

brought forth in sorrow, lift up our souls in praise to God for having by His preventing grace, preserved at least one of our race—thee, oh Mary! from stain of sin; and we magnify God, who hath done this thing for thee; and we worship God because He hath placed thee outside of the darkness of sin, and hath established thee in the full sunshine of His infinite grace.

And, oh! though sinless, thou wilt have pity on us sinners. Pray for us sinners “now and at the hour of our death,” that we may in our own measure fulfill the prophecy and share thy privilege—that like unto thee, there shall be enmities between our souls and Satan forever and forever.

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ASPIRATION.

BLESSED art thou, O Virgin Mary, by the Lord, the most high God, above all women upon the earth. Thou art all fair, O Mary, and there is no stain of sin in thee.

PRAYER.

OH, God! who, by the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin, didst prepare a worthy habitation for Thy Son, we beseech Thee that as Thou didst, through the foreseen death of Thy same Son, preserve her from all stain, so Thou wilt also grant that we may reach Thee cleansed through her intercession.

SIXTH DAY.

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The Flower of the Immaculate Conception.

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SECOND PART.

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“Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will tell you what great things He hath done for my soul.”—*Psalm, lxxv.*

TO-DAY let us gaze again upon the spotless purity of this beautiful flower. There are three Edens—the Eden of Genesis, the Eden of grace, and the Eden of glory. The first was an Eden of perfect happiness until innocence was lost; the second is an Eden of perfect grace, in which innocence is regained; the third is an Eden of perfect glory, where innocence, restored by grace, is forever crowned. The first was a material garden, bright with the beauty of all natural beautiful things; the second is the mystical garden of the Church, full of the spiritual beauties of supernatural grace; the third is the Eden of heaven, radiant with the ineffable beauties of everlasting glory.

Before the closed gate of the earthly Eden stands the angel of God's justice, with sword of flame, guarding the gate and barring entrance through it. That first perfect happiness, with innocence lost, never has been and never shall be found again here below. Before the ever-open gate of the mystical Eden of grace, the Holy Church, stands the angel of God's mercy, bidding those who are laden with sorrow and burdened by sin to come and enter. At the narrow gate of the Eden of glory, heaven, as sentinel stands the high Archangel of

God's sanctity, guarding entrance through it against all souls defiled. In the first Eden, amid the falling ruins of perfect happiness and innocence, God promised the Redeemer and the Woman. In the second Eden of grace, the Redeemer, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and the woman, Mary of Nazareth, His mother, appear in fulfillment of the promise; and their relations, each to the other, are as inseparable in the Eden of grace as they were in the garden of the promise. In the third Eden, heaven, Jesus Christ is sitting at the right hand of His Father, in glory, King, as man, over all creations, while with Him, Mary of Nazareth, by right of her royal, divine motherhood, reigns queen over all creatures. And why? Because her Immaculate Conception was, in the divine will, a necessary part of the predestination of Jesus Christ as Son of God, the Redeemer, and therefore King of all creations. It was by God's eternal ordaining, the first preparation for the kingdom of grace, the perfect fulfillment of the promise, the necessary prelude to the foundation of the Church, and to the wonderful history of the Sacraments; and more than that, the very beginning on earth of all man's future glories in heaven.

What then is the Immaculate Conception? It is the restoration, in Mary, of the lost perfect innocence of the earthly paradise; it is the divine dowering of Mary with all the supernatural perfections of Eve in her innocence and before her fall; and still more than that, because sinlessly conceived she is to make true, by conceiving Christ, the very words of Satan to Eve: "Ye shall be as Gods," for Christ, her Son, is our Saviour—God, and by His grace we become partakers of His divinity, and become like unto God.

Mark you, we were made to God's image; the image was not lost by sin, for the image, like the indelible character of baptism, could not be destroyed; but we were also made to His likeness. By the first sin that likeness was destroyed. In the Immaculate Conception of Mary, that lost likeness is restored perfectly to her; if we can so speak (it is against grammar, but in harmony with truth), *more perfectly* in Christ; and in Christ born of her the likeness is restored by grace, but less perfectly to us.

She is the most perfect human person ever made by God (remember her Son, Jesus Christ, is not a human but a divine person); but the perfection of her personality rests on her Immaculate Conception. In what does highest human perfection consist? In the total absence of all sinfulness, and in the presence and possession of all graces.

What said the Angel of the Annunciation to her? "Hail! full of grace!" Therefore, her soul was full of grace, and, therefore, in her soul sin never had a place; but had she been conceived in sin, sin would have had a place in her, and would have emptied her soul of the very grace which is the greatest of all—the absence of the sin original, which is the root of all sinfulness, and the cause of all sins.

