

OUR LADY OF AMERICA

The Blessed Virgin Mary & Immaculate Co-Redemptrix
Enthroned as Our Lady of America!
Shrine of The Most Blessed Sacrament
Our Lady of The Angels Monastery
Hanceville, Alabama

May 31, 2006

The Franciscan Friars of The Immaculate enthroned a statue of Our Lady of America at Our Lady of The Angels Monastery in the Shrine of The Most Blessed Sacrament after a procession which began at 5:00 p.m. on Wednesday, **May 31, 2006**. The devotion to Our Lady of America arose from the apparitions to Sister Mary Ephrem (Mildred Neuzil) beginning at Rome City, Indiana, on September 26th, 1956, and continuing there, and at the Precious Blood Sisters Cloister near Fostoria, Ohio. The image, a medal and the Prayer to Our Lady of America all received the Imprimatur from Monsignor Paul F. Leibold, Vicar General to then Cincinnati Archbishop Karl Alter in 1963. The Our Lady of America Center has sent this particular statue to the Shrine of The Most Blessed Sacrament for public veneration through August 15th, The Feast of The Assumption of The Blessed Virgin Mary.

Processions of this Our Lady of America image at the Shrine of The Most Blessed Sacrament in Alabama are planned for a number of Marian feast days this year. This statue of Our Lady of America was originally made with the approval of Bishop William G. Connare of Greensburg, Pennsylvania (Deceased), and exhibited for more than thirty (30) years by the Discalced Carmelite Sisters of Latrobe, Pennsylvania. This particular image was recently given to the Our Lady of America Center at Fostoria, Ohio, which is sponsoring this visitation along with the Poor Clares of Perpetual Adoration at the Our Lady of The Angels Monastery. The same statue visited the Diocese of Cheyenne, Wyoming this immediate past February 11th-19th for a novena and Cathedral procession.

This is a transcript of the homily given at the enthronement ceremony by **Rev. Fr. Angelo Mary Geiger F.I.**

In the image of Our Lady of America that we enshrine in this beautiful Shrine of the Most Blessed Sacrament today, we have an icon of what our Blessed Mother wants for Her children in America: devotion to Mary; conversion and sanctification; holy purity; and our readiness to fight for the soul of America. In the image of Our Lady of America, we see revealed Her Pure Heart set to shine on all Americans.

Our Lady has always had a special place in the hearts of Catholics in the United States, but devotion to Our Lady has never been more critical to the future of our country than it is today. Our fundamental beliefs about human life, about marriage and family life, are openly attacked and ridiculed in the public square, and often times Catholics themselves are confused and discouraged. The authentic Catholic intuition urges us to turn to Our Lady in such difficulties, to trust Her, and entrust to Her our lives and our country.

This intuition has always been a part of the life of the Church in America. On May 13, 1846 the Bishops of the United States unanimously chose Our Lady, under the title of the Immaculate Conception as our national Patroness. At the time the Immaculate Conception had not yet been proclaimed a dogma, and while Our Lady's Conception was celebrated throughout the Roman Church, the liturgical texts for that celebration did not include the concept of the Immaculate Conception. The American bishops, therefore, requested permission of Pope Blessed Pius IX to include the word "Immaculate" in the oration for the Mass and office of the Conception of Mary for its celebration in the United States. They also asked to include the invocation "Queen, conceived without sin, pray for us" in the Litany of

Loreto. Both requests were granted by Pope Blessed Pius IX, and a year later, seemingly influenced by the devotion of the American bishops, he upgraded the liturgical texts for the celebration of the Conception of Mary for use in the diocese of Rome, and then two years later, extended the usage to the whole Church. In 1854, of course, less than nine years after the American Bishops chose the Blessed Virgin Mary, Conceived without Sin, as the Patroness of our country, Pope Blessed Pius IX proclaimed the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. So you see, our country has a great tradition of Marian devotion, and has even helped to promote that devotion across the globe.

