carry within her womb the human and divine nature of the Savior. God the Creator made of her a new creature— a human being free from the burden of our wounded nature, which is sin and the corruption of the body in death. The work accomplished in Mary is a creative work of God, capable of an absolute newness, like all the work of Christ and like the work of the creating Spirit who would descend upon the first community on the day of Pentecost.

God, who is freedom itself, in His infinite freedom made His Creature free, so that she could be the empty space ready to receive the Savior. The Immaculate One is feminine weakness preserved and made powerful by the work of God. With her consent, Mary expresses her unconditional trust in God, which comes from her total belonging to the love and will of God.

This commitment of God to save humanity, which began in the garden of Eden, is fulfilled in the Immaculate Virgin, a fragile human being. With her, God gives us the courage to begin the journey of faith anew, to be able to cross the desert of loneliness,



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to live with serenity the passing of days and old age, in peaceful expectation of the Lord's coming.

After the conception of the Child Jesus, Mary sets out to visit her relative Elizabeth: Mary finds confirmation of what the angel had told her— that Elizabeth, in her old age, had conceived a son. God's promise was fulfilled in her.

Elizabeth's sterility and old age, as well as Mary's holiness, are the space for God's action. This teaches us that only together, in the relationship of love and service, and not in self-sufficiency, can we find the meaning and mission of our life, on both personal and ecclesial levels. God reveals Himself in His work through the least, the small, and the poor.

Mary Immaculate expresses the fullness of our being in waiting. Our expectation of God is always partial, marked by original sin and the sins we have committed in life. For this reason, we too are called to a holiness of life imbued with the light of Advent.

In this light we find ourselves stripped and exposed in our poverty, but the Immaculate One clothes us with her poverty, which is pure innocence— the poverty of being in its most authentic simplicity. To appropriate anything or anyone makes us slaves. God, who exists in pure self-giving, wished to make Mary all-pure, possessing nothing of her own.

Original sin is appropriation; but the purity and supernatural innocence of Mary, on the other hand, are the empty space of freedom for the absolute freedom that is God. God created us free, but we made ourselves slaves. In this Advent season we should ask ourselves what our slaveries are, whether chosen or unchosen. Christ has set us free. Christ sets us free today, tomorrow, and always. To enter the truth of Christmas, to enter eternity and life with God, we must convince ourselves that the reality of this world is not the final one. This reality is not truly ours. There is more.

I wish you a blessed journey toward Bethlehem, where, in His infinite poverty, the Child awaits us. In this poverty is our salvation!

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