These are the proprieties, the reasons and the glories of the Immaculate Conception. All of them? Not half; yet enough. But what is the meaning of the Immaculate Conception? Conception and death are the two terms of every human life. In conception, life begins. In death, life ends. In conception, the soul is united to the substance which is to form the human body, and the moment of that union is the first instant

of the life of man. Before the actual union of soul and body we cannot properly say that the child has been conceived, or has begun to live, though there is a something, in mystery hidden, disposing itself little by little, and no one knows how long, for the conditions necessary to the receiving of the soul. So, after the actual separation of the soul from the body we cannot say that man lives, or that even he is man, though something of him remains—his corpse, which little by little returns, by its own corruption, unto dust, while the soul has passed into eternity. How is it possible that an infant can be a sinner in its conception, that is to say, in the instant when its soul is united to its body? The infant is incapable of sin, and yet it is infected with the contagion of the sin of our first parents. Why? Because though thousands of years afar from the hour of the first fall,—the moment it is conceived into it flows the sin-stained blood of Adam. For Adam was not only the first; but, because the first, he was the universal man. All humanity was contained in him. When he fell, all humanity fell with him, and this is why every child of his race is born fallen from grace and in sin; so that every child, his in conception, can be called an innocent criminal—innocent, because personally the child has done no wrong, but criminal, because the child is involved originally in the sin of him who, in himself, germinally contained the entire human race. Thousands of oak trees are contained in one single acorn, and if there be a flaw in the acorn, it will be reproduced in every tree that grows from it.

Whence, then, to each person of our fallen race comes the stain of sin? Does it come from the soul, or does it come from the body? Not from the soul; because the

soul is created directly by God and comes pure from His hands. Not from the body; because the body is not capable before animation of having any part in sin. How then comes the stain? The soul is innocent, and the unanimated body is incapable of sin. This is how. The instant soul and body unite, their union produces a child of Adam; and to be a child of Adam is to inherit in person, with his blood, his sin, and with his sin its penalties for soul and body. In Adam we all have sinned, and on account of sin we die.

If the blessed Virgin Mary sinned in Adam, she was certainly conceived in sin. Did she sin in Adam? Was she, like the rest of the race, involved in the fall from grace? There is no better place to answer the question than the very scene of the primal guilt.

Go we now there. Eve fell—Adam fell, Satan conquered. But God came into that garden. What are His words? They breathe malediction against Satan, and promise benediction to the race in some future day. "I will put enmities between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed." Mark, He says "I will." That means the future. Will God ever do anything, in any future, that He has not decreed to do from all eternity? No; and why? Because if He would, it would be because He would have a new thought. God cannot have new thoughts. His thoughts are as old as Himself—eternal. Therefore, that enmity between the woman and Satan is from all eternity. It is not a new thought, it is an eternal decree. If eternal, the enmity must be always. If she were conceived in sin the enmity would not be always, it would cease awhile. Then God, if He lets the enmity cease for an instant, in time, between the woman, Mary of Nazareth,

and the evil spirit, would contradict and contravene, here below, His very own eternal decree. Will He do it? No; why? Because He cannot do it. Why? Because an eternal truth would become an eternal lie. With God all things are possible save one; and that is self-contradiction.

No, no, the common laws that rule every person of Adam's race do not govern the person of Mary. All women conceive children by men. She conceives her child by the operation of the Holy Ghost. All women bring forth in sorrow. She brought forth in gladness. All die in pain. She died what could scarcely be called a death. The separation of her soul from her body was a rapture. All bodies return to dust and await the day of resurrection. Her pure body was translated to heaven. As in her conceiving Christ, so in her own conception she stands outside and above the general law, an eternal exception.

Many, in ignorance, imagine that our Holy Church, in proclaiming the truth of Mary's Immaculate Conception, teaches that Mary's body, as well as her soul, was created directly by God. Let us have pity on ignorance, when it cannot help itself. But who can respect that ignorance which, by examining, can correct itself, and will not? If God himself had created her body, as well as her soul, she would not belong to the human race at all. Then her Son, Christ, would not belong to the race. Then, in no real sense, would He be man. Nor could He call himself the Son of Man.

Now, who are they who deny the truth of Mary's Immaculate Conception? What is their character for learning and piety? They are those who imagine (mark you, *imagine*, for they have no settled beliefs; they are

not nourished by the manna of faith divine, and they try to satisfy their soul's hunger—do they ever satisfy it? God help them if they can, with the husks of human opinions) that by covering the conception of Mary with the cloak of original sin, they are placing a crown of greater glory on the head of Jesus Christ. Foolish men, and blind! Christ would tear such crown in twain and trample it under His feet. His glory is her glory, and her ignominy is His ignominy.

