Today we celebrate the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, and thus our gaze is drawn to the beauty of the Mother of Jesus, our Mother!

Yesterday in St. Peters Square Pope Francis said: “With great joy the Church contemplates her “full of grace” (Lk 1:28), and starting with these words we salute her together: “Full of grace!” Let us say it three times: “Full of grace!”. Everyone: Full of grace! Full of grace! Full of grace! This is how God saw her from the first moment of his loving design. He saw her as beautiful, full of grace. Our Mother is beautiful!

Mary sustains our journey toward Christmas, for she teaches us how to live this Advent Season in expectation of the Lord. For this time of Advent is a time of waiting for the Lord, who will visit us all on the feast, but also, each one, in our own hearts. The Lord is coming! Let us wait for him!
The Gospel of St Luke presents us with Mary, a girl from Nazareth, a small town in Galilee, in the outskirts of the Roman Empire and on the outskirts of Israel as well. A village. Yet the Lord’s gaze rested on her, on this little girl from that distant village, on the one he had chosen to be the mother of his Son. In view of this motherhood, Mary was preserved from original sin, from that fracture in communion with God, with others and with creation, which deeply wounds every human being. But this fracture was healed in advance in the Mother of the One who came to free us from the slavery of sin.

Our Lady never distanced herself from that love: throughout her life her whole being is a “yes” to that love, it is the “yes” to God. But that didn’t make life easy for her! When the Angel calls her “full of grace” (Lk 1:28), she is “greatly troubled” for in her humility she feels she is nothing before God. The Angel consoles her: “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name
Jesus” (v. 30,31). This announcement troubles her even more because she was not yet married to Joseph; but the Angel adds: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you… therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God” (v. 35). Mary listens, interiorly obeys and responds: “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word” (v.38).

The mystery of this girl from Nazareth, who is in the heart of God, is not estranged from us. She is not there and we over here. No, we are connected. Indeed, God rests his loving gaze on every man and every woman! His gaze of love is on every one of us. The Apostle Paul states that God “chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him” (Eph 1:4). We too, from all time, were chosen by God to live a holy life, free of sin. It is a plan of love that God renews every time we come to him, especially through the Sacraments.

On this Solemnity, then, by contemplating our beautiful Immaculate Mother, let us also recognize our truest destiny, our deepest
vocation: to be loved, to be transformed by love, to be transformed by the beauty of God. Let us look to her, our Mother, and allow her to look upon us, for she is our mother and she loves us so much; let us allow ourselves to be watched over by her so that we may learn how to be more humble, and also more courageous in following the Word of God; to welcome the tender embrace of her Son Jesus, an embrace that gives us life, hope and peace.