



The Holy See

SOLEMNITY OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

POPE FRANCIS

ANGELUS

*Saint Peter's Square
Saturday, 8 December 2018*

[Multimedia]

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning and happy Feast Day!

Today the Word of God presents us with an alternative. In the first reading there is the man who, at the origin, says *no* to God, and in the Gospel there is Mary who, at the Annunciation, says *yes* to God. In both readings it is God who seeks mankind. But in the first case God goes to Adam, after the sin, and asks him: “Where are you?” (Gen 3:9), and Adam responds: “I hid myself” (v. 10). In the second case, however, God goes to Mary, without sin, who responds: “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord” (Lk 1:38). *Here I am* is the opposite of *I hid myself*. *Here I am* opens one to God, while sin closes, isolates, causes one to be alone with oneself.

Here I am is the key phrase for life. It marks the passage from a horizontal life, centred on oneself and one’s own needs, to a vertical life, ascending toward God. *Here I am* is being available to the Lord; it is the cure for selfishness, the antidote to a dissatisfied life, which is always lacking something. *Here I am* is the remedy against the aging of sin; it is the therapy for staying young within. *Here I am* is believing that God counts more than my ‘me’. It is choosing to bet on the Lord, docile to his surprises. This is why saying *here I am* to him is the highest praise we can offer him. Why not begin our days with a ‘here I am, Lord’? It would be beautiful to say each morning: “*Here I am, Lord, today let your will be done in me*”. We will say it in praying the *Angelus*, but we can repeat it now, together. *Here I am, Lord, today let your will be done in me!*

Mary adds: “Let it be to me according to your word”. She does not say “let it be done as I want”, but “as You will”. She does not place any limitations on God. She does not think: “I will dedicate myself partly to him, I will deal with it and then I will do what I want”. No, Mary does not love the Lord when she feels like it, off and on. She lives by entrusting herself to God in all things and for all things. This is the secret of life. One who trusts God in everything can do everything. However, the Lord, dear brothers and sisters, suffers when we respond to him as Adam did: “I was afraid, and I hid myself”. God is Father, the most tender of fathers, and desires his children’s trust.

How often, instead, do we mistrust him; we mistrust God! We think that he might send us some trial, deprive us of freedom, abandon us. But this is a great mistake; it is the temptation of the origins, the temptation of the devil: weaving mistrust in God. Mary overcomes this first temptation with her *here I am*. And today we look at the beauty of Our Lady, born and lived without sin, ever docile and transparent to God.

This does not mean that life was easy for her, no. Being with God does not magically resolve problems. The conclusion of today’s Gospel passage recalls it: “the angel departed from her” (v. 38). He departed: it is a strong verb. The Angel left the Virgin alone in a difficult situation. She knew the special way in which she would become the Mother of God — the Angel had said so — but the Angel had not explained it to others, only to her. And problems began immediately: let us imagine the irregular situation according to law, to Saint Joseph’s torment, the life plan tossed aside, what the people would have said.... But faced with problems, Mary places her trust in God. She is left by the Angel, but believes that God remains with her, in her. And she trusts. She trusts in God. She is certain that with the Lord, even if in an unexpected way, everything will be fine. This is the wise approach: not to live depending on problems — when one ends, another appears! — but by trusting God and entrusting every day to him: *here I am!* “Here I am” is the phrase. “Here I am” is the prayer. Let us ask the Immaculate for the grace to live this way.

After reciting the Angelus, Pope Francis added:

Dear brothers and sisters, today Bishop Pietro Claverie and 18 men and women religious Companions, killed in hatred of the faith, were beatified at the Notre Dame de Santa Cruz Chapel in Oran, Algeria. Nineteen new Blessed! These martyrs of our time were faithful proclaimers of the Gospel, humble peace builders and heroic witnesses to Christian charity: a bishop, priests, men and women religious and lay people. Their courageous witness is a source of hope for the Catholic community of Algeria and the seed of dialogue for the entire society. May this Beatification be for everyone an inspiration to build together a world of fraternity and solidarity. Let us offer a round of applause for the new Blessed, everyone together!

I assure remembrance in my prayers of the young people and mother who died last night in a nightclub in Corinaldo, near Ancona, as well as the many injured. I ask Our Lady’s intercession for

all.

I offer an affectionate greeting to you, pilgrims from Italy and from other countries, especially families, parish groups and associations. On this Feast of the Immaculate Conception, in Italian parishes membership is being renewed in Catholic Action, an association that for 150 years has been a gift and a resource for the journey of the Church in Italy. I encourage its diocesan and parish divisions to commit themselves to the formation of lay people capable of witnessing to the Gospel, becoming leaven for a more just and solidary society.

I wholeheartedly bless the faithful of Rocca di Papa and the flame with which they will light the great star on the Fortress of their beautiful town, in honour of Mary Immaculate.

This afternoon I will go to Saint Mary Major to pray to Our Lady, and afterwards I will go to Piazza di Spagna to renew the traditional act of homage and prayer at the foot of the monument to the Immaculate. I ask you to join me spiritually in this gesture, which expresses filial devotion to our heavenly Mother.

I wish everyone a happy Feast Day and a good Advent journey guided by the Virgin Mary. Please, do not forget to pray for me. Enjoy your lunch. *Arrivederci!*