Of all the moments of her life, its first instant was its supremest. For that first instant was to tell for her or against her forever. It was to be the criterion of the very character of her soul. If conceived in sin, she would be placed in the position and possibility of never seeing God face to face; and more, if sin touched her, and she was an instant under the power of Satan, God, by His sanctity, was obliged to look upon her with infinite hatred, and to hold her in abomination. Could such a thing be? And the Son of God, who was to be her son sixteen years afterwards, would have been obliged to regard His own future mother with detestation. No, no; a conception in sin of God's Mother would be an infinite horror. It is as abhorrent to the Divinity of the Son as it would be unworthy of the human personality of His Mother Mary. But why say more?

Our Holy Church has defined the dogma as God had decreed its truth. Mary, in her conception and birth, is a living sacrament—she being, on earth, the living outward sign of the greatest grace to creature ever given. God's power could not go farther. In her person, God made the greatest act of divine love for our race that even He could make; the greatest, save the greater one of assuming in her our human nature. And these

grand acts of eternal love are inseparable from one another.

Not very far from Jerusalem lived Joachim, of the royal tribe of Juda, with Anna, his saintly spouse. They were rich in flocks. They divided their riches into three parts: the first for the temple and the ministers of the altar; the second for the poor; and the third for themselves. They were faithful to the law.

Sacred Scripture does not mention even their names; nor does Scripture say one word about the conception and birth of Mary. A veil of mysterious silence hangs around these two great mysteries. Remember that the inspired writers have not written a single word or omitted to write a single thing without the special direction of the Holy Spirit. Not a word about her conception; not a word about her birth; not a word about her childhood; not a word about her life in the temple; not a single word until in the Gospel of St. Matthew we read: "And Jacob begat Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called the Christ." And then not another word until in the first chapter of the Gospel of St. Luke we read: "The angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, and the name of the virgin was Mary."

What is the meaning of this mysterious silence, for the silences of the Scriptures have meanings as well as its written words?

Around the Eternal Father of the Eternal Son what a silence hangs like a holy veil. He stays in the eternal silences, and in infinite silence He speaks His Eternal Word. So the Mother of that Eternal Word Incarnate wears on earth the mantle of silence until the Angel of

the Annunciation comes. For Mary, as the Mother of the Son of God, is to bear a strange resemblance to His Eternal Father. Hence the silence that veils her birth and first years.

Ah! how many there are, outside our Holy Church, who read the Scriptures and make great boast of their knowledge, and yet read its words divine all in vain and miss their deepest meanings! But since the marriage day of Joachim and Anna years went by; twenty years, says St. Jerome; forty years say others; and they bore the opprobrium of barrenness. No child came to bless their union, and a childless marriage was a humiliation among their people. But they waited and they prayed, and they hoped against hope.

Never is the effect of grace more evident and powerful than when nature is powerless. Was not Isaac, the Patriarch, born of Sara, who was barren? Was not Jacob, his son, born of Rebecca, who was barren? Was not Joseph born of Rachel, who was barren? Was not Samuel, the prophet, born of Anna, who was barren? Was not Sampson, that miracle of strength, born of a barren mother? Was not John the Baptist, than whom, by the testimony of Christ, none greater was ever born of woman, born of Elizabeth when she was aged and barren? Strange mystery! but with God all things are possible, and when nature is powerless, He loves to manifest His own power; and is there not a strange resemblance between barrenness and virginity, since both are equally without fruit?

The prayers of Joachim and Anna were heard at last. St. Jerome says that the angel Gabriel announced to each of them separately that God would answer their prayers and the glorious answer was the Immaculate

Conception of Mary in the womb of Anna. It was a natural, and not a supernatural conception. The name Joachim signifies the Preparation of the Lord, and Anna signifies grace. Was the immaculateness of Mary's conception revealed to them? Some writers think so. And now, from the sinless soul of Mary, in her mother's womb, ascended to God acts of worship greater than the angels' adorations; for, remember, her sinless soul had at once the fullness of reason and the illumination of all the graces of the Holy Spirit. All the perfections of the soul of Eve in the instant of her creation were in the soul of Mary in the first moment of her conception. The light of perfect understanding, the strength of perfect love, the perfect union of her will with the Divine Will, all these, and more, were there. In the first instant of her conception her soul was self-conscious, and while she was corporally united to Anna, her mother, her soul at once became intimately united to God, in a union that was never to be broken. The life of her soul reached an almost infinite intensity.

