

December 8, 2018

St. Augustine Cathedral

12:10 p.m. Mass

Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception/Consecration of the Diocese to the protection and intercession of Mary, Mother of the Church

In these 3 (4 if we include the Psalm Response), relatively brief, but profoundly important passages from Sacred Scripture that we have just heard proclaimed, we have a basic summary of salvation history!

In the first Reading, we heard the familiar, and tragic, account of our first parents, Adam and Eve, and the encounter with their “Creator” following their commission of the “original sin”. We remember again that “Sin” has been a part of the human condition since “day 1” of the human experience. Sin is in our spiritual DNA. Sin can be defined in an overly simplified way as “saying ‘No’ to God, and ‘Yes’ to myself---my desires---my choices”.

In the Gospel passage, we heard the familiar, and saving/glorious/spiritually life-changing, account of another encounter---an encounter with the Divine through the Archangel Gabriel sent from God to a young Virgin, who would soon become the Mother of Jesus, and eventually, through Jesus’ saving Act of Redemption, would become our Mother as well. That was the beginning of the new Creation, and it began with the one word, summarized in an overly simplified way as “saying ‘Yes’ to God, and ‘No’ to any sinful choices or temptations that would take us away from God.

Adam and Eve said ‘No’; Mary said ‘Yes’. And that changed the world so that Jesus could bring salvation to all.

St. Paul reminds us in our Second Reading in his Letter to the Ephesians that “*in Christ*”, God’s original Plan is able to be restored. And what was that Plan? Paul summarized it this way: “*God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and without blemish before Him.*” Jesus was able to destroy the power of Original Sin and restore God’s original Plan, in large part because Mary said ‘Yes’.

And so we proclaim with joy in the words of today’s Psalm: “*Sing to the Lord a new song, for He has done marvelous deeds*”.

Today’s Feast solemnly celebrates the quiet moment, unknown to anyone but God, when Mary, who was naturally conceived through the love of her parents, Sts. Joachim and Ann, was kept free from original sin at that moment, and the

effects of sin throughout her life. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church puts it very simply: “Mary was redeemed from the moment of her conception” (#491), unlike each of us who needs to be washed clean of original sin in Baptism, and to make every effort to open ourselves to the effects of Jesus’ redemption by choosing to live a life of holiness. While the exception to being conceived in Original Sin has been restricted to only one human being in the history of the world--- Mary, --- through Jesus’ Redemption of the human race, all human beings can refuse to be mastered or controlled by sin, and to say ‘Yes’ to God, and ‘No’ to sin each day of our lives.

Mary, the Mother of Jesus, continued to say “Yes” to God throughout the next 9 months until Jesus’ Birth, throughout His private life, and all throughout His public ministry. She encouraged His first miracle at the Wedding Feast of Cana, by telling Him of the young couple’s needs, and then by telling the waiters: “*Do whatever He tells you to do.*” Mary followed Jesus on the Way of the Cross, and stood faithfully and lovingly at the foot of the Cross as He died, but not before Jesus entrusted His mother into the care of the beloved disciple, John, thereby becoming also the Mother of all disciples---the Mother of the Church---our Blessed Mother. From the Day of Pentecost when the Church was born, with Mary present with the Apostles in that Upper Room, throughout the past 2,000 years and up to our day and time, especially in times of great trouble, suffering, and confusion, Mary always points us to Jesus, with the same words that she spoke to the waiters in Cana, the final words of Mary recorded in the Gospels: “*Do whatever He tells you to do.*”

The Church in the United States, and all of us here in the Diocese of Kalamazoo, find ourselves at a particular time of great difficulty. Primarily due to the most recent revelations of scandalous activities of a very high-ranking member of the hierarchy, and great concerns about the leadership of many bishops in the United States due to the Pa. Grand Jury Report and other serious matters, our priests, deacons, and lay faithful are suffering from a sense of grave disappointment, and a deep lack of trust in those who are supposed to be the ones most directly bringing us all to Christ. As a result, some people have lost faith in God; others have turned away from the Church. What I believe we need to do is to do what we so naturally do in times of trouble: to turn to our Mother. Today we turn to our Blessed Mother, to seek her protection, to ask for her intercession, and to know that she will stand with us and help us.

