

America Belongs to Mary

Our Catholic Heritage

“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.*” ... Then solemnly and distinctly, in calm yet majestic tones, I heard these words: “I am Our Lady of America. I desire that my children honor me, especially by the purity of their lives.”

Our Blessed Mother called herself Our Lady of America in response to the love and desire that reached out for this special title in the hearts of her children in America. This title was the sign of her pleasure at the confidence our land places in her and as a reward for its staunch and childlike devotion to her. Her children longed for this personal visit of Our Lady, whether consciously or otherwise, and in her kindness and mercy she responded far beyond all expectations. ... Our Lady promised that greater miracles than those granted at Lourdes and Fatima would be granted here in America, the United States in particular, if we would do as she desires.

“I desire through my children of America, to further the cause of faith and purity among peoples and nations.” ... Though she came in this manner as a token of her love for us, nevertheless, Our Lady of America welcomes her children of all nations to her feet, for there will be found true peace. ... Our Lady, moreover, often emphasized her desire that the Shrine in Washington, D.C. be made a place of special pilgrimage. She wishes to be honored there as Our Lady of America, the Immaculate Virgin.

(Sister Mildred (Mary Ephrem) Neuzil, Diary, OUR LADY OF AMERICA®, Fostoria, Ohio, Pgs. 9-12).

To fully understand the great favor of this visit of Our Lady to America, we must reflect upon our Catholic heritage. We were taught that Christopher Columbus discovered America in 1492, and that he sailed on behalf of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Catholic Spain in search of the East Indies but landed in the West Indies instead. Although others arrived here before him he is given credit for the discovery of America because he paved the way for permanent expansionism from Europe. He brought Catholic missionaries here from Spain and thereby rooted the Catholic faith in our soil. Our land was called “America,” the Latin feminized form of the name of the Catholic explorer, the Italian Amerigo Vespucci, who was the first to realize this was a continent separate from Asia.

More Catholics came from Europe and by the mid 19th century Catholicism was the largest denomination in the United States, roughly 25% of the population. America has the fourth largest Catholic population in the world, after Brazil, Mexico and the Philippines. The 2013 Catholic Directory lists 195 dioceses/archdioceses, 19 U.S. Cardinals, 454 bishops and 69,436,660 registered Catholics. (22% of the population).

Fr. Robert Fox in *The Catholic Church in the United States of America* recounts the growth of Catholicism in America. Persecution of the Church in England was carried over to the English colonies here. Catholics were not permitted in Virginia, New England, the Dutch colony of New York and the Swedish settlement of Delaware. In 1683, however, James II appointed Thomas Dongan governor of New York and the latter granted religious liberty to all. By 1700 laws against Catholics were again put in place and Catholics from New York had to travel to Philadelphia as late as the Revolutionary War to participate in

Mass and receive the sacraments. The Catholic colony in Maryland gave religious freedom to all, but with the rise to power of the Protestants, Catholics were again restricted until after the Revolutionary War. Since the Quakers in Pennsylvania respected religious freedom for all, many immigrants settled there. Around 1721 the French King allowed the Ursuline sisters to settle in New Orleans where they opened the first convent in the United States. The Catholic settlement in Saint Augustine, Florida, begun in 1565, survived on the commitment of the missionaries to continually replace those killed by the natives until they were accepted.

The more the European nations came to the New World, the more conflict ensued as they vied for land, wealth and power. The Franciscans, like Fr. Juniper Serra in California, were able to “preach the gospel with the greatest care and example and the least avarice because they avoided politicizing.” Fr. Eusebio Francisco Kino, a Jesuit, was called “the most picturesque missionary pioneer of all North America, for he was explorer, astronomer, cartographer, mission builder, ranchman, cattle king, and defender of the frontier.” As the French and British raided the Spanish settlements, many natives, missionaries and Catholic faithful lost their lives. Protestants (protesters against Catholic thought) brought the Enlightenment and Rationalism of Voltaire and the Free Thinkers of France to the New World. In spite of their bigotry, the Catholic faith spread. Commodore John Barry, a Catholic, became the Father of the American Navy. Charles Carroll of Maryland was the only Catholic to sign the Declaration of Independence. Thomas Fitzsimmons and Daniel Carroll were delegates to the Constitutional Convention, all this at a time when Catholics were forbidden to practice law or hold elective office. When General George Washington asked Charles Carroll for financial support for the war for independence, Charles gave it on the condition that religious liberty be granted to all; he prayed it would be guaranteed until the end of time.