Never had God been praised as she was silently praising Him then. Never had God been so loved as her sinless soul was loving Him. Faith, hope and charity, in perfection, filled her soul; and every instant was a perfect act of each; and as the hours and the days and the months went by, and her mother waited for the moment of the birth of the child she bore, that child was giving more glory to God than all the angels in heaven. Only one was to give to God a greater glory; and He was to be her Son, Jesus Christ.

Did the angels in heaven know of the mystery? Did God reveal it to them in reward for their fidelity in the day of their trial? And if He did, how they must have

longed for the coming of their Queen! Oh! sinless soul, next to the human soul of thy future Son, most beautiful! all pure! most glorious! perfect with all perfections! full of all graces! sweet hope of the hopes of the world! we salute thee in the mystery of thy Immaculate Conception! we bless thee for the blessings thou hast received from on high! And, oh Immaculate, we bless thee more for the blessed Christ whom thou wilt bring to us in the day when thou shalt say from the depths of thy all pure soul: "Behold the handmaiden of the Lord, be it done unto me according to His word."

Is there any need to go back to the past and ask the saints of old to give their testimony? No need indeed; but still it might edify; for the words of saints bear the seal of their sanctities. Read the ancient liturgy containing the Masses of St. James and of St. Mark, the Evangelist. In the first, Mary is saluted as "most holy, most glorious, immaculate, altogether outside the ranks of sinners." In the other, Mary is called "most holy, immaculate and blessed, ever Virgin Mother of God." Listen to St. Hyppolitus, Bishop and Martyr, nigh seventeen hundred years ago. He salutes Mary as Immaculate. And old Origen calls her "the Holy and Immaculate Mother of the Immaculate;" as if he were drawing a parallel between the purity of the Mother and the purity of the Son. Hear the words of Gregory, the wonder worker of Neo-Cæsaria: "An angel without a body was sent to a Virgin pure and Immaculate. He, who had never known sin, was sent to her who was spotless and without the corruption of sin." Let Cyprian, the great Archbishop, speak from his throne in Carthage: "Mary is like the rest of mortals in nature, but not in sin."

Fifteen hundred years ago, St. Epiphanius, Bishop, not in preaching, but in prayer, exclaims: "Thou art full of grace, Oh thrice Blessed Virgin, and, after God, thou dost excel all creatures! In entering this world thou art more beautiful than the Cherubim and Seraphim." Would she have been more beautiful than those highest of the angels, had she ever been stained with original sin? Listen to the great St. Augustine, the prince of the doctors of the Church, in his discussion with the heretic Pelagius: "When there is question of sin, on account of the honor of the Lord, the Virgin Mary is out of the question." And so, from age to age, saint passes down to saint one grand unbroken testimony to the truth of the mystery of the Immaculate Conception; and in the halls of holy councils echoed the word, Mary's word, "Immaculate." True, here and there, at times, rose a voice of hesitation, of uncertain sound, and sometimes of doubt; but not, all along the line, one single great voice of plain denial. Religious orders, confraternities, universities, cathedrals, kingdoms, all adown the centuries, placed themselves under the protection of Mary of the Immaculate Conception; and all these traditions, of the same universal belief, blended with the words of Scripture, expressed themselves on that eighth of December, eighteen years ago, in the solemn definition of the dogma.

And was it not singularly appropriate that these United States, free from all tyranny, and the home of all the natural rights born with men, should be placed under the special patronage of Mary Immaculate, who was free from all the tyranny of sin, and whose soul, by her Immaculate Conception, became the sanctuary of

all the supernatural rights of grace? Oh, Mary Immaculate! guard with loving care this country dedicated to thee. Let thy purity keep it pure. Watch over its institutions. As thou art the refuge of all sinners, this country is the refuge of the exile and the oppressed; guide it ever in the ways of peace; let it never forget its high vocation to teach the nations of the world, by word and example, the principles of well regulated liberty and reverence for the rights of man! Let not its prosperity be its ruin! Many, alas! of its children, who know not what they do, are walking in uncertain paths, which are dark and lead them away from truth! Mother of all! pray for us and plead for them, that we, thy children, may love and honor thee more and more, and love and adore thy adorable Son with more fervent faith; and that they who are wandering in error's path may, through thy intercession, return to the one fold of the true Shepherd, who is thy only Son forever, and our Saviour Jesus Christ.

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ASPIRATION.

"CRY with joy to God, all the earth.

"Sing ye a psalm to His name; give glory to His praise

"Say unto God: How terrible, Oh Lord! are Thy works; in the multitude of Thy strength Thy enemies shall LIE to Thee!"—*Psalm, lxxv.*

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, vouchsafe, we beseech Thee, that as we venerate with festal-solemnity the stainless virginity of the purest of Virgins, Mary; so thro' her intercession we may attain into purity both of mind and body.