

## Day 9 - Who are you, O Immaculate Conception? (Part One)

Yesterday, when I mentioned St. Maximilian's arrest by the Gestapo, I left out a remarkable detail that will be important for today's reflection: Two hours before his arrest, the future saint penned the single most important theological reflection of his life. It was nothing less than the answer that had eluded him for so many years, the answer to the question he had pondered over and over from the earliest days of his religious life: "Who are you, O Immaculate Conception?" In today's reflection, we'll begin to unpack this remarkable document, but before we do, let's pause and say a silent prayer to the Immaculata, asking for the grace to receive Kolbe's wisdom.

The document begins as follows:

IMMACULATE CONCEPTION. These words fell from the lips of the Immaculata herself. Hence, they must tell us in the most precise and essential manner who she really is. ...

Who then are you, O Immaculate Conception?

Good question, but still no answer. Later in the document, Kolbe points out a simple but key point: At the apparitions in Lourdes, Mary didn't say to St. Bernadette "I was immaculately conceived" but rather "I am the Immaculate Conception." This seems to be a problem. After all, Mary was immaculately conceived. In other words, through a special grace from God, she was conceived in the womb of her mother, St. Anne, without any stain of original sin by the foreseen merits of her Son. So why does she speak so strangely? Why does she make the grace she received at her conception her very name? Doesn't this almost seem as if she were making herself divine? Clearly, Mary is not God. Kolbe wrestled with this apparent "divinity problem" for decades, and it led to the following solution.

The Immaculate Conception is divine. But the one I'm talking about isn't Mary. It's the Holy Spirit. In other words, Kolbe believed there are two "Immaculate Conceptions": Mary and the Holy Spirit. Mary is the created Immaculate Conception and the Holy Spirit is the uncreated Immaculate Conception. In other words, before there was the created Immaculate Conception (Mary), for all eternity there is the uncreated Immaculate Conception, the One who for all eternity "springs" from God the Father and God the Son as an uncreated conception of Love and who is the "prototype of all the conceptions that multiply life throughout the whole universe." So, "the Father begets; the Son is begotten; the Spirit is the 'conception' that springs from their love."

Now, the Holy Spirit is a "conception" in the sense of being the Life and Love that springs from the love of the Father and the Son — in some analogous way, there's the conception of children who "spring" from the love of husband and wife. The Holy Spirit is an "immaculate" conception because, being God, he is obviously without sin. And finally, the Holy Spirit is an "eternal, uncreated" conception because, again, he is God.

Okay, so this covers Kolbe's teaching that the Holy Spirit is the Immaculate Conception, but why does Mary call herself by the same name? We'll leave this question for tomorrow.

Today's Prayer:

Come, Holy Spirit, living in Mary. Unveil for me the meaning of the Immaculate Conception.