

Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary
Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe, La Crosse
8 December 2016

Gn 3, 9-15. 20
Ps 98, 1. 2-3ab. 3cd-4
Eph 1, 3-6. 11-12
Lk 1, 26-38

HOMILY

Praised be Jesus Christ, now and forever. Amen.

Today, we celebrate the mystery of our salvation in Jesus Christ by recalling how God the Father prepared the Virgin Mary, from the moment of her conception, to be the worthy vessel in which His only-begotten Son would take our human nature. In accord with His all-loving plan to adopt us as His own dear children – in His only-begotten Son – , God, by a wondrous work of His grace, chose the Virgin Mary “before the foundation of the world,”¹ predestining her to be the mother of His Son at His Incarnation. Let us listen to the words of Saint Paul in the Letter to the Ephesians:

In love [the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ] destined us for adoption to himself through Jesus Christ, in accord with the favor of his will, for the praise of the glory of his grace that he granted to us in the beloved.²

God the Father granted to the Virgin Mary the grace of the victory over sin and everlasting death, at her conception, which the Son, Whom she was to conceive in her womb by the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit, would accomplish on our behalf by His Suffering and Dying on Calvary.

When our First Parents, by their sinful pride, had lost the life of grace for which God had created them, God necessarily expelled them from the Garden of Eden, the place of full communion with Him. In doing so, He spoke to the serpent, to Satan, announcing the first promise of man’s salvation:

I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike at your head, while you strike at his

¹ Eph 1, 4.

² Eph 1, 5.

heel.³

While God in His justice expelled Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden, in which they had enjoyed communion with Him, He, in His immeasurable and unceasing mercy, immediately announced the great work of their salvation and of the salvation of their offspring through His Son, born of a virgin.⁴

In order that the Virgin Mary might be prepared to accept her vocation and mission of Mother of God, Mother of the Redeemer, God the Father granted her a full share in the divine grace, in the victory over sin and eternal death, which only God the Son Incarnate could accomplish. The classical representation of Mary Immaculate shows her crushing the head of a serpent with her feet, reminding us of the fulfillment of the first promise of our salvation through her Divine Maternity. From her conception in the womb of her mother Ann, Mary was totally for Christ; there was no mark of sin in her. Throughout her life, she remained totally for Christ.

Rightly, then, at the Annunciation, at the conception of God the Son in her womb by the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit, the Archangel Gabriel addressed her with the words: “Hail, full of grace! The Lord is with you.”⁵ Because God had preserved her from all stain of original sin, Mary was indeed full of grace. God was dwelling within her through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The fullness of grace in Mary led her to total obedience in doing God’s will, even though it meant the mystical piercing of her Immaculate Heart at the foot of the Cross. She responded to the Archangel Gabriel’s announcement with complete trust and engagement: “Behold I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.”⁶ Mary trusted completely in the Word of God spoken to her by the Archangel Gabriel. At the Visitation, her cousin Elizabeth exclaimed: “And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.”⁷

Mary Immaculate is the image of the victory over sin in our lives by the working of God’s grace, the working of the Holy Spirit in our souls. Her sinlessness inspires us to call upon the grace of Christ given to us in Baptism and Confirmation, restored within us through the Sacrament of Penance, and nourished within us through the Holy Eucharist we celebrate. Mary Immaculate leads us to her Son with the instruction which she first gave to the wine

³ Gn 3, 15.

⁴ Cf. Is 7, 14; Rev 12, 4-5.

⁵ Lk 1, 28.

⁶ Lk 1, 38.

⁷ Lk 1, 45.

stewards at the Wedding Feast of Cana: “Do whatever he tells you.”⁸ Her obedience is our model of holiness of life through obedience to God’s Word.

At the same time, Mary Immaculate is ceaseless in her maternal prayers for us. She knows well the wiles of Satan by which our First Parents fell from grace; she knows the daily struggles, which are ours in following her Divine Son on the Way of the Cross, which leads to eternal salvation. Let us, therefore, turn to her daily and throughout the day, asking the help of her intercession.

The Blessed Virgin Mary, under her title of the Immaculate Conception, is the patroness of our beloved nation. Let us on her feast day, in a most special way, ask her prayers for our homeland in these tumultuous times in which human life, marriage and the family, and the free practice of religion are under a constant and fierce attack. The Holy Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary is a most powerful spiritual means for obtaining the many graces, which we so much need for the conversion of our personal lives to Christ and for the transformation of our culture, in accord with God’s plan for us and for our world. Let us storm heaven on behalf of our families and of our nation by praying the Holy Rosary.

Let us pray, too, for this place, holy to the memory of Our Lady of Guadalupe who, in December of 1531, appeared for four days on our continent, beginning on the feast of her Immaculate Conception. In her own words, she appeared to us and continues to be with us through the miraculous *tilma* of Saint Juan Diego, her messenger, in order to show us God’s all-merciful love and to help us to live the mystery of His mercy and love in our daily lives. At the present time, the Shrine is working to gather significant funds, in order to carry out more fully and perfectly the work of Our Lady of Guadalupe: the teaching and deepening of the Catholic faith through catechesis and through spiritual retreats. May God bless abundantly “Answering Mary’s Call,” the Shrine’s capital campaign for its greater financial stability and for the building of the Father John A. Hardon Marian Catechist Apostolate Center and Retreat House.

Today, we pray also for Relevant Radio, rightly called “Talk Radio for Catholic Life,” and its mission of assisting the Church in proclaiming, celebrating, and living the truths of the faith with new energy and new engagement. Relevant Radio helps us, the listeners, to give more effective witness to the faith by the manner of our daily life. From its inception, Relevant Radio has cultivated a strong bond with the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe here, seeing in the Virgin of Guadalupe both a peerless model of its mission and a most powerful

⁸ Jn 2, 5.

intercessor for the fulfillment of that mission. Christ alone brings hope to the world, and Relevant Radio brings Christ into our homes, and into our places of education, work and recreation. May God bless today's celebration of Relevant Radio. May He bless all of the works of Relevant Radio.

Let us now unite our poor and sinful hearts to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, lifting them up to the glorious pierced Heart of Jesus, always open to receive them. As Christ now makes sacramentally present His Sacrifice on Calvary to free us from sin, may our hearts rest in His Sacred Heart, so that we may more and more be freed from sin in our daily lives. In the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, we find the eternal salvation for which we constantly look and long. May Mary Immaculate lead us always to our home in the Heart of her Divine Son, Jesus.

*Heart of Jesus, formed by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary, have mercy on us.
O Mary, conceived without original sin, pray for us who have recourse to Thee.
Saint Juan Diego, pray for us.*

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Raymond Leo Cardinal BURKE