

FROM THE PASTOR
DECEMBER 3, 2023
THE FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT

**THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION OF
THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY**

Dear Parishioners St. Paul:

Praised be Jesus Christ and Mary His Most Holy Mother! During this holy time of Advent, it is a great grace to celebrate one of the more glorious feasts of Our Blessed Mother, the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception. As is well known this Feast is kept this year on Friday of this week, December 8th. This exactly nine months to the day before we celebrate the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary on September 8th. This Solemnity is our National Feastday, since Our Lady under the title of the Immaculate Conception, is the Patroness of the United States of America. Please see this bulletin for the Mass schedule for Immaculate Conception.

What fond memories do I have of these days as they are celebrated in Rome. The Solemnity itself is preceded by a Novena which is celebrated nightly in the Church of the Twelve Apostles, near the Victor Emmanuel Monument. The highlight of the Novena, which began in 1854, is the singing of the Hymn *Tota Pulchra Es...You are All-Beautiful O Mary*. This music was written for the definition of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception by Blessed Pius IX in 1854. The music is particularly moving. Interestingly, during the Pontificate of St. Pius X (1903-1914) the music was banned. The great saint and pope (Pius X) thought that the music was too operatic and thus unsuited for Divine Worship. He wished to return to the more ancient and modest (not to mention more serene) practice of the simple Gregorian chant. But to deprive the Romans of this spectacle and drama was tantamount to depriving them of *Vino Bianco dei Castelli Romani*. At the death of the great saint, Pope Pius X in August 1914, there was great mourning. But the Romans demanded of his successor Pope Benedict XV (1914-1923), the return of the singing of the *Tota Pulchra Es*. It has been sung ever since.

Because this feast is uniquely one of the United States, every American living, working, or studying in the City (of Rome), is invited to a Solemn Mass and Banquet at the North American College. It was the custom that many hundreds (but fewer than 1,000) would attend. The banquet was a very happy and very scripted event. Here toasts were made: 1. To the Pope. 2. To the President of the United States. 3. To the North American College. Many wonderful wines were served with each course, and the United States Ambassador to the Holy See would be present. In my days in Rome 29 years ago, the Ambassador to the Holy See was His Excellency

Raymond P. Flynn, who had previously served as the Mayor of Boston. He was a particularly kind and respectful gentleman who seemed deeply moved that the President had selected him to serve in this unique diplomatic embassy. The Holy See is a juridic entity in international law and thus sends and receives ambassadors to over 140 nations. The present ambassador of the Holy See to the United States is His Eminence Christophe Cardinal Pierre who lives at the Embassy of the Holy See to the United States (commonly, but, incorrectly, referred to as the Vatican Embassy) on Massachusetts Avenue (Embassy Row) in Washington, D.C. Before coming to Washington, Cardinal Pierre had been the Ambassador of the Holy See to Mexico. All the Ambassadors of the Holy See are called *the Apostolic Nuncio*. In whatever nation he may be serving the nuncio also serves as the Dean of the Diplomatic Corps. (This was a protocol of the Congress of Vienna in 1815). It is largely a ceremonial position, but the Dean of the Diplomatic Corps' unique privilege is to extend to the Head of State (in our case, the President of the United States) the New Year's greetings on behalf of all the ambassadors and the nations they represent. The present American Ambassador to the Holy See is His Excellency Hon. Joseph Donnelly, former U.S. Senator from Indiana. Ambassador Donnelly is a native of Long Island and an alumnus of St. Pius X in Uniondale and the University of Notre Dame.

As though this were not enough, immediately after the Banquet everyone would rush to the so-called Spanish Steps (Piazza di Spagna) for the annual Immaculate Conception visit of the Pope to the Spanish Embassy. No other nation on earth has done more to spread the devotion and orthodox reaching of the Immaculate Conception throughout the world than the Spanish nation. In gratitude for this apostolic crusade the Pope annually visits the Spanish Embassy on Immaculate Conception Day to express his own sincere esteem for Spain and the King and Queen (if they are in the City). After this, the Pope and the Most Catholic Monarchs stand on the balcony of the embassy as the youngest member of the Roman Fire Department places a floral wreath on the statue of the Immaculate Virgin 120 feet on top of a column. Such a spectacle is met with great *nervosità* and excitement by the immense crowd.