The Carroll family played a great role in the foundation of our American nation and our Catholic heritage. In 1789, John Carroll, the third brother, became a priest and America’s first Catholic bishop of the first diocese of America in Baltimore. He pushed for Article 6 in the Constitution guaranteeing the free exercise of religion. He led the first Synod of Baltimore which established the rules for governing the Church in America. In 1760 the Immaculate Conception was declared the principal patron of the possessions of Spain, including those in America. **In 1792 Bishop Carroll himself consecrated the newly created United States to the patronage of the Blessed Virgin, the Immaculate Conception, as Spain had already done. Clearly, devotion to Mary is woven into the fabric of American history and life.** The bishop founded Georgetown University and asked the Jesuits to run it. He invited the Sulpicians to Baltimore to start the first seminary in the United States and named it after the Blessed Virgin Mary. With the French Revolution, many priests fled France and came to America, and soon Catholic schools were started to educate our children in the Faith. **In 1847 the 7th Provincial Council of Baltimore reiterated Bishop Carroll’s consecration of America to the Mother of God by declaring The Immaculate Conception the official Patroness of the United States.** It wasn’t until 1854 that Pope Pius IX defined the dogma of the Immaculate Conception for the universal Church. In 1914 American Catholics launched the project to build the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C., the nation’s capital. World War II halted the completion of the Upper Church for some years, but it was finished and dedicated on November 20, 1959, becoming the seventh largest religious building in the world. **This is the shrine where Our Lady of America, the Immaculate Virgin® has asked to be enthroned in a place of honor by the American bishops, after being**

carried in solemn procession. Our Lady has asked this as a safeguard for our country against which she says the evil of the world is now focused. She promises to make this a place of wonder and asks that we make it a place of special pilgrimage. She promises miracles, not of the body but of the soul, miracles greater than those granted at Lourdes and Fatima, here in America in particular, if we do as she has asked. This is why this enthronement by her beloved sons is so important for our country and for our mandate from heaven to lead the world in spiritual renewal. She has favored us with her visit under the title of our country, promising so much blessing. Now we must respond, fulfilling her request, reforming our lives as she has asked, and assuming leadership in this urgent work of renewal.

The Cincinnati diocese in Ohio is of great importance to this message of Our Lady of America®. In 1822, the Dominican, Edward Fenwick, was appointed bishop of the Cincinnati diocese and established the Athenaeum Seminary, later known as Mt. St. Mary's Seminary, where Archbishop Paul F. Leibold, spiritual director for Sister Mildred Neuzil for 32 years, had studied for the priesthood. He had also studied at the University of Dayton in Ohio which houses the Marian Library, the world's largest resource center with respect to Mary. Father Sorin of the Holy Cross Congregation came to northern Indiana and founded Notre Dame du Lac college dedicated to Our Lady. It would be in Indiana that Our Lady would make her first appearance. A journalist, John F. Noll, born in Fr. Wayne, Indiana, ordained in 1898, started a newspaper to help spread the faith. As anti Catholic sentiment, socialism and materialism grew, he sought the support of the working class, enlarging and renaming his paper ***Our Sunday Visitor***. Anti-Catholic bigotry, the idea that you cannot be a good Catholic and a good American, brought here from Europe, was driven by the "Native" American group (which denied that the Indians were the real natives) and the Know Nothing Party. They flamed a persecution of Catholics, the destruction of churches, even tarring and feathering a Jesuit priest and attacking the papal representative in 1853.

In 1915, the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, a bigotry movement that was anti-Catholic, anti-black, anti-Semitic, and anti-alien, stood beneath a blazing cross on a mountain-top near Atlanta, Georgia and pledged loyalty to the "Invisible Empire." They rooted themselves in the Democratic Party and played a large role in preventing Governor Alfred E. Smith, the first Catholic ever nominated, from becoming president in 1928. The election of John F. Kennedy as the first Catholic president in 1960 has given way to a new wave of anti-Catholic sentiment that is blatantly aggressive in our society today.

Reference: <http://www.catholiceducation.org/articles/history/us/ah0020.html>

In spite of persecution, the Catholic Church in America has produced some notable saints. Bishop John Neumann, born in Bohemia in 1811, ordained a priest in New York in 1836, became bishop of Philadelphia in 1852 and was canonized in 1977. He was the first bishop to prescribe Forty Hours devotion to Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament and is credited with establishing the Catholic School system in the U.S. American women saints are honored in the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception's Hall of American Saints. Frances Xavier Cabrini, (1850-1917) emigrated from Italy and became a U.S. citizen in 1909. She is honored as the patroness of immigrants and in 1946 was the first American citizen to be canonized. Mother Elizabeth Ann Seton (1774-1821), a convert, founded the Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph in Emmitsburg, Md. and was canonized in 1975 as the first American-born saint. Rose Philippine Duchesne (1769-1852), emigrated from France to the St. Louis area and instituted a school for Native

