Today’s Feast is so special and important. It celebrates a moment in time that changed the world, and yet it was unnoticed---unknown---to anyone but God. Mary is the only human being in the history of the world to “be conceived without Original Sin”. In other words, our Faith tells us that every human being, including each of us, is conceived, we inherit what we know as the Original Sin.

We heard about that in today’s First Reading from the Book of Genesis when our first parents, Adam and Eve, whom God created and entrusted all His creation to, and who lived in the Garden of Eden in Paradise, there was one exception; they were told not to eat the fruit of the one Tree in the center of the Garden. We know what happened; they couldn’t help but go against God’s command---they ate the Fruit, and thereby, they committed the first, the Original, Sin. And the impact of Adam and Eve’s Original Sin is that all human beings are born with a natural inclination toward sin. Because God also made us with the gift of free will, we can freely choose to follow God, or not. On the day of our Baptism, that Original Sin was washed away, and brought us into a life of Grace. From that point on, we have God’s Grace to help us.

But Mary was the one and only human person ever to be conceived without Original Sin, and it’s effects.

God had a Plan to reconcile the world back to us, and that Plan involved sending His Son into our world, to be born like all of us are, except that it would be by the power of the Holy Spirit and not by the power of another human being; that His Son would grow up, and through His public ministry of preaching, teaching, and proclaiming the Kingdom of God, He would begin to bring people back to God. But for the Plan to ultimately work, Jesus would have to suffer, die and rise again on Easter. And not only that, His Son’s human Mother would need to be completely free of sin, including Original Sin. That’s why we celebrate Mary’s Immaculate Conception.

We all have Plans, right? Every morning when we get up, we have a plan for our day. Right now you might be focused on your Plan for Christmas---only 17 days and counting!!! Maybe you’re making your lists, checking them twice, and
trying to not be naught, but nice. But in a more long-range, we all have a “Life Plan” too—we are all thinking about what we might want to do, and be, when we grow up.

Mary had a Plan too. Even at her very young age, she had determined that God was calling her to a life of virginity. But, all of a sudden, she was faced with a quandry as we heard in today’s Gospel when the Archangel Gabriel greeted her and told her that God wanted her to become the mother of His Son. That’s why she asked: “How can this be?”; she had decided to be a virgin, not to get married and have a family.

This all helps us to remember that Mary’s greatness is two-fold: first, that she was kept sinless from the moment of her conception; but also secondly that she chose to remain sinless---to always align the plans for her life to be consistent with and aligned to God’s Plan. That’s what she was saying when she responded: “Behold, I am the maidservant of the Lord; let it be done to me as You say.”

God has a Plan for each of us too. And He tells us also: “Do not be afraid!” Trust that God’s plans for us are always for our good.

I am so pleased to know that your School Year has been focusing a lot of your attention on the Holy Spirit during this “Jubilee Year of the Holy Spirit”. I urge you all to Pray, Listen, use the Gifts of the Holy Spirit, and in particular God’s Grace to help you to be open and willing to align your plan with God’s Plan for you.

Here in this wonderful St. Augustine Cathedral Catholic School, we’re all a part of God’s Plan; we contribute in both positive and negative ways to each other’s plans. Our Teachers have major influences on our Students; we are so grateful to our Teachers for the wonderful ways that they not only teach so effectively, but also are such wonderful models of Christian charity to all they encounter. Of course, our students certainly have an influence on the Teachers. And Students definitely influence one another. My hope and prayer is that we will choose to have only positive influences on one another.

As St. Paul told us in today’s Second Reading in his Letter to the Ephesians, God has had a plan for us from the very beginning of the world. Let us make sure that we choose to say Yes to God, in all the ways that we live our lives; let us always look to our Blessed Mother as our Model as we say with her: “I am the servant of the Lord....let it be done to me as You say.” God bless you!