

- Today is one of the most beautiful feast days of the entire year: it is the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, which calls to mind how our Lady was conceived without any trace of original sin in the womb of our patroness, St. Ann.
- It is also a very special day for our country, as our Lady, under the title of the Immaculate Conception, is the patroness of the United States.
- In coming to understand this beautiful mystery of our Catholic faith, the Church elucidates four elements that help us to more fully understand what it is that we believe about this dogma.
- First, we believe that God the Father chose Mary to be the Mother of Jesus Christ; in other words, she was predestined to be the Mother of God before the foundation of the world.
- Secondly, we believe that God prepared Mary for this unique and singular task from the first moment of her conception by preserving her free from all stain of sin.
- Thirdly, we know that this is a singular grace granted to no other person in history; Mary is thus the highest and fairest honor of the human race – higher in dignity than all men and all the angels and saints.
- And lastly, we believe that Mary enjoys a special place in the economy of salvation both in relation to the mystery of Jesus and of the Church.
- As we ponder this mystery and meditate on the first reading from Genesis, we are reminded of the devastating consequences of sin. The first reading reminds us that sin is destructive, and that there is always a price to pay for our sins.
- While our first reading tells us of how the serpent was banned from the animals and made to crawl on its belly and eat dirt, the very worst consequences of sin are the internal consequences that we don't always readily perceive.
- Sin is spiritually corrosive. It eats away at our souls, making us less than who God has destined us to be. It distorts us, alienates us, and takes away our peace.
- Moreover, just as Adam and Eve lost paradise because of their sin, if our sins are mortal and we refuse to repent of them, we can lose the paradise of Heaven for all eternity.
- Yet as we consider the second reading and look upon this great gift our Lord has given to the Blessed Virgin Mary in preserving her from all stain of sin from the first moment of her conception, we see in this mystery of our faith the great love and mercy of God as well.
- In his letter to the Ephesians, St. Paul reminds us today that God the Father desires to adopt us as His very own children! Our Lord has chosen each of us for Heaven!
- For this reason our Lord desires us to be holy and without blemish before Him. And Mary, as our spiritual mother, is our pattern of holiness and our advocate in Heaven.
- By her sinless life, Mary is not only the worthy mother of God, but she is also the sign of God's favor to the Church and the promise of its perfection as the bride of Christ.
- And at Nazareth Mary shows us the path to holiness in her exchange with the Archangel Gabriel by her whole-hearted willingness to fulfill God's will. Full of grace, Mary does not hesitate to say yes to our Lord's invitation.
- And the same must be true for us.
- If we wish to be holy as God desires us to be, then we must be willing always to say yes to our Lord's divine will, no matter how difficult or uncomfortable His will may seem for us.

- My friends, on this special day in which we honor our Immaculate Mother, let us pray that through her intercession each of us may grow in docility and humble obedience so that we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.
- And let us give thanks to our Lady for being not only God's worthy mother, but our worthy mother as well.