American children. She was canonized in 1988. Katherine Drexel (1858-1955), was a Philadelphia heiress who used her wealth to aid the Indian missions and founded the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament in Santa Fe, NM. She established a system of black Catholic schools and Xavier University in New Orleans, the first U.S. university for African Americans. She was canonized in 2000. Kateri Tekakwitha, the Lily of the Mohawks, born in Auriesville, NY, fled to Canada to escape the hostility of her tribe after her baptism. She was canonized in 2012 as the first native American and is patron of ecology and the environment along with St. Francis of Assisi. Along with Kateri were the eight North American Jesuit martyrs who worked with the Huron Indians in Auriesville, NY and Canada in the 1600's. **One might say their blood was the seed of faith in America. They were canonized in 1930 and are essential to the message of Our Lady of America, as she appeared for the first time to Sister Mildred on the eve of their feast, September 25, 1956.** Today we need a rebirth of Faith in America. The Angel Guardian and Protector of America declared himself the Defender of America **whose soil is saturated with martyrs' blood** and honors so highly the Queen of Heaven and Her holy Spouse who work only to further the Kingdom of Jesus.

When it comes to the source and destiny of the American spirit, no one sums up the state of our union better than this.

"The most wonderful thing about America is its people. Their deepest values are spiritual, not materialistic. It may be hard to believe when you see evidence of materialism all around you, but it is true! It took me three early years, 1963 to 1966, to come to this conclusion, and understand this puzzling dilemma.

Since I was born in the Orient (Bombay, India), it was drilled into me like a mantra that the East is spiritualistic and the West (especially America) is materialistic. Nothing can be further from the truth and actually the reverse is true! America's heritage is spiritual and no one should forget that, in spite of strong cultural currents dragging us in the opposite direction." (Don Sutaria, Career Quest Newsletter, "What's Really So Wonderful About America," July 2010).

One of the first presidents of the U.N. General Assembly and Chairman of the U.N. Security Council was a Philippine Catholic, General Carlos Romulo, who stated in his farewell speech to America:

"Never forget, Americans, that yours is a spiritual country. Yes, I know you're a practical people. Like others, I've marveled at your factories, your skyscrapers and your arsenals. But underlying everything else is the fact that America began as a God-loving, God-fearing, God-worshipping people. It is this spirit that makes America invincible. May God keep you always, and may you always keep God."

May we always keep God! And may we pray often to our dear guardian angel and protector of the United States of America who stated this promise to Sister Mildred on August 22, 1981:

"If the people of this Land carry out faithfully the instructions and pleadings of the Lord Jesus and the Virgin Mother then they will be following me to the hour of peace. With this sword of the Divine white flame of Love and the lightning bolts of His infinite Justice God will strike down his enemies and heal the repentant sinner. This Nation and all who follow in the pursuit of peace will know the protection of God and the destruction

of those who fight and seek to destroy them through the evil powers of the infernal spirits of darkness and hate.

Follow me, people of God, brothers and sisters, as our Queen paves the way and the peace of the Lord will reign once more upon the earth.” (Diary, Pg. 41).

Prayer to the Immaculate Conception

O Immaculate Mother, Queen of our Country, open our hearts, our homes, and our Land to the coming of Jesus, your Divine Son. With Him, reign over us, O heavenly Lady, so pure and so bright with the radiance of God’s light shining in and about you. Be our Leader against the powers of evil set upon wresting the world of souls, redeemed at such a great cost by the sufferings of your Son and of yourself, in union with Him, from that same Savior, Who loves us with infinite charity.

We gather about you, O chaste and holy Mother, Virgin Immaculate, Patroness of our beloved Land, determined to fight under your banner of holy purity against the wickedness that would make all the world an abyss of evil, without God and without your loving maternal care. We consecrate our hearts, our homes, our Land to your Most Pure Heart, O great Queen, that the kingdom of your Son, our Redeemer and our God, may be firmly established in us.

We ask no special sign of you, sweet Mother, for we believe in your great love for us, and we place in you our entire confidence. We promise to honor you by faith, love, and the purity of our lives according to your desire.

Reign over us, then, O Virgin Immaculate, with your Son Jesus Christ. May His Divine Heart and your most chaste Heart be ever enthroned and glorified among us. Use us, your children of America, as your instruments in bringing peace among men and nations. Work your miracles of grace in us, so that we may be a glory to the Blessed Trinity, Who created, redeemed, and sanctifies us.

May your valiant Spouse, St. Joseph, with the holy Angels and Saints, assist you and us in “renewing the face of the earth.” Then when our work is over, come, Holy Immaculate Mother, and as our victorious Queen, lead us to the eternal kingdom, where your Son reigns forever as King. Amen. (200 days) (Written at the behest of Our Lady, October 5, 1956, Diary, Pg. 47).

"Never forget, Americans, that yours is a spiritual country..."

May God always keep us!

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