Certainly, Our Lady is pleased by the honor paid to Her by Americans. The National Shrine to the Immaculate Conception in Washington D.C. is an expression of a common desire of the Catholics of our country to see Our Lady acknowledged in the public square, even in the capital of our nation. In the many years since Our Lady became our patroness, hundreds if not thousands of churches and institutions in the United States have been dedicated to Our Lady under the title of the Immaculate Conception. And if over the past 40 years we have witnessed an ebb in Marian devotion, in most recent years we have experienced a great resurgence.

This comes at a time when faith and morals in our country are under a terrible assault. Marian devotion is just what we need. The Immaculate Conception is not only a dogma; it is a person, God's masterpiece of immaculate purity. America today needs purity, and therefore, it most desperately needs Our Lady.

Before America was hit by the sexual and Cultural Revolution of the 60's Our Lady expressed Her concern for the future of our country in a series of locutions and apparitions given to a humble nun in Rome City, Indiana. On the vigil of the feast of the North American martyrs, September 25, 1956, Our Lady appeared to Sr. Mary Ephrem Mildred Neuzil and said:

“I am pleased, my child, with the love and honor my children in America give to me, especially through my glorious and unique privilege of the Immaculate Conception. I promise to reward their love by working through the power of my Son's Heart, and my Immaculate Heart, miracles of grace among them. I do not promise miracles of the body, but of the soul.”

Sr. Mary Ephrem would soon learn that the miracles of the soul, promised by Our Lady, would be inner conversion leading to an intense contemplative appreciation for the indwelling of the Blessed Trinity. “I am Our Lady of the Divine Indwelling, handmaid of Him who dwells within,” She told Sr. Mary Ephrem. But Our Lady knew that if the Blessed Trinity was to dwell in the hearts of men, then the hearts of men would have to be nurtured in the womb of pure families. So these messages focus a great deal on the sanctification of the family. Our Lady wished to cleanse the temples of the Holy Spirit, each and every person individually, each and every family, and each and every home.

Sr. Mary Ephrem discerned these messages with her spiritual director, then Monsignor Paul F. Leibold, later Auxiliary Bishop of Cincinnati, and still later the Archbishop of Cincinnati, who eventually authorized the publication of the messages, and remained Sister's spiritual director until his death in 1972. Sr. Mary Ephrem, a loyal and obedient daughter of the Church throughout her life, died in the Jubilee Year of 2000. The messages of Our Lady to Sister Mary Ephrem are simple, direct, pure, and consistent with the Gospel and the teachings of Holy Mother Church.

As I said, these messages came before the flood of secularism in the 1960's, and in a sense, were a preemptive strike on the part of Our Lady to prepare us for coming trails. She promised miracles of the soul, by which Her children in America could become instruments of peace. But Our Lady also told Sr. Mary Ephrem: “Peace is from within, not from without.” In this way she taught us to begin by cleansing the sanctuary of our own souls. “Weep, then, dear children, weep with your mother over the sins of men,” said Mary. “Intercede with me before the throne of mercy, for sin is overwhelming the world. . .”

Our Lady was most concerned about the attacks on marriage and family life, specifically, about the onslaught of

impurity leveled against married couples and against young people. Our Lady told Sr. Mary Ephrem that she had high hopes for our country: “I wish it to be the country dedicated to my purity. . . I desire that they be the children of my Pure Heart. I desire, through my children of America, to further the cause of faith and purity among peoples and nations.”

Think about that for a moment: we Americans are to be exporters of purity, exporters of the holy virtue of chastity! Thanks to the many wonderful works of the church in America, such as EWTN, Americans have in fact been instruments of the culture of life. But how often is the opposite true? The United States is the most influential exporter of culture and ideas in the world, and all too often it has exported the culture of death. How much worldwide scandal is caused by television, film, and music produced in the United States? How often do secularist ideologues in our country use cultural propaganda to destroy innocence and to sow the seeds of doubt concerning eternal truths? In consequence of the propagation of impurity, marriage and family life have been eroded, divorce and contraception have become rampant; millions of unborn children have been killed, women have been victimized, fatherhood has been rejected, and today the whole foundation of natural law has been thrown into doubt. In some state legislatures today, there is talk of criminalizing the Church’s defense of the moral order and of the institution of marriage as a union of one man and one woman for life. To speak the word of God, they say, is a hate crime.

