



## SAINT LOUIS ABBEY



### **Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception December 8, 2005**

The prayers of this Mass speak of Our Lady's sinlessness. She was preserved from all stain of sin, they tell us; by grace she was immune from all stain of sin; her conception was singularly preserved from the guilt of sin.

Sinlessness, when we first think of it, can perhaps seem somewhat negative, even somewhat cold. This is because of our own great distance from sinlessness, our own great distance from being what Our Lady is, and always has been. But we can gain some understanding of what sinlessness truly is if we recall the special grace which sometimes accompanies our reception of the Sacrament of Penance and by which we are enabled to experience to some degree the blessedness of sinlessness. Even after receiving the forgiveness of our sins in the sacrament, there can still remain in us some tendencies, including some habitual tendencies, to sin; there can still remain in us some debt of temporal punishment for our sins; and there certainly remains in us the weakness of our will in this life, so that sinning again remains a possibility for the future. But even with all this, if we are given the grace of experiencing the forgiveness of sins which the sacrament brings, the experience can be immensely blessed. There is the experience that what had been separating us from God is gone, utterly gone: "as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our sins"; there is the experience of a limitless, fathomless peace, the peace which passes understanding; there is the experience of our soul soaring aloft, unburdened by any weight, in a limitless liberty: "Thanks be to God, who has given us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ," Saint Paul exclaims. As we recall this experience, we begin to gain some understanding, catch some glimpse, of what Our Blessed Mother's complete freedom from sin must be: not negative, but the most immensely positive of realities; not cold, but alive with the fullest and most perfect life; not severe, but unspeakably gracious. 'Gracious', 'grace': there is the word, and now we recall the salutation with which the angel greets Our Lady, as we heard in the Gospel for this Mass: "Hail, full of grace". "Full of grace": That is what Our Lady is, that is what we commemorate on this beautiful day: "Hail, full of grace; the Lord is with thee."

May we draw two practical conclusions. First, as the prayers of the Mass teach us to do, let us beg Our Lady's intercession that we might be freed from our sins. As we do so, let us turn our gaze to the Lord Jesus, for it is by his power, by his saving death, that Our Lady was preserved from sin, and that we are delivered from sin. Our Lord's saving death would not have occurred had he not first become incarnate, and it is as the omnipotent Child, lying a helpless baby in his Mother's arms, that we see most clearly his innocence, his being without sin, and her innocence, her being without sin, which she receives from him. How fitting, then, that the feast of Our Lady's Immaculate Conception is a feast in Advent, for



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it entirely points toward Christmas, it is the first appearance of the blessing of Christmas which will be spread throughout the world.

Then, secondly, let us take care to receive, before the end of Advent, the Sacrament of Reconciliation, with a whole and devoted heart, a full and liberating confession. Thus we shall receive that grace which in us forgives our sins, in her preserved her from sin; thus we shall come closer to her, see a little more clearly her beauty, her loveliness; thus we shall be prepared for the blessing of Christmas.

On this day the Lord speaks thus to Our Lady:

Listen to me, devout child, and blossom  
like the rose that grows on the bank of a water course.  
Give off a sweet smell like incense  
flower like the lily, spread your fragrance abroad,  
sing a song of praise  
blessing the Lord for all his works.