

“He Has Not Done Thus for Any Other Nation”

HOMILY – SOLEMNITY OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

Archdiocesan Celebration of the Cruzada Guadalupana

Cathedral of St. Mary of the Assumption

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Introduction

“Non fecit taliter omni nationi.” In this Latin phrase the Church has seen God working the wonders of His plan of salvation all throughout the history of His people. The sentence comes from Psalm 147: “He has not done thus for any other nation.”

God’s Marvelous Deeds Throughout Salvation History

Originally, of course, this was written with the ancient people of Israel in mind. This is the complete verse: “He has proclaimed his word to Jacob, his statutes and his ordinances to Israel. He has not done thus for any other nation; his ordinances he has not made known to them” (Ps 147:20). The Psalm speaks about the wonders that the Lord has worked to guide, protect and care for His people: above, by giving them the Law through Moses. This Law, the revelation of His love and truth and His very name, He revealed to Moses in the burning bush on Mount Sinai. This was a higher law, unlike that of any other nation in the world at that time. It was the sign of the Covenant which the Lord made with them. The people’s adherence to this Law would show to the rest of the world how wise and intelligent they were, and so point to the one who gave the Law: the Lord, the one, true God, to whom they belonged.

The Law, and indeed all of Israel’s aspirations, are fulfilled in God’s Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, born of the Blessed Virgin Mary. And so the Church sees in this Psalm a special application to the Mother of God’s Son, in a very personal way. Mary carried in her womb all of

the aspirations of Israel. And so, to be a worthy vessel through which His Son would take on human flesh and be born into this world, God, by a special privilege, kept her free from sin from the first moment of her existence; she was graced beforehand with the fruits of the sacrifice her divine Son was to make of himself on the Cross to win for us our salvation. The Preface for this Mass of the Immaculate Conception teaches us as much, as, in praying to God, the priest proclaims:

... you preserved the most Blessed Virgin Mary from all stain of original sin, so that in her, endowed with the rich fullness of your grace, you might prepare a worthy Mother for your Son and signify the beginning of the Church, his beautiful Bride without spot or wrinkle.

This prayer signals a truth of great importance: it was not just a personal privilege God granted to the Mother of His Son, but also the sign of a grace He would grant to the world through the new people His Son would acquire for Him: the Church. Mary is the image and model of the Church. As the Second Vatican Council teaches:

The Church indeed, contemplating [the Blessed Virgin Mary's] hidden sanctity, imitating her charity and faithfully fulfilling the Father's will, by receiving the word of God in faith becomes herself a mother. By her preaching she brings forth to a new and immortal life the [children] who are born to her in baptism, conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of God. She herself is a virgin, who keeps the faith given to her by her Spouse whole and entire. Imitating the mother of her Lord, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, she keeps with virginal purity an entire faith, a firm hope and a sincere charity.¹

¹ Dogmatic Constitution on the Church of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, *Lumen Gentium*, n. 64.

The Church, like Mary, is our Mother, and, like Mary, seeks to embrace all of God's children and bring them into the unity of the one family of faith that is the Church.

Mary our Mother: Evangelizer and Unifier

And so it is that this distinctive statement of God's wonders of salvation, "Non fecit taliter omni nationi," came to have a very particular application to our Lady in her appearance at Tepeyac. Indeed, never before or since has God worked such a wonder for any other nation.

It is recounted that in 1754 a Jesuit priest from Mexico brought a painted reproduction of the image of la Morenita to Rome and told the Pope, Benedict XIV, the history of the apparition and the great wonders that followed thereafter, which moved the Pope to fall on his knees and exclaimed this Latin phrase. The history of this wonder is well-known to us: during the first fifteen years or so of the Spanish conquest of Mexico the missionaries had very little success in converting the Mexican natives to the Catholic faith, but once our Lady appeared at Tepeyac Mexico became Catholic, to the point that within ten years nine million people were baptized. Why, though, did this image on a poor, simple piece of cloth have such a remarkable effect? It is because of what the native people understood when they saw this image.

The Aztecs saw a woman who was one of their own. She wore a cloak of turquoise, an honor reserved to Aztec gods and the Aztec royal family, and she is being carried, another sign of honor accorded to the ruling family of the Aztec empire. But she is more than a princess: the stars decorate her mantle; she is more prominent than the sun; and she stands on the crescent moon. Her head is bowed and her hands are folded in humble supplication – exalted though she is beyond all others, she worships one more powerful than herself. And she wears a dark band of maternity, indicating that she is carrying a child. Her brooch is a cross. This illustrious yet

humble woman is the Mother of God's Son, "the handmaid of the Lord" whose whole being proclaims the greatness of the one true God.

