

Ceasefire

In 1982, war had broken out in West Beirut. The constant bombing and casualties caused the nurses at an orphanage there to abandon those 100 children to their own demise. Yet Mother Teresa had other plans. Despite the efforts of the US Ambassador to dissuade her, she wanted to walk into that war zone to rescue those children.

'We must go and take the children one by one...All for Jesus.'

'Do you hear the bombs?'

'Yes I hear them'

'It is absolutely impossible to cross at the moment; we must obtain a cease-fire!'

'Ah, but I asked Our Lady in prayer. I asked for a cease-fire for tomorrow, the eve of her feast day'

'Mother...I believe in the power of prayer...I am a man of faith. But, you see, you're asking Our Lady to deal with Prime Minister Begin, and do not you think that the time limit you gave him is a little short?'

'Ah! Not at all Mister Habib! I'm sure we'll have a cease-fire tomorrow.'

'If we get a cease-fire, I personally will ensure that arrangements are made for you to go to West Beirut tomorrow'

On the next day, August 14 1982, the eve before the Feast of Mary, total silence enveloped the city.

Indeed, Mother Teresa is a woman of faith, but she could have such great faith and confidence because she entrusted herself to a woman who is truly powerful, is truly FULL of GRACE. This is the mystery of the Immaculate Conception of Mary that we ponder today.

But this is not something Catholics just recently created; it goes back to the early Church and the ancient interpretations of scripture which we hear about today.

God chose to bless Mary 'in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavens as he chose [her] in him before the foundation of the world to be holy and without stain (immaculati) before him'. It is from this text that we received the name of our Solemnity today: not stained=immaculati. The Immaculate Conception i.e., Mary was conceived without the stain of original sin.

This abundant grace was given to Mary because of her role as the Mother of God and because of what was foretold about her. In the book of Genesis, we hear about the prophecy of the serpent and the woman where God says:

'I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers.'

So the Fathers of the Church saw the fulfillment of this passage in Jesus and particularly in Mary. To be at enmity with the serpent is to be against, to be an enemy of the serpent; to be at enmity one cannot be in a state of any sin, personal sin or original sin. When we sin, we are no longer at enmity with Satan but rather we have entered into an alliance with him. Speaking of Jesus and Mary St. Ephrem writes:

"[Jesus], thou alone and thy Mother are in all things fair, there is no flaw in thee and **no stain** in thy Mother." Ephraem, *Nisibene Hymns* 27:8 (A.D. 370).

St. Ephrem and the Fathers of the Church concluded that Mary was conceived without original sin since she was always at enmity with the ancient serpent, she was always the one who is 'full of grace' as the angel Gabriel announced and that is why she is truly a powerful intercessor.

While we might not rely on her intercession to ask for a ceasefire, we do consecrate ourselves to her in order to make a perfect gift of ourselves to Jesus. Sometimes that feels more difficult than a ceasefire because we do not know how to give ourselves to Jesus and sin prevents us from doing this as well.

If it was not for Mary I would not be here right now. 10 years ago this day I had made my consecration to Mary, I had desired to offer my life completely, I had desired to be a priest. But unlike her I was not at enmity with sin, unlike her I said let it be done unto me according to my will and I was afraid of the priesthood. Yet she took that imperfect, broken gift of myself, she took it under her glorious mantle, nurtured it with her love and now I stand before you as a transitional deacon waiting for the priesthood not because of my merits but because of hers.

Therefore, dear Mother your children stand here before you pleading from you not to give a ceasefire of bombs, but to accomplish a permanent ceasefire of sin in our life. You whose immaculate heart is without the stain of sin, lend us your heart that we too may be truly at enmity with sin. Keep us always in your most Immaculate Heart that we may please Jesus in you, with you and through you as Mother Teresa teaches us. We give ourselves to Jesus through you this day because you know how to take our weak and broken hearts and make of them a pleasing offering, a fragrant offering before the Lord of heaven and earth. We have total confidence in you that we will receive the ceasefire of sin in our hearts and one day approach those pearly gates without the stain of sin because as St. Maximillian Kolbe wrote of you:

'Our dear little, little mother, the Immaculate Mary, can do anything for us. We are her children. Turn to her. She will overcome everything.'