

**VOTIVE MASS OF OUR LADY OF LOURDES
CHAPEL OF SAINT PATRICK
SHRINE OF OUR LADY OF LOURDES
LOURDES, FRANCE
OCTOBER 19, 2006**

Gn 3:9-15, 20

Ps 98: 1, 2-3ab, 3cd-4

Lk 1:26-38

Praised be Jesus Christ, now and forever. Amen.

1. One of the striking aspects of the appearances of the Blessed Virgin Mary to Saint Bernadette is the repeated request of Bernadette to know the identity of our Blessed Mother, who replied with a silent smile until the Sixteenth Apparition, on the Feast of the Annunciation, March 25, 1858. During the Sixteenth Apparition, Bernadette, urged by her parish priest, asked the beautiful lady her name four times. Finally, after the fourth request, Our Blessed Mother replied: "I am the Immaculate Conception." After revealing her name, the Virgin Mary did not speak to Bernadette again. Her name summarized and completed all that she had spoken to Bernadette and had asked of her.

2. The response is also striking in that the Virgin Mary identifies herself with an event: her conception in the womb of Saint Ann without any stain of original sin. In fact, her parish priest had asked her the beautiful lady's name, in order to be confirmed in doing what our Blessed Mother asked of him through Bernadette: "Go ask the priests to have the people come here in procession and tell them to have a chapel built," (Patricia A. McEachern, *A Holy Life: St. Bernadette of Lourdes*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005, p. 210). When Bernadette gave our Blessed Mother's name, Father Marie-Dominique Peyramale, the pastor, responded that the Immaculate Conception is not a name.

3. The name, Immaculate Conception, in fact, does not denote only the event of Mary's sinless conception. It expresses her vocation and mission in life, the identity which God had given to her before her conception. Mary is the all-pure and all-generous virgin who received the Savior of the world in her womb, when He first came into the world. Her

womb, at the moment of her acceptance of the word spoken by the Archangel Gabriel, became the first tabernacle of God's dwelling with us in our human flesh. Mary's Immaculate Conception prepared her to receive God the Son, conceived in her womb by the Holy Spirit and born of her at Bethlehem. Her Immaculate Conception truly expresses her identity: the Virgin Mother of God. When the Archangel Gabriel greeted her at the Annunciation, he addressed her: "Hail, full of grace," (Gospel). Mary was indeed filled with grace because she was freed from the stain of original sin. She was full of grace in order to become the Mother of the source of all grace, our Lord Jesus Christ. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the grace of our salvation, in Mary, from the moment of her Immaculate Conception enabled Mary to respond to Gabriel's announcement: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your Word," (Gospel). The Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, is the woman about whom our Lord spoke at the first announcement of our salvation, after the sin of Adam and Eve. She is the woman who is at enmity with Satan, for she bears in her womb the Divine Offspring Who crushes the head of Satan (Reading I).

4. Mary's name, the Immaculate Conception, expresses her mission as Mother of God: to unite her Immaculate Heart to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, conceived by the Holy Spirit in her womb, under her Immaculate Heart. Because her heart was perfectly united to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, our Blessed Mother became His first and best disciple. She is our model in following our Lord Jesus Christ. As our dear mother, she teaches us to place our hearts in the pierced Heart of Jesus and to obtain there the grace of a pure heart, a heart all-generous in love of God and neighbor.
5. The Immaculate Conception is also our intercessor in striving for the union of our hearts with the glorious pierced Heart of Jesus. Because we are sinners and because we live in a world fallen from grace, it is not easy for us to give our hearts completely to our Lord Jesus. The Way of the Cross is our way, the way of prayer and penance to which Our Lord and His Blessed Mother urge us—is for us the only way to the lasting happiness which we all desire. Mary's Immaculate Heart was pierced by seven swords of sorrow; her Immaculate Heart was transfixed at the cruel Passion, Death and Burial of her Divine

Son, but her heart was filled with deepest peace and joy, for she saw, by the Way of the Cross the victory over the sin and death, which held man in slavery, the victory of eternal life by which man is made finally free.

6. In her first words to Bernadette, Our Lady of Lourdes asked her to visit her at the grotto for 15 days. She then said to her, “I do not promise to make you happy in this world, but in the other” (McEachon, p. 206). Our Blessed Mother makes us happy in the world to come by teaching us the courageous acceptance of suffering in this world, with our eyes clearly fixed on the victory over sin and everlasting death, the victory of life, which our Lord Jesus has given us already now. Her Immaculate Conception brings us happiness already in this life, but a happiness which will only know its fullness in the life to come. Her Immaculate Conception leads us to accept suffering and sorrow as the way of purifying our love, of inflaming our love to an ever greater generosity. Blessed by our Eucharistic Lord, in our procession here, His joy and peace reigns in our hearts.

7. Reflecting upon the responses of Mary to the announcement of the Archangel Gabriel, the response made possible by her Immaculate Conception, Father Bede Jarrett reflects on our life in Christ:

“May it be done unto me according to Thy Word.” That is her gift—not the taking away of trouble, but giving man the heart of courage to meet his trouble. She will teach us that, for she also is a child of Eve. She lived her years of banishment, yet she walked with courage. She lost no hope....If you are really devout to God’s Blessed Mother, this much can be promised you. You will have courage to the end; and that is the only fine thing man has—courage in all his adventures; courage in faith; courage in hope; courage in love. Courage, that within which gives us power to surmount anything and everything.... Having nothing, possessing all things—we that have God (Bede Jarrett, O.P., *Our Lady of*

Lourdes, Westminster, Maryland: The Newman Press, 1954, pp. 42-43).

8. We are about to witness the great fulfillment of Mary's Immaculate Conception, the end which our Lord had in view when He preserved her from all stain of sin from the moment of her conception. Her Divine Son, Whom she was prepared to receive in her womb from the moment of her conception, offers His life for us, crushing Satan's head, and winning for us the victory of life and freedom. May we receive Him into our souls, purified from our sin and inflamed with love of Him, so that we may have the courage, the courage of Mary, to bring Him to our world.

Heart of Jesus, burning furnace of charity, have mercy on us.

O Mary conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee.

Saint Bernadette Soubirous, pray for us.