America, indeed, needs the Immaculate Conception. Our Lady told Sister Mary Ephrem: Behold, O my children, the tears of your Mother! . . . Be my army of chaste soldiers, ready to fight to the death to preserve the purity of your souls. I am the Immaculate One, Patroness of your land. Be my faithful children as I have been your faithful Mother.”

The Woman Clothed with the Sun wishes us to fight along side Her against the Dragon in order to thwart his efforts to subvert the values of the Gospel. So much of secular culture is precisely that, an inversion of Gospel truth. A good example of this inversion is the moral sabotage executed in the in The DaVinci Code. It is the false gospel of impurity. Dan Brown accuses the Church of inventing the Virgin Birth and Marian devotion in order to subvert the true religion of Goddess worship. What a sin against the Holy Spirit, to denigrate the Immaculate Virgin in that way! Our Lady is the answer to the moral evils in America, not the cause of the problem. Chastity is liberation, not repression. Sometimes people are looking for excuses to be impure. Behold the tears of your Mother, people of America, and repent!

Our Lady desires us to return to the common sense of the natural law, where fathers are not afraid to exercise their authority to guard and protect their families, because they are not afraid to deny themselves all that is dishonorable and displeasing to God; where women are icons of modesty and chastity, respecting themselves and insisting on being respected; where children are able to remain children and young people become what Our Lady called “Torchbearers of the Queen,” that is, the light bearers of chastity to a world darkened by sin.

Our Lady taught Sr. Mary Ephrem to pray in this beautiful way: “By thy Holy and Immaculate Conception, O Mary, Deliver us from Evil.” Deliver us from evil--the same words with which Our Lord taught us to address to our Heavenly Father. How can we say these words to Our Lady? Because She is the Woman of God’s promise. She is the Mother, Mother of God, and Mother of all those who have become the children of God. She is the One who teaches us to do everything that the Lord tells us to do, as we just heard from the Gospel of St. John. She is the One who brings Jesus to us, just as She did to St. Elizabeth and St. John the Baptist (as we have had an opportunity to recall on this feast of the Visitation). Because She is the One who stood at the foot of the Cross in solidarity with Christ and out of love for us. Our Lady told Sr. Mary Ephrem: “[I]t is my special work as co-redemptrix of the human race to help souls reach the sanctity of the Father in eternal union by showing them how to put on Christ, to imbibe His Spirit, and thus become one with Him.”

As Chesterton said of Our Lady, Hers is the “Broken Heart and the Unbroken Word.” Our Lady delivers us from evil because She has been faithful unto the Cross. Mary will deliver us from evil and become the Mother of the Divine

Indwelling, if we take Her into our home, and, most of all, if we take Her into the dwelling of our heart. Our Lady told Sr. Mary Ephrem that consecration is not enough. In a similar way, St. Maximilian Kolbe taught that the act of consecration to the Immaculate is only that--an act. The act is only a beginning and a sign of our intention. It is in the choices of our daily lives that true devotion to Mary is lived out faithfully. Our Lady said: What I ask, have asked, and will continue to ask, is reformation of life. There must be sanctification from within. I will work my miracles of grace only in those who ask for them and empty their souls of the love and attachment to sin and all that is displeasing to my Son. Souls who cling to sin cannot have their hands free to receive the treasures of grace that I hold out to them.”

As we honor our Lady today we invoke Her presence upon our country, and we press forward patriotically against the current of impurity and the culture of death. We pray as the earliest Christians prayed: “Deliver us from evil.” The antiphon *Sub Tuum Praesidium*, the Greek text of which dates back to the third century, confirms the age old Marian intuition:

We fly to thy patronage, O holy Mother of God, despise not our petitions in our necessities, but deliver us from all danger, O ever glorious and blessed Virgin.

May Our Lady of America, deliver us from evil. May our country be worthy to have the Immaculate Conception as our national Patroness, and may Our Lady of the Divine Indwelling make us the children of Her Pure Heart, and worthy temples of God. By thy Holy and Immaculate Conception, O Mary, Deliver us from Evil.