

"Mary is all beautiful, younger than sin"

Angelus address of Pope Francis on December 8, feast of the Immaculate Conception.
"Sin ages us, because it makes the heart sclerotic, it makes it inert. But she who is full of grace is empty of sin."

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Dear brothers and sisters, good morning, and happy feast day!

Today we contemplate the beauty of Mary Immaculate. The Gospel, which narrates the episode of the Annunciation, helps us to understand what we celebrate, above all through the greeting of the angel. He addresses Mary with a word not easy to translate, which means “filled with grace,” “created by grace,” “full of grace” (*Lk 1: 28*). Before calling her Mary, he calls her *full of grace*, and thus reveals the new name that God has given her and that suits her more than the name given to her by her parents. We also call her thus, in every *Hail Mary*.

What does “full of grace” mean? That Mary is full of the presence of God. And if she is entirely inhabited by God, there is no place in her for sin. It is an extraordinary thing, because everything in the world, unfortunately, is contaminated by evil. Every one of us, looking within, sees dark sides. Even the greatest

saints were sinners and all the realities, even the most beautiful, are affected by evil: all except Mary. She is the only “green oasis” of humanity, the only uncontaminated one, created immaculate so as to fully welcome, with her “yes”, God Who came into the world and thus began a new history.

Every time we acknowledge that she is full of grace, we pay her the greatest compliment, the same one God made to her. A pleasant compliment to pay to a women is to say to her, politely, that she appears youthful. When we say to Mary she is *full of grace*, in a certain sense we also tell her this, at the highest level. In fact, we always recognize her as young, because she never aged through sin. There is only one thing that really does make us grow old and age inwardly: not age, but sin. Sin ages us, because it *makes the heart sclerotic*. It closes it, makes it

inert, it makes it fade. But she who is *full of grace* is empty of sin. And so she is always youthful, she is “younger than sin,” she is “the youngest of humankind” (G. Bernanos, *Diary of a Country Priest*, II, 1988, p.195).

Today the Church congratulates Mary by calling her “all beautiful,” *tota pulchra*. As her youth does not reside in her age, so her beauty does not consist in exteriority. Mary, as the Gospel of today shows, does not excel in visibility: from a simple family, she lived humbly in Nazareth, an almost unknown village. And she was not famous: even when the angel visited her, no one knew, and there was no reporter there that day. Our Lady did not even have a comfortable life, but knew worries and fears: she was “greatly troubled” (verse 29), says the Gospel, and when the angel “departed from

her" (v.38), so her problems increased.

However, she who was *full of grace* lived a beautiful life. What was her secret? We can perceive it by looking again at the scene of the Annunciation. In many paintings, Mary is depicted sitting in front of the angel with a small book in her hand. This book is the Scripture. Thus Mary used to listen to God and speak with Him. The Word of God was her secret: close to her heart, it then took flesh in her womb. Remaining with God, in dialogue with him in every circumstance, Mary made her life beautiful. It is not appearance, not what passes, but rather the heart focused on God that makes life beautiful. Today we look with joy at she who is *full of grace*. Let us ask her to help us stay youthful, saying "no" to sin, and to live a beautiful life, saying "yes" to God.

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