

+ Immaculate Conception

December 9, 2019

Homily of the Right Reverend Dom Philip Anderson, Abbot of Clear Creek Abbey

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

Tu Gloria Jerusalem, tu laetitia Israel, Thou art the glory of Jerusalem, thou art the joy of Israel, thou art the honor of our people, Alleluia. (Alleluia verse).

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,
My Very Dear Sons,

When Christian artists represent Our Lady under the mystery of her Immaculate Conception, they usually do so, employing for the task, the sacred symbolism taken from the description of the mysterious woman enveloped in light, the woman described in chapter twelve of the Apocalypse.

And a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars.¹

They often depict as well a serpent crushed under her feet, which is a patent allusion to the protoevangelium of the Book of Genesis, according to the Latin vulgate and the Douay-Reims versions:

I will put enmities between thee and the woman, and thy seed and her seed: she shall crush thy head [says the Lord God to the Serpent, Satan], and thou shalt lie in wait for her heel.²

How many there are of these serpents in our day, serpents we would like to see crushed by the power of God operating through the agency of Our Lady! Were we to add something to the classic symbolism of Our Lady in her Immaculate Conception, it would no doubt be to show her Immaculate Heart, to which the triumph over the gravest errors was promised to Sister Lucia of Fatima. The triumph of this Heart, the expansion of the Immaculate Heart as it were, will be and is already the crushing of the serpentine head, the ugliest of heads. But for now this head is popping up everywhere, it seems, in our decaying Western World.

For one thing, in our time, it is the very nature of woman, of the feminine, that has been terribly distorted by modern ideologies: this is an error, a formidable “serpent” that slithers everywhere through the contemporary world. It used to be said of the Catholic Church (especially by certain Protestants) that she “puts Mary on a pedestal, only to abase the rest of womankind”. But just think of it: what chaos would ensue, were all women to be set up on pedestals? It is precisely the woman who is close to the ground of human existence, close to our earthly realities, to those small people who are the children and to the very concrete details of the whole human enterprise. Of all of that great and humble service Our Lady is the perfect exemplar. She surely did not lead her mortal existence upon a pedestal. Her feminine attention to the plight of the newlyweds of Cana, for example, whose supply of wine for the marriage feast had run low, gives us a precious insight into this maternal mode of care for the most human of realities.³

¹ Apoc. 12:1.

² Gen. 3:15.

³ Cf. Jn 2:1-12.

In fact, the solution to what has been called “the feminine question” is hiding there in plain sight and was there all along—at least since the coming of Christ. The perfect answer to the angst and anger of the militant feminists has been placed by God on a heavenly pedestal for all to see, who will merely accept to look with faith upward, the privilege of mankind, as opposed to the animals whose gaze is ever toward the ground, not for service, as with the servants of God, but savagery. It is a paradox, like so many in the Gospel, that we human beings, especially women, must keep our interior gaze fixed on high, even as we attend so often to the things down on earth, the place of our humility, because it is the place of the *humus* or living soil of the lower, but very beautiful, portion of God’s creation.

Now, on this feast of the Immaculate Conception a question arises: if the Blessed Virgin Mary, unlike the rest of us, was conceived without the slightest trace of original sin, how can she be close to us? How can she not be on a pedestal so high that she is out of reach? If she is thus unique, how can she be the solution to the feminine quandary? The answer here, as with so many important answers, necessitates bringing the power of God into the discussion. Mary is not unique and perfect because of her innate excellence, owing to her own merits. It is God who granted her the grace of the Immaculate Conception. Like the rest of us, by her being conceived after the Fall of Adam and of that first woman, Eve, she was doomed to be conceived in sin: this was the imminent threat. Only by the merits of her Son, operating in view of Christ’s saving Passion which was to come, did God spare her entirely, by a unique privilege, from being touched even by the shadow of sin. If God could thus preserve her from all sin, the same God could enable her also to be close to us and to intercede for us while we struggle through our mortal existence. By the power of God, therefore, she can and does show the path of true femininity. As astounding as it seems at first sight, she is truly Mother and truly ever virginal—what a miracle!—, but she is also, by the power of God, close to every woman.

Even so, there remains the fact that we all look for, even before the end of the world, here and now, a more complete triumph of good over evil, a greater manifestation of Mary’s Immaculate whiteness and her Immaculate Heart over the hideous impurity now rampant everywhere in our post-Christian societies. Many Catholics are feeling that there must certainly be a greater victory of the Immaculate Heart to come, above and beyond the political defeat of Communist Russia that has now been accomplished. Where is the more complete realization of this prophecy heard by Sister Lucia from the lips of Our Lady, “But in the end my Immaculate Heart will triumph”?⁴

We must remember that the Magnificat is an ongoing canticle, a spiritual symphony coextensive with the history of the world, beginning with the Annunciation and the Visitation. This canticle of praise and victory teaches us that it is, in fact, without ceasing that

He hath shewed might in his arm: he hath scattered the proud in the conceit of their heart.
He hath put down the mighty from their seat, and hath exalted the humble. He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away.⁵

We may not hear of this triumph in the major news outlets, but it is already at work in more places than the enemy knows. We must not forget that it is God’s part, not ours, to master the tides of history; it is ours to be the humble rivulets that run to the great rivers and to the sea. Our Lady, the Mother of God, the Immaculate Conception, the Woman clothed with the sun, shows us incessantly the way. God will have the last word, now and for all eternity. O Mary conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee. Amen. Alleluia.

⁴ Apparition to Lucia, July 13, 1917.

⁵ Lk 1:51-53.