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“Nothing is impossible for God” (Luke 1:37).

Gen 3:9-15, 20; Eph 1:3-6, 11-12; Luke 1:26-38

One way to approach the major feast days for Mary in the liturgical calendar is to think of them as our feasts. What happens to Mary is a preview of what is meant to happen to us. Mary is called the model disciple because her relationship to Jesus offers us the pattern of our own growth as Christians.

Theological doctrines tend to distance Mary from us. Today’s feast of the Immaculate Conception can only mean that she was fully human in a way unfiltered by the distortions of sin that accommodate us to the ways of the world. Her keen awareness of injustice and her sensitivity to the suffering of others surely heightened her sense of the holiness of God ever-present in her thoughts and feelings. Her immersion in ordinary life must have revealed at every turn the grace in all things. What better preparation for her role to help Jesus become a human being?

We catch glimpses of Mary in her son. Her pondering of life’s mysteries shows up in his parables of the hidden meaning of daily realities. His joy in children, in the dignity of service and work, his love of the Scriptures, which came true in his “yes” to them, these were lessons from his mother. Jesus’ love for the poor, the outcast, for those estranged within families, for forgiveness and hospitality at table where all were welcome, these were all witnessed in Mary of Nazareth. She prepared him for suffering and the supreme value of love to change people’s hearts and overcome

evil.

We walk with Jesus more easily because of Mary. For every doctrine that explains salvation, there are also the prayers of those fingering their rosaries into the night who find God in their joys, sorrows and triumphs by whispering Mary's name over and over again.

Mary models our "yes" to the Word, letting God into our lives, showing us how to carry Jesus to term and give birth to him in the world. Mary helps us share our faith in our friendships as she shared her joy with Elizabeth, two pregnant women at the edge of the world who changed history. Mary teaches us in her Magnificat to be indignant at life's injustice while never losing hope in God's love for its victims and promise to make things right. Mary in the temple and at the cross shows us how even devastating loss and suffering can be redemptive when united to the death and resurrection of Jesus.

The immaculate Conception invites us to celebrate that, in spite our struggles and sins, from the beginning of our existence God placed within us the dream of innocence and a longing for eternity that is the divine spark in our human nature. What was complete in Mary is promised in us. To become fully human is the goal of our discipleship and the destination of our human sojourn.

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