

Back in the 1980s, there was a new board game that it seemed everyone was playing. I'm sure you know it - it was called Trivial Pursuit. There were six categories, and you moved your playing piece around a wheel shaped board ... looking to collect all six pie pieces and then head for the center of the board to answer a question from whatever was the hardest category.

One of the questions, in I'm not sure which category, was "Who does the Immaculate Conception refer to in Catholic theology?" One night, while playing with a mixed group, a friend who was non-Catholic insisted that it was Jesus. Of course all Catholics know that the Immaculate Conception is about Mary. Needless to say, a heated argument ensued; and that rule-of-thumb that applies to not discussing religion or politics in polite company was violated many times.

And indeed, the Immaculate Conception is about Our Lady. On this day in 1854, Blessed Pope Pius IX declared that "at the first instant of her conception, by a singular privilege and grace of the Omnipotent God, in virtue of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Savior of mankind, [Mary] was preserved immaculate from all stain of original sin".

Wouldn't that be nice? Who among us wouldn't desire to be granted such a privilege by Almighty God through the merits of Our Savior Jesus Christ? We are all too aware of our sinfulness - some choose to hide behind it, others flaunt it, and perhaps the healthiest response is to trust in God's mercy; knowing that it's not a matter of how often or how hard one falls, but rather that through God's grace we are able to get back up and carry on with life.

Yet, we have all been given "a singular privilege and grace of Omnipotent God, in virtue of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Savior of mankind" through our Baptism which saves us from original sin. Not, of course from the first instant of our conception - but for many of us it was less than a year after we were conceived.

The Sacraments are all *singular privileges and graces of Omnipotent God, given to us in virtue of the merits of Jesus Christ, our Savior*. Baptism saves us from original sin; Reconciliation saves us from personal sin; and the Eucharist strengthens us against temptation and the effects of sin.

Perhaps we've never thought about it that way.

Let us ask Our Lady, the Immaculate Conception, to intercede for us today that we might more fully engage the graces of our Baptism and recognizing the great privilege that we have been given, go forth as a light to the world of the redeeming power of Jesus Christ.