

My question is this. *Since Mary was “protected from sin” by her Immaculate conception, she remained sinless. But it had never occurred to me, before I heard your homily, that Adam and Eve were created without original sin too. OHMYGOSH!! Of course they were! Was Mary just so much a better person, or how did she withstand temptation in her long life? Her will was free too... right?*

*I guess I always figured avoiding sin was easier for Mary than the rest of us, and I easily identified with Adam and Eve because they seemed more human. But I don't know what to make of the fact that they were actually immaculately conceived (sort of) too. Monica B*

Answer: Let's begin with your last sentence first. Adam and Eve were *created, not conceived*, in perfect innocence, with no stain of sin which could only come from their free wills. Moreover they were endowed with sanctifying grace from the beginning and were given all the necessary actual graces to remain free from sin. Their choice to disobey God was caused purely by their own free wills and not by any lack of God's grace. As a result of the original sin, all their children, the whole human race, shared in the consequences of that sin. The most important consequence was the loss of sanctifying grace, a share in God's supernatural life which makes one a child of God and capable of sharing God's eternal life in heaven. Had they not sinned, we all would have inherited, by God's dispensation, their gift of sanctifying grace along with an untarnished human nature. But when they lost their gift, it could not be handed down with the human nature we receive ultimately from them. Interestingly, when sanctifying grace would later be handed down, it would come through another's humanity, the humanity of Christ by means of a material sign - baptism.

Likewise, as a result of their original sin, we inherited a fallen nature from them, no longer innocent, since we inherited Original Sin, not as a personal sin, but as a sin of our nature, a nature lacking Sanctifying Grace. Original Sin also causes our humanity to have a tendency to sin, which is the immediate result of the disorder introduced between body and soul by Original Sin. That same disorder is what causes the problems we have with intelligence (ignorance) and free will. We find these two human powers often overwhelmed by the lower powers, our appetites. Finally, this same disorder in our human nature is what causes both suffering and death. Adam and Eve were not subject to either of these evils by a special dispensation of God's grace. But that gift too was lost along with sanctifying grace.

Mary, on the other hand, was truly *conceived* without original sin, just as her divine son would be in her. Her immaculate conception was itself a grace that came from God as the first fruits of the redemptive work of her son. In effect, God produced the effect - her redemption in the act of her conception when God preserved her soul from inheriting Original Sin from her parents - before the cause (Christ's death and resurrection) in time. By her immaculate conception she was preserved only from *sin*, for we know she did inherit the physical effects of original sin since she would suffer and die. Christ could suffer and die only because he willed it; but Mary seems to have inherited certain effects of original sin, which are not in any way sins, in terms of suffering, death, along with the effects of ignorance and the necessity of perfecting her free will.

God certainly gave Mary special graces far in excess of any other creature, beginning with her immaculate conception and of course her divine maternity. In addition, God gave her tremendous actual graces to make it possible for her to remain free from all sin. Nonetheless, these graces did not take away her freedom; she had to exercise their freedom, like us, to accept those graces. In effect, the graces together with her free choices perfected her freedom. How God's grace work's with our free will to perfect us is a true mystery of faith.

Finally, it's understandable in one way that we can identify more with Adam and Eve since we make bad choices by rejecting God's grace. But we should also identify with Mary, because she is living proof that the grace of her son is even more powerful than the original grace given to Adam and Eve, and just as it was capable of preventing Mary from contracting Original Sin and enabled her to remain free from sin all her life, so it can help us, weak as we are, to

overcome sin, beginning first with all mortal sin and gradually most of our venial sins, if only we cooperate like she did. Being our mother, she intercedes for all the help we need to conquer sin.