That is the primary reason why on this great Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, I take this occasion to consecrate our Diocese---our priests, deacons, and lay faithful---all our parishes and institutions----to the protection and intercession of our Blessed Mother, and to consecrate ourselves to follow her example of making every effort to live a sinless life.

I say our current problems within our Church leadership is the primary reason for doing this, but when we look around our world, we see a host of concerns that trouble us, confuse us, and attempt to draw us away from God. Today we bring all our prayers and special intentions to Mary, the Mother of the Church, and ask her to help us stand against the forces of evil that are at work in our society and in our world; to stand up for our Faith in God; to joyfully profess our love for Jesus Christ; to commit ourselves to allowing the Light of Christ and the teachings of the Gospel to shine through us to the world in which we live; and most of all, to beg for the grace to keep us from allowing the strong influence of Sin, and the seductive and deceptive efforts of the Evil One, to take control of our lives.

Mary, though conceived without original sin, was human in every other way, including the freedom of choice. Her greatness is that she always “chose” to say “Yes” to God and His holy will; that she refused to say “No”, no matter how appealing the temptation might have been. And so we look to Mary, as our Model, for how we too can say “Yes” to God, and “no” to sin.

We look to Mary, the Mother of the Church, to remind us that we must: “do whatever Jesus tells us to do”.

We consecrate ourselves to Mary, to choose to live a virtuous life, and refuse to be mastered by sin.

We pray for Mary’s intercession to rid our culture obsessed with sexual promiscuity, the destructive impact of pornography, and the enslavement of other addictions of drugs, alcohol, and other substances.

We pray for an end to the culture of death through an end of legalized abortion, euthanasia, and the immoral use of medical technology to demean the dignity of human life, and to try to take the place of the One Who is the Source of all Life.

We pray for Mary, wife and mother, and “heart” of the Holy Family so that all Family Life can be protected, and the value of Sacramental Marriage can be defended.

We pray for the grace to fight against “complacency” in our own lives, we pray for a renewal of Faith in the hearts of all believers, we pray for a return to the practice of the Faith of those who have fallen away or turned away from the Church, and we pray for a spirit of New Evangelization to take hold of all of us to spread the Good News of Jesus to the more than 50% of our neighbors who profess no religious affiliation at all.

We pray for all survivors of childhood abuse of any sort, and in particular for those who have experienced sexual abuse at the hands of a priest or bishop; we pray for an end to all human trafficking, violence of any sort, and protection for those who are victims of such human indignities.

We pray for those in our communities who are homeless, who are in great need of material and physical needs, and for a renewed spirit of generosity and responsibility that Mary shows us to help our sisters and brothers in need.

We pray intently for an increase of vocations to the priesthood and religious life, for holy marriages, and loving families; we pray for young people to make good and God-centered decisions as they chart the course for their career choices and life choices.

We pray for civility and cooperation in our government and community leaders and for priority to be given to the common good, we pray for a greater respect for human life at all stages of the life spectrum.

And we pray that each of us will live our lives with prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance, rooted in a life of Faith, Hope and Love---according to the Model of our dear Blessed Mother.

In place of the Creed today, we will all have an opportunity to renew our Baptismal Promises, which provide for all of us the basic elements of our Faith: that we reject Sin, and that we choose to believe in God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, through the Sacramental Life of the Church. In the midst of our current culture which passively, **and** actively, resists the ways of God and the teachings of the Church, we need every grace and resource to help us be faithful to those Promises.

I pray that each and every one of us will consecrate ourselves to the protection and intercession of our Blessed Mother, even as I do so on behalf of our entire Diocese. She is the Model for us all on what it means to be a Disciple of Jesus. She is the One who has gone before us and shown us how to live a life of virtue. Our devotion and consecration to Mary is only for the purpose of strengthening our devotion and consecrating ourselves more totally to loving and following her Son, and our Lord, Jesus Christ.

May the celebration of today's great Feast, and our Diocesan Consecration, be a turning point for each of us, and for our entire Diocese, to say "No" to sin and its control in our lives, and, with God's grace and through Mary's intercession, to say "Yes" to God and to choose to live in God's ways.

God bless you, and God bless the Diocese of Kalamazoo!