

Tuesday of the Second Week of Advent, The Feast of the Immaculate Conception

So, my concern is where does this come from, this “doctrine” of the sinlessness of Mary from the moment of her conception.

There is no biographical data on Mary apart from the Gospels and they are not consistent, and they provide no details on the parents of Mary. Luke gives us select pieces of detail important to his version of the story but nothing about her parents, her home life, her sinlessness, nothing of that kind of data, neither do any of the other Gospels.

In Catholic piety from very early in the tradition there was the notions that Mary’s body did not decay,, no historical records, none for Jesus, either, Mary in early Christian art, apparently a reflection of early Christian belief, went to sleep and was assumed body and soul into “heaven,” a belief called the “dormition of Mary.”

Since death is the wage of sin, death being a punishment for our sins, actually not ours but Adam and Eve’s, it could be a logical assumption that Mary since her body did not “undergo corruption” was sinless from her conception as later doctrine, mostly based on Augustine, although not necessarily what Augustine meant, later doctrine emphasized and taught that “original sin” was transmitted from generation to generation through sexual intercourse and conception was the exact moment, although, there has been theological dispute as to when the “soul” was infused into the body by the Creator and sin is a spiritual condition.

But, again, why did our ancestors want Mary to be different from us?

What was it about us that was so unwanted that Mary had to be different or what was it about Mary that our ancestors needed for her to be different?

Mary, the biblical character has leant herself to all manner of inhabitations lending that biblical character to a kind of changeling that allowed Mary to be sort of recreated as a national or cultural icon such as Our Lady of Guadalupe or Our Lady of Czestochowa or Our Lady of Lourdes or Our Lady of Mount Carmel and so on with dozens of names that have been or are applied, apparently to that same character that we meet in the New Testament that Jesus only refers to as “mother” and others in the biblical account refer to as the “mother of Jesus” or The Mother of God.

I do not want to simply confuse the issue but I think that we need some preciseness in our theology and our theological thinking as we try to make our way to the truth of our faith and Mary has become a kind of all purpose portable character that deviates far from the actual place that Mary or the mother of Jesus plays in the Sacred Scriptures.

She has been made, for instance, a commanding officer in many national armies throughout European history and I wonder how that can be traced to the virgin girl in Nazareth.

The question remains in my mind, though, why did our ancestors “need” a sinless virgin as the mother of Our Lord? I do not dispute that the Church teaches both Mary’s sinlessness and her perpetual virginity, but why and where does that come from?

It is not explicit in Scripture and many, many non-Catholic Christians find that to be problematic. We Catholics say it is part of the Tradition and we look to both Scripture and the Tradition to

inform our faith and I just wonder what “need” it fulfilled, what role it played in the proclamation of the Good News.