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Immaculate Conception

December 8, 2022

In nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti. Amen.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

My Very Dear Sons,

What in God's creation could be simpler and purer than the Immaculate Conception? What image might we choose to express this mystery by means of a comparison in order to evoke the utter whiteness of this unique grace accorded to the Virgin Mother of God? It would have to be something like the imagery of today's liturgical texts, which speak of garments white as snow, of a face like the sun, of the lily, or of the dove... And yet the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, this utterly simple reality, has encountered over the centuries many vicissitudes. It was the object of intense debates before it was clearly defined by the Magisterium of the Church as being part of divinely revealed Truth.

Dom Prosper Guéranger, the founder of our Benedictine congregation of Solesmes, had his doubts, as a youth, regarding this privilege of the Blessed Virgin. The story is well known to some of you, but it is worth repeating. Dom Guéranger relates, in his autobiography, the story of this grace he received while he was still a seminarian almost two centuries ago.

It was then that the merciful and compassionate Queen, Mother of God, came to my assistance in a way which was as triumphant as it was unexpected. On December 8, 1823, while I was making my meditation with the community, and I approached, as usual, my subject—the mystery of the day—with my rational viewpoints, suddenly I was led to believe in Mary immaculate in her conception. Reason and feeling were united effortlessly in this mystery.

I felt a sweet joy in my consent; without rapture, but with a gentle peace and sincere conviction. Mary deigned to transform me with her blessed hands, without anxiety, without vehemence. One nature disappeared to leave room for another. I did not say anything to anyone, especially because I did not yet understand the significance that this revelation would have for me. But I was truly overwhelmed. I am still overwhelmed to this day, when considering the scope of the favor that the Holy Virgin deigned to grant me that day (Autobiography, p. 17).

In later years, after having founded Solesmes Abbey and the Benedictine Congregation that now bears that name, he was led by providential ways to write a *Mémoire* on the question of the Immaculate Conception, a truth that Pope Pius IX was hoping just then to define *ex cathedra*. In order for this belief to receive the highest approval of the Church, wrote the abbot of Solesmes, three things would be necessary. First, it would have to be established that this belief belonged to Divine Revelation, contained in Holy Scripture or in the Tradition of the Church (or both)—or at least implicitly contained in dogmas previously defined. Secondly, it would be

necessary to prove that this truth had been firmly proposed to the Faith of the Catholic faithful by the ordinary Magisterium of the Church. Finally, it would have to be demonstrated that this belief is attested to by the liturgy, by the Fathers of the Church, and by ecclesiastical writers. The abbot of Solesmes showed in his *Mémoire* that, indeed, these three conditions were met and, therefore, that the definition was possible. “The Church,” he wrote, “had to await the fitting moment, when, recollected in herself, she would recognize that this universal agreement is, indeed, the proof that such is *the doctrine of the Catholic Church*.”¹ He went on to show the great appropriateness of the definition. As we know, the doctrine, in the end, received the *ex cathedra* and infallible definition. The same Pope Pius IX, the Pope of the Immaculate Conception, subsequently wrote a letter in which he commended Dom Guéranger in the highest terms for his contribution to this teaching of the Supreme Magisterium of the Church.

One must admire in this story the great spirit of Faith that animated the founder of our Congregation, that spiritual intuition that opened up into a great understanding of and sympathy for all that is the Church. In reading his *Mémoire* on the Immaculate Conception we contemplate the monk, who was so familiar with Holy Scripture, with the Fathers, and with the prayers of the liturgy. We discover the contemplative as well, who had long meditated on the mystery of Mary Immaculate. It is of the same living fountain of Marian Theology and devotion that we too at Clear Creek mean to live.

It does not require much insight to see that our time is characterized by a horrible lack of moral purity and beauty. Our decadent Christian culture, if it can even be called “Christian,” is anything but immaculate. No one really believes that this state of things is good, but some profit greatly from it, and the great number look on helplessly as noble sentiments and aspirations to what is most excellent in life sink little by little into oblivion.

The remedy is clear enough. It will not come from this or that pastoral program, though these too are often necessary, or from the latest findings emanating from a committee, though the latter be animated with the most praiseworthy of intentions. No, the solution to this terrible problem, the answer to this formidable challenge, can only come from a new generation of Saints.

What will these new Saints look like? (We can be sure they will, indeed, come.) What will be their mode of action, their motto, their *cri de guerre*? Heaven only knows for sure. One thing there is that is certain: these new martyrs and virgins and confessors of the Faith will have an ardent love of the Immaculate Mother of God, as they will fight for the Kingdom of Heaven under the glorious banner of her Immaculate Heart. Our Lady announced as much at Fatima. We are still in the middle of the great contest between spiritual light and darkness in modern and post-modern times. Soviet Communism as such has been beaten—it ended with a whimper rather than with a bang—but other demons have appeared on the scene to continue the fight against God and His Church. At this point in America especially we must hold on to God for dear life, even if we lose our life in order to gain a better life.

¹ *Mémoire sur l'Immaculée Conception*, p. 129.

May the Immaculate One, who so inspired Saint Maximilian Kolbe, the martyr of Auschwitz, and who so transformed the young Prosper Guéranger, make our hearts more and more like her own Immaculate Heart. Amen. Alleluia.