

- We celebrate a marvelous mystery today: that the Blessed Virgin Mary was conceived immaculately, a miracle that took place within the womb of our patroness, St. Ann.
- Unlike the rest of humanity who, in our fallen state, rely upon the merits of our Lord's Paschal Mystery to liberate us from sin, Our Lady was *preserved* from sin from the first moment of her conception by our Lord's same merits.
- So, while Our Lady still relies upon her Son as her Savior, He saved her from sin in a unique way, in a mode different from the rest of us – as is completely fitting for her unique dignity.
- Because this miracle of grace occurred within the womb of St. Ann, churches named in her honor often have a chapel or at least an altar dedicated to the Immaculate Conception – just as we do.
- Tradition tells us that St. Ann and her husband, St. Joachim, were pious, but elderly and childless. After years of imploring our Lord for a child, they were gifted with no ordinary child, but a daughter whose name would be on the lips of men, and whose fame would be known throughout the world.
- If you go into our Chapel of the Immaculate Conception and look at the center window on the left side, you'll see a depiction of St. Ann and St. Joachim kissing outside the Golden Gate of Jerusalem, on the eastern side of God's holy city – which is the symbolic way artists have often depicted the conception of Our Lady.
- Furthermore, Ann and Joachim's reunion on the eastern side of Jerusalem after learning separately from an angel that they would conceive a child is a subtle nod to the fact that the east, being the direction of the rising sun, is the direction from which our Lord will come when He comes again.
- The window on the far right of the left wall of the chapel shows the birth of Mary in the upper portion, and with her birth we see the serpent that seduced Adam and Eve being driven into the darkness of the West while the sun rises in the East.
- The lower part of the window shows the birth of Jesus, the whole reason why Mary had to be preserved from all stain of original sin.
- In order to be worthy of bearing Him, our Lord allowed Mary to share beforehand in the merits of His death and resurrection – and so it was that she was conceived without sin.
- Because of our patroness's connection with this very beautiful dogma of our faith, it's a fitting day for us to consecrate our parish once again to our Immaculate Mother – imploring Our Lady always to intercede for us and protect us.
- But even more than just interceding for us and protecting us, I hope Our Lady inspires us to greater holiness. We are not meant to be passive spectators in the epic story of man's salvation, most especially in our own personal salvation story.
- While God Himself is the hero of each and every one of our personal salvation stories, we are cooperators with him. Thus, we cannot be like Adam in our first reading, who passes blame onto Eve and even God Himself when confronted with his moral failure.
- Very beautifully, the Church gives us a portion of St. Paul's magnificent first chapter of his Letter to the Romans as our second reading today.
- Here St. Paul reminds us that, as Christians, we have been chosen from all eternity – indeed, from “before the foundation of the world” – “to be holy and without blemish” before God.

- While we are all called to strive for this holiness, seeking by God's grace to overcome the dark temptations that lead us into sin, Our Lady was preserved "holy and without blemish" from the first moment of her conception in St. Ann's aged womb.
- Holy Mother Church provides us this reading today on the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception to illustrate how what we find so extraordinarily perfected in Our Lady is the call and future hope of the entire Church!
- When all is at last made manifest at our Lord's second coming, when the souls of the elect are gathered into Heaven and the reprobate souls are cast into eternal darkness, with the Church militant and the Church suffering welcomed as part of the Church triumphant, the Church in her completeness will be completely holy and without blemish, just like Mary.
- In this way, Mary is our model and inspiration for holiness. She is "our life, our sweetness, and our hope." She is the fairest honor of our race. And we imitate her holiness, my brothers and sisters, by responding as she did to the call of God, which we hear in our Gospel passage.
- When confronted with knowledge of God's will through the message of an angel, she said YES with humble confidence, without worry or concern for the personal cost she would pay for doing God's will.
- This, my friends, is truly the path to becoming holy and without blemish before God. We must say yes to whatever God asks of us, no matter what the cost, trusting that God's will is the best thing that can happen to us.
- This is the basic vocation of every Christian distilled down to its barest bones: doing with the will of God no matter what.
- Of course, this requires humility, courage, love for God, and confidence in His mercy and grace – all virtues that come through prayer, a life immersed in the sacraments, and practice.
- And with Our Lady's help, we can do all these things.
- Trusting always in Mary's powerful intercession, let us confidently entrust ourselves and our entire parish into her competent hands. May she always guide us, protect us, and inspire us to grow in genuine holiness so that we may render more perfect honor and praise to her Son.
- Immaculate Heart of Mary, Cause of our Joy, pray for us!