In 1854 Pope Pius IX proclaimed the Immaculate Concepcion of Mary an infallible dogma: “The 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.”

“Spared from original sin” (Lumen Gentium, no. 56). The stain of original sin we have inherited from Adam and Eve is not a personal sin, but rather a condition, both internal and external, into which we are born. Externally, we are all thrust at birth into a sinful human community. Sin lies outside us, influencing and harming us. However, sin also lies within. Internally, we experience having an enslaved will that is not wholly directed toward God and God’s will. This interior impulse to reject God is due to the deprivation of sanctifying grace, the consequence of Adam’s sin on us. Thus sin is also an interior reality, propelling us to compound the sin of the world.

To proclaim that Mary was preserved from the stain of original sin means that, like us, she was born into a sinful world; however, unlike us, her mind, heart, and will remained totally oriented towards God.

Redeemed by her Son, Jesus. Mary was preserved from original sin because of her motherhood of the Savior. The eternal Word was conceived and developed in the new ark of the covenant, the womb of Mary. The divine Son was raised by a human mother, pure and holy. In this sense, Mary was saved by her Eternal Son at the moment of her conception. Even before his incarnation, death, and resurrection, the divine Son had already redeemed his human mother.

Mary’s free assent. Though freed from the stain of original sin, Mary could have turned down God’s invitation to give birth to and raise the Savior, for God never imposes his desires upon us. Mary remained free every moment of her life; free in the sense of having the option even to sin. Nonetheless, she chose God in every decision she made; she submitted to God’s will every moment of her life.

Mary was never coerced by God. Her freedom was never undermined by grace. For Mary to fulfill her challenging role in God’s salvific plans, she had to freely decide for God. Nonetheless, she was dependent every moment on grace that empowered her to opt for God and God’s will: “for Mary to be able to give the free assent of her faith... it was necessary that she be wholly borne by God’s grace” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, art. 490).

In relation to us. While we are not spared from the stain of original sin, we are also graced by the Risen Lord. While our wills are powerfully drawn toward sin, we are enabled by a greater power still—Jesus, Victor over sin and death—to opt for God. While we are not Theotokoi—the bearers of God—in the sense of carrying the Word in our womb like Mary, we are called to be Christotokoi, Christ-bearers through our words and witness to Jesus.

We can all too easily justify our sinfulness, claiming to be “tao lamang”; unlike Mary, we have not been spared from original sin. We can excuse ourselves for our lack of virtue and fidelity to Jesus, maintaining that we have not been graced like her. Yet it is important to bear in mind that Mary’s privileges did not spare her from the possibility of turning away from God. Grace did not exempt her from fearing for her life as an unwed mother, a refugee in Egypt, an eventual widow, and a mother of a crucified convict. God’s favor did not shield her from suffering and pain, confusion, and especially darkness at the foot of the cross; nonetheless, through it all, Mary chose God. Mary chose to remain obedient to God’s will for her and faithful to her Son from his crib to his cross.

Thus, as Mary freely cooperated with God’s plans for her and the world, so are we invited to participate in God’s redemptive plans for our families, our nation, and the world. As God did great things through Mary, a simple, humble maiden, so can God do great things through each of us despite our humble stations in life. We pray that, like Mary Immaculate, we might be graced to choose God every moment of our lives.

Fr. Manoling Francisco, SJ
Gloria

All — Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to people of good will. We praise you, we bless you, we adore you, we glorify you, we give you thanks for your great glory, Lord God, heavenly King, O God, almighty Father. Lord Jesus Christ, Only Begotten Son, Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father, you take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us; you take away the sins of the world, receive our prayer; you are seated at the right hand of the Father, have mercy on us. For you alone are the Holy One, you alone are the Lord, you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit, in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

Collect

P — Let us pray. (Pause)

O God, who by the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin prepared a worthy dwelling for your Son, grant, we pray, that, as you preserved her from every stain by virtue of the Death of your Son, which your foresaw, so, through her intercession, we too, may be cleansed and admitted to your presence.

Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

All — Amen.

The Liturgy of the Word

First Reading [Gn 3:9-15, 20] (Sit)

By succumbing to the serpent’s temptation, which symbolizes evil, Adam and Eve bring their descendants out of God’s grace. But the Lord does not abandon humankind: a new Eve will bring forth an offspring who will overcome evil.

A reading from the Book of Genesis

AFTER THE MAN, ADAM, had eaten of the tree, the LORD called to the man and asked him, “Where are you?” He answered, “I heard you in the garden; but I was afraid, because I was naked, so I hid myself.” Then he asked, “Who told you that you were naked? You have eaten, then, from the tree of which I had forbidden you to eat!” The man replied, “The woman whom you put here with me—she gave me fruit from the tree, and so I ate it.” The Lord God then asked the woman, “Why did you do such a thing?” The woman answered, “The serpent tricked me into it, so I ate it.”

Then the Lord God said to the serpent: “Because you have done this, you shall be cursed above all the animals and from all the wild creatures; on your belly shall you crawl, and dirt shall you eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike you at your head, while you strike at his heel.”

The man called his wife Eve, because she became the mother of all the living.

— The word of the Lord.

All — Thanks be to God.

Respensorial Psalm (Ps 98) R — Sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous deeds.

1. Sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done wondrous deeds;/ his right hand has won victory for him,/ his holy arm. (R)

2. The Lord has made his salvation known:/ in the sight of the nations he has revealed his justice./ He has remembered his kindness and his faithfulness/ toward the house of Israel. (R)

3. All the ends of the earth have seen/ the salvation by our God./ Sing joyfully to the Lord, all you lands;/ break into song; sing praise. (R)

Second Reading (Eph 1:3-6, 11-12)

Paul speaks of how God chose his holy ones in Christ and
describes how God prepared Mary for her role as mother of the Savior.

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Ephesians

BROTHERS AND SISTERS: Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavens, as he chose us in him, before the foundation of the world, to be holy and without blemish before him. In love he destined us for adoption to himself through Jesus Christ, in accord with the favor of his will, for the praise of the glory of his grace that he granted us in the beloved.

In him we were also chosen, destined in accord with the purpose of the One who accomplishes all things according to the intention of his will, so that we might exist for the praise of his glory, we who first hoped in Christ.

— The word of the Lord.
All — Thanks be to God.

Alleluia [cf. Lk 1:28] (Stand)

All — Alleluia, alleluia. Hail, Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel (Lk 1:26-38)

P — A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke
All — Glory to you, O Lord.

THE ANGEL Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin’s name was Mary. And coming to her, he said, “Hail, full of grace! The Lord is with you.” But she was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. Then the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his Kingdom there will be no end.” But Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?” And the angel said to her in reply, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. And behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren; for nothing will be impossible for God.” Mary said, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.” Then the angel departed from her.

— The Gospel of the Lord.
All — Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Homily (Sit)

Profession of Faith (Stand)

All — I believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible.

I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all ages. God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father; through him all things were made. For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven,

(At the words that follow, up to and including and became man, all bow)

and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary and became man.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate, he suffered death and was buried, and rose again on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead and his kingdom will have no end.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets.

I believe in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins and I look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.

The word of the Lord.
All — Thanks be to God.

Prayer of the Faithful

P — As we celebrate the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, let us ask her to intercede for us to our almighty Father, the Creator of the world. With humility and trust, we ask:

R — Through the intercession of the Blessed Mary, Lord, hear our prayer.

C — May the Church, as it commemorates the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, learn to imitate her heart so that it may go forward in hope, relying on the help of Christ. We pray: (R)

C — May government and civil leaders never grow weary of invoking the Blessed Mother and always find refuge in her. We pray: (R)

C — May all who are sick, handicapped, depressed, abandoned, and suffering because of natural and man-made calamities feel Mary’s motherly love through the communities who care for them. We pray: (R)

C — May our Christian communities be centers of joy and mutual support and be protectors of life from conception to old age. We pray: (R)

P — Listen to us, O Loving Father, as we rejoice in the privilege of Mary’s Immaculate Conception. May we who desire to be cleansed of all sin come to you through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

All — Amen.
Acclamation (Stand)
All — When we eat this Bread and drink this Cup, we proclaim your Death, O Lord, until you come again.

THE COMMUNION RITE

The Lord’s Prayer
All — Our Father...
P — Deliver us...
All — For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever.

Invitation to Peace

Invitation to Communion (Kneel)
P — Behold the Lamb of God, behold him who takes away the sins of the world. Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb.
All — Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed.

Communion Antiphon
Glorious things are spoken of you, O Mary, for from you arose the sun of justice, Christ our God.

Prayer after Communion (Stand)
P — Let us pray. (Pause)
May the Sacrament we have received, O Lord our God, heal us in the wounds of that fault from which in a singular way you preserved Blessed Mary in her Immaculate Conception. Through Christ our Lord.
All — Amen.

An Act of Consecration of Thanksgiving and Petition for the Faithful and the People of the Philippines (Optional)
O Most Blessed Virgin Mary, you who were preserved from the stain of original sin, most loving and powerful Patron of the Philippines, to you also be endless praise, everlasting veneration, and thanksgiving in Christ Jesus. O Immaculate Mother, our most kind Mother, our most sweet and august Queen, with grateful hearts we praise your mercy and fly to your protection. O Blessed Lady, you who captivate the hearts of men, you who

captivated our hearts; you have captivated the hearts of our people also. You have established, fostered, and strengthened the foundations of the faith in our beloved land by your good patronage as manifested in so many visible proofs of your maternal love. O Lady, you are our Mother, who crushed the head of the serpent, deliver our people from the poisoned arrows of evil men and heretics. You, who nourished and educated our people in the faith of your most Beloved Son, be also our guardian, our defender, and our safeguard. We are yours; we wish to be yours, show yourself a Mother and Patron to us, guard us and save us through your most powerful intercession. Amen.

THE CONCLUDING RITES

P — The Lord be with you.
All — And with your spirit.

Solemn Blessing
P — Bow down for the blessing. (Pause)
May God, who through the childbearing of the Blessed Virgin Mary willed in his great kindness to redeem the human race, be pleased to enrich you with his blessing.
All — Amen.

P — May you know always and everywhere the protection of her, through whom you have been found worthy to receive the author of life.
All — Amen.

P — May you, who have devoutly gathered on this day, carry away with you gifts of spiritual joys and heavenly rewards.
All — Amen.

P — And may the blessing of almighty God, the Father, and the Son, (†) and the Holy Spirit, come down on you and remain with you forever.
All — Amen.

Dismissal
P — Go in peace.
All — Thanks be to God.