But the Spaniards, too, came to accept the appearance of this woman as the one they knew to be the Mother of the Son of the God they worshipped, because they saw in her an image of the Immaculate Conception. It was in 1854 that Pope Pius IX declared the doctrine of Mary's exemption from original sin to be part of the dogmatic faith of the Catholic Church, but this was a teaching that Spanish theologians had championed for centuries before. The Biblical imagery the theologians saw in support of this dogma was what we just heard proclaimed in our first reading for Mass today: the story in the Book of Genesis of the woman crushing the serpent's head – that is, after the fall of our first parents God promises that Eve's descendant will crush the Evil One so that he will not keep a hold on God's people. But they also saw her image in the last book of the Bible, the Book of Revelation, in the passage which is the reading used for Mass on the Feast Day of Our Lady of Guadalupe: the woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars, and with child about to give birth (Rev 12:1-2). So the Spaniards saw in this image the Lady they venerated as the Immaculate Conception. Indeed, the first Spanish account of the events at Tepeyac, written in 1648, explicitly associates Our Lady of Guadalupe with the biblical images that inspired the iconography of Mary as the Immaculate Conception.

We can, then, see how Our Lady of Guadalupe unites the Old World and the New. She who appears to the Aztecs as one of their own race, la Morenita, is also venerated by the Spanish as la Inmaculada, whose honor Spain had championed in theological debate and whose beauty her greatest artists had celebrated. She appeared there, at Tepeyac, with the mission to protect the people of the new world from both the bloody sacrifices of the Aztec priests and the bloody

rampage of the conquistadors. This voracious spilling of human blood was put to an end by the shedding of the blood of her divine Son, our eternal High Priest. By his one, perfect sacrifice on the Cross, the Son of the Lady the indigenous people saw as one of their own brought that true harmony to creation which they had vainly sought in their human sacrifices: with her foot resting on the crescent moon she crushes the serpent's head, thus clearly vanquishing their foremost deity, the feathered serpent "Quetzalcoatl," and so replacing their former religion with that of the Son of the one, true God. And to the Spaniards, this Mother served as a constant reminder of the inherent dignity of the people they so mistreated in light of her Son's discomfiting words, "As often as you did it to one of these least ones, you did it to me" (Mt 25:40).

A new Christian people is formed from the two, a mestizo people; a new Christian civilization is born from the union brought about by her who is venerated as la Morenita and la Inmaculada. How blessed is Mexico, for truly God has not done thus for any other nation! It was Pope Benedict XIV who first proclaimed, "Non fecit taliter omni nationi"; and it was a later Pope Benedict – Benedict XVI – who pointed out before his election to the Chair of Peter:

In Mexico, at first, absolutely nothing could be done about missionary work – until the occurrence of that phenomenon at Guadalupe, and then the Son was suddenly near, by way of his Mother ... and suddenly the Christian religion no longer wears the terrible face of the conqueror but the kindly face of the Mother."²

² Pope Emeritus Benedict and Peter Seewald, "God and the World: a Conversation with Peter Seewald." Quoted in <https://fatherjerabek.com/2013/06/28/non-fecit-taliter-omni-nationi/>.

Our Most Holy Mother

Today we celebrate both, together. It was eight years before Pope Pius IX's dogmatic proclamation that the bishops of the United States declared the Immaculate Conception the Patroness of our nation, and on Christmas Eve, 1854, the first Archbishop of San Francisco, the Spaniard Joseph Sadoc Alemany, dedicated our first Cathedral church to the glory of God in honor of St. Mary of the Immaculate Conception. We are now here in this magnificent Cathedral, celebrating this Solemnity of our Lady under her title, Immaculate Conception, by which she is the Patroness of the United States, as we honor her under the title, Our Lady of Guadalupe, by which she is the Patroness of Mexico and, more significantly, of all of the Americas. She is our Mother, who unites all of us as God's children into one family of faith that is the Church. It is her purity – she is without any stain of sin, she is all-beautiful – which accomplishes this unity of diverse peoples.

In this family of faith, what counts is not one's language, race, nationality or legal status. All these are welcome for those who ask her Son for that same purity of heart. All of us in this family of faith claim her as our Mother, our Most Holy Mother. What a joy, to call her "our Most Holy Mother." An even greater joy is the reality: she *is* our Most Holy Mother, who is with us always to accompany and protect us, and keep us close to her Son. She crushes the head of the Evil One; for those who stay close to her with a pure heart, no evil can harm them.

Conclusion

She is close to us and comes to our aid, as she did for her cousin Elizabeth as she was about to give birth to John the Baptist, destined to be the forerunner of her Son. And so, after the end of Mass we will sing that most cherished hymn, "Santa Maria del Camino" ("Our Lady of

the Way”). That is she: she is always with us on the way, she walks with us as we journey to the encounter with her Son. So let us, then, stay close to her. Let us unite together as her children with purity of heart, together taking delight in acclaiming her our Most Holy Mother. She gave us our Savior: truly God has not worked any greater wonder for any other nation!