Three other interesting facts concerning the Immaculate Conception and Spain cannot be overlooked now.

- 1). In gratitude for the apostolic mission of Spain in spreading devotion throughout the world to Immaculate Conception, a special indult is granted to the Spanish nation and to all priests of Spanish heritage and her former empire (including the Philippines). The indult is to wear blue vestments only on this feast. Thus, for the last ten years have blue vestments been worn at St. Paul on this unique day.
- 2). In gratitude to Spain and to the Spanish nation and empire is granted a perpetual dispensation from the obligation of abstinence from flesh meat on Fridays.

3). To Spain and her empire is granted the privilege to celebrate the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception on the most ancient day of its observance which is December 9th. That is why St. Juan Diego was on his way to attend Mass for the Immaculate Conception on December 9, 1531, when Our Lady of Guadalupe appeared to him on the Tepeyac Hill, outside Mexico City.

Please accept my apologies for this bit of nostalgia. One day I may write of how I came to be in the Spanish Embassy on December 8, 1995, when St. John Paul II visited, but that is a whole other column.

The doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary means that Our Blessed Mother never knew the taint of the Original Sin. From the first moment of her conception in the womb of her mother St. Ann, Our Lady was full of grace; she was free from all sin. Thus, do we say *You are all-fair, O Blessed Virgin Mary, and no taint of sin is found in you*. We may say that Our Lady shared in the great mystery of the redemption beforehand. She is younger than sin itself and in the words of the poet Longfellow, she is “Our tainted nature’s solitary boast.”

This truth of our faith must not be confused with the Virginal Conception and Birth of Our Lord Jesus Christ. This refers to that truth of our faith found in the Holy Bible that Our Lord was born of a Virgin. How fitting this would be for the Son of God would have no earthly father, but rather St. Joseph was the Guardian of the Redeemer. We pray at Holy Mass of the *ever-Virgin Mary*. As the Church has always held Our Blessed Mother was a virgin both spiritual and physical *before, during, and after* the birth of Our Lord Jesus Christ. That is why St. Thomas Aquinas said of the virgin birth, *it was as light passing through a prism*. Although Our Blessed Mother never experienced the pain of childbirth, she knew at the time of Our Lord’s death the great moral pain at his crucifixion.

PLEASE HELP TO KEEP OUR CHURCH CLEAN AND IN GOOD

REPAIR: As many may have noticed, our Church has recently been cleaned and renovated. It is my fond hope that the good parishioners of St. Paul will help to preserve their Church for the future. When the pews were removed to be renovated, the workers remarked how sad it was to see years of chewing gum under the pews. Please do not place gum there and please do not allow your children to do so. We have also placed in the Church upholstered kneelers and seat cushions. Please do not stand on them. Please, do not bang the kneelers put place them down gently with the hand. Already several kneelers have been damaged, and a hymnal rack has been torn from its place (this is from toddlers hanging on them). I had hoped that perhaps one month could pass without damage being done, but that hope has been in vain. Please do not eat or drink in the Church and do not allow your children to do so. And may I remind the gentlemen that men do not wear hats in Church. They must, as is said in the armed forces, uncover in the Church.

POT/LUCK SUPPER AND TREE LIGHTING: Please make every effort to attend our Tree Lighting and Pot/Luck supper on the evening of Saturday, December 9th. Tree lighting will take place during the 5.00PM Mass and the Potluck Supper is in the Lower Hall immediately after Mass. We are grateful to the Knights and Squires for providing this fun-filled and grace-filled evening.

In Jesus and Mary,
Monsignor James F. Pereda