

MORNING MEDITATION

The Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary

**Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers,
for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.**
(Hebrews 13:2)

Today, we gratefully remember the special grace Mary had received from the moment of her conception, which prepared her to be the mother of God. We believe that God had kept Mary free from sin from the moment of her conception. Mary is the immaculate one. Let us be grateful to Mary for living a simple and pure life to which God had called her and making herself totally available to God. Let us also draw inspiration and strength from her and follow her example of total dedication to the will of God.

Genesis 3:9-15, 20

In the garden, man enjoyed an intimacy with God which was destroyed by disobedience. Ashamed and afraid man and woman hid themselves from God. This excerpt tells us that through disobedience sin entered the world, and as a result, man and woman experienced separation, suffering, and ultimately death. Man and woman failed to be faithful to what God made them to be. Sin is a violation of what God made us to be.

Be faithful to what God made you to be.

Psalms 98

**Sing to the Lord a new song,
For he has done wondrous deeds;
His right hand has won victory for him, his holy arm**

Ephesians 1:3-6, 11-12

Paul tells the Ephesians: God chose us before the world began to be holy and blameless in his sight, to be full of love...God has given us wisdom to understand fully the mystery, the plan he was pleased to decree in Christ.....to bring all things into one in Christ!

Luke 1:26-38

This excerpt tells us about the visit of angel Gabriel to Mary with the great news of the birth of Jesus: "You have found favor with God and you shall conceive and bear a son and give him the name Jesus....." Gabriel assured her that it was through the power of the Holy Spirit that she has conceived this child and that "nothing is impossible with God". Mary surrendered and said to Gabriel, "I am the maidservant of the Lord. Let it be

done to me as you say". Mary was called to surrender to God's word and that's our call today!

Be still! Listen! Be discerning! Pray for God's wisdom to know and the courage to fulfill and surrender to his plan for you.

Mary trusted and surrendered to God's word and God's word became flesh in her. God's word comes to us today through the Scriptures, through lived experiences of many people, through our own personal experiences and through many events and situations. We are called to be sensitive, docile, available and attentive to God's word and let God's word become flesh in our life.

May God's Word of "Love" continue to become flesh, real, tangible, in all of us!

It was in simple faith that Mary accepted the angel's message. She accepted it without full knowledge and with troubled heart and fearful spirit. Luke tells us that Mary did not understand, but she pondered and wondered. Mary has become a model for all believers.

Like Mary, we must wonder and ponder and doubt and believe and trust our way through life's many challenges, troubles, fears, anxieties and uncertainties.

We may be tired and weary of our duties, responsibilities and daily chores.....full of life and energy or tired and weary, we must CHOOSE TO BE FAITHFUL.

Fr. Gus Tharappel,msfs

St. Juan Diego and 36 other saints are remembered this day

Saint Juan Diego was born in 1474 as Cuauhtlatatzin, a native to Mexico. He became the first Roman Catholic indigenous saint from the Americas. Following the early death of his father, Juan Diego was taken to live with his uncle. When a group of 12 Franciscan missionaries arrived in Mexico in 1524, he and his wife, Maria Lucia, converted to Catholicism and were among the first to be baptized in the region. Juan Diego was very committed to his new life and would walk long distances to receive religious instruction at the Franciscan mission station.

On December 9, 1531, Juan Diego was in a hurry to make it to Mass and celebrate the Feast of the Immaculate Conception. However, he was stopped by the beautiful sight of a radiant woman who introduced herself, in his native tongue the "ever-perfect holy Mary." Mary told Juan Diego that she was the mother of all those who lived in his land and asked him to request the local bishop to build a chapel in her honor on Tepeyac Hill, which was the site of a former pagan temple.

Bishop Juan de Zumarraga was skeptical of the story of Juan Diego and needed time to reflect on the request. Later, on the same day, Juan Diego encountered the Virgin Mary a second time. He tried to explain to her that he was not an important person, and so not the right person for the task, but she insisted that he was the man she wanted. Juan Diego returned to the Bishop the next day and repeated his request, but now the Bishop asked for proof or a sign that the apparition was real.

Juan Diego went straight to Tepeyac and, once again, encountered the Virgin Mary. After explaining to her what the Bishop asked, she agreed and told him she'd provide him with proof on the next day, December 11. However, on the next day, Juan Diego's uncle became very sick and he was obligated to stay and care for him. Juan Diego set out to find a priest for his uncle.

The Virgin Mary intercepted Juan Diego. He explained his situation and promised to return after finding a priest for his uncle. Mary assured him that his uncle would be cured. She then asked him to collect the flowers growing on the hill. He obeyed and found many flowers blooming in December on the rocky land. He filled his tilma (cloak) with flowers and returned to Mary. The Virgin Mary arranged the flowers within his cloak and told him that he should present this as the sign to the bishop. When Juan Diego found the bishop, he opened his cloak and the bishop was presented with a miraculous imprinted image of the Virgin Mary on the flower-filled cloak.

The next day, Juan Diego found his uncle fully healed from his illness. His uncle explained he, too, saw the Virgin Mary. She also instructed him on her desires to have a church built on Tepeyac Hill. She also told him that she wanted to be known with the title of Guadalupe. News of Juan Diego's miracle quickly spread, and he became very well-known. However, Juan Diego always remained a humble man.

The bishop first kept Juan Diego's imprinted cloak in his private chapel, but then placed it on public display in the church built on Tepeyac Hill the next year. Juan Diego moved into a little hermitage on Tepeyac Hill, and lived a solitary life of prayer and work. He remained there until his death on December 9, 1548, 17 years after the first apparition.