

“God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world.”

St. Paul is telling us in his letter to the Ephesians that the initiative or starting point for faith – is God’s! God chooses us!

And I think we all need to be reminded of this truth. Because we may tell ourselves that the initiative for our faith is from ourselves – not from God.

St. Paul knew otherwise – and so did Mary.

How unlikely that God chose Paul! Recall the account of his conversion:

Paul, as a leading Pharisee, was on his way to Damascus with the intention of persecuting the followers of Jesus – and to bring them back to Jerusalem in chains.

Suddenly, while on the road – Jesus appears to him and confronts him: “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?”

Clearly the initiative from Paul’s conversion came from Jesus and not from Paul! And so Paul reminds the Ephesians that like him – they did not choose God – but God chose them! Paul could not be more clear:

“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 foundations of the world.” And Paul reminds the Ephesians that it is only because of their communion with the Lord Jesus Christ – that they have been chosen: “In him we were 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.”

Yes, how unlikely it was for God to choose Paul. But God did choose him – and Paul responded – fully. And how unlikely that God chose Mary!

From all the eons of the world's existence – and from all the women of the human race – God chose Mary!

God chose an obscure woman, from an obscure country and an obscure village – to become God's earthly mother. God chose Mary!

And God encountered Mary just as unexpectedly as God encountered Paul. Startled like Paul, Mary heard God's voice through the angel, Gabriel: "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you."

Mary was frightened so the angel reassured 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."

Mary was troubled, but she responded with trust: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to be according to your word."

How unlikely that God chose Mary! Yes, God did choose her and Mary responded – fully.

And how unlikely that God chooses us – and yet he does.

The most precious gift God gives us is the gift of faith. On this feast of the Immaculate Conception, we look to Mary. Yes, we look to Mary especially in our suffering and doubt: Mary is our model, our intercessor, our mother! So we pray for our world, and we pray also for ourselves that we may actually experience the depth of God's indwelling in us so like Mary, we may be transformed by God's presence.

"Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now" --- so that we may imitate you in responding ever more fully to God's call.