

Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary 2005

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

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On the first Christmas Eve, a great white throne of light came down to shepherds on Judean hills teaching them the joy of *Gloria in excelsis*. Through Mary's fiat of acceptance, eternity had become time, infinity had become finite, divinity had become human, omnipotence became bonded and God became man.

Each year on December 8, Holy Mother Church celebrates the Feast of the Immaculate Conception. As Catholics, as followers of Mary, we possess a powerful motive for good. Through Mary we can feel good, look good, and simply be good.

And in the United States we hail Mary not only because we are proud Catholics, but because we are Americans as well. In 1846, the bishops of the United States solemnly chose Mary as the official patroness of our country. What were they thinking of, I wonder? After all, England has St. George for a national patron, France has St. Denis, Ireland has St. Patrick, Germany has St. Boniface, Spain has St. James, Italy has Sts. Peter and Paul. Why America, the mother of God herself?

1. Was it because the United states was a virgin frontier and so rated a virgin patroness?
2. Was it because America was conceived in liberty and thus deserved a patroness conceived in innocence?
3. Was it because they thought of Betsy Ross and her flag of red, white and blue and then remembered how Mary stood beneath the flags of the cross with its red wounds, its white gaunt body, its glinting blue spikes?
4. Was it because of the red in our flag - the red of pride, of power, of passion, of hate - threatened to run wild over the other colors, the blue and the white, Mary's colors?

As Americans, we are free - not only from something, but for something. Mary, free from sin and free for the service of God, can teach us much about the proper use of freedom: for life, for family, for tradition, for right living, for happiness. Mary is the Patroness of Freedom, the loving Mother of all of us bound in the chains of sin. Christ did not refuse her request at Cana, and He will not refuse her request for us: for forgiveness for our foolish use of freedom, for our many hidden needs, for our inability to pray as we should. It is just as the poet wrote:

Lovely Lady dressed in blue
Teach me how to pray!
God was just your little boy
Tell me what to say!

Lovely Lady dressed in blue

Teach me how to pray.
God was just your little boy,
And you know the way.