

FULGENS CORONA

ENCYCLICAL OF POPE PIUS XII PROCLAIMING A MARIAN YEAR TO COMMEMORATE THE CENTENARY OF THE DEFINITION OF THE DOGMA OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION SEPTEMBER 8, 1953

To Our Venerable Brethren, the Patriarchs, Primates, Archbishops, Bishops, and other Local Ordinaries in Peace and Communion with the Apostolic See.

Venerable Brethren, Health and Apostolic Benediction.

The radiant crown of glory with which the most pure brow of the Virgin Mother was encircled by God, seems to Us to shine more brilliantly, as We recall to mind the day, on which, one hundred years ago, Our Predecessor of happy memory Pius IX, surrounded by a vast retinue of Cardinals and Bishops, with infallible apostolic authority defined, pronounced and solemnly sanctioned "that the doctrine, which holds that the Most Blessed Virgin Mary at the first moment of her conception was, by singular grace and privilege of the Omnipotent God, in virtue of the merits of Jesus Christ, Savior of the Human race, preserved from all stains of original sin, is revealed by God, and therefore to be firmly and resolutely believed by all the faithful." (Dogmatic bull Ineffabilis Deus, of Dec. 8, 1854.)
2. The entire Catholic world received with joy the pronouncement of the Pontiff, so long and anxiously awaited. Devotion of the faithful to the Virgin Mother of God was stirred up and increased and this naturally led to a great improvement in Christian morality. Furthermore, studies were undertaken with new enthusiasm, which gave due prominence to the dignity and sanctity of the Mother of God.
3. Moreover, it seems that the Blessed Virgin Mary herself wished to confirm by some special sign the definition, which the Vicar of her Divine Son on earth had pronounced amidst the applause of the whole Church. For indeed four years had not yet elapsed when, in a French town at the foot of the Pyrenees, the Virgin Mother, youthful and benign in appearance, clothed in a shining white garment, covered with a white mantle and girded with a hanging blue cord, showed herself to a simple and innocent girl at the grotto of Massabielle. And to this same girl, earnestly inquiring the name of her with whose vision she was favored, with eyes

raised to heaven and sweetly smiling, she replied: "I am the Immaculate Conception."
4. This was properly interpreted by the faithful, who from all nations, and almost countless in number, flocked in pious pilgrimage to the grotto of Lourdes, aroused their Faith, enkindled their devotion and strove to conform their lives to the Christian precept. There also miraculous favors were granted them, which excited the admiration of all, and confirmed that the Catholic religion is the only one given approval by God.
5. In a special manner was its significance grasped by the Roman Pontiffs, and when, in the space of a few years, the devotion of clergy and people had raised there a wonderful church, they enriched it with spiritual favors and generous gifts.
6. When Our predecessor decreed in the Apostolic Letter that this tenet of Christian doctrine was to be firmly and faithfully believed by all the faithful, he was merely carefully conserving and sanctioning with his authority the teaching of the Fathers and of the whole Church from its earliest days right down through the centuries.
7. In the first place, the foundation of this doctrine is to be found in Sacred Scripture, where we are taught that God, Creator of all things, after the sad fall of Adam, addressed the serpent, the tempter and corrupter, in these words, which not a few Fathers, Doctors of the Church and many approved interpreters applied to the Virgin Mother of God: "I will put enmities between thee and the woman, and thy seed and her seed" (Gen. III-15). Now, if at any time the Blessed Mary were destitute of Divine grace even for the briefest moment, because of contamination in her conception by the hereditary stain of sin, there would not have come between her and the serpent that perpetual enmity spoken of from earliest tradition down to the time of the solemn definition of the Immaculate Conception, but rather a certain subjection.
8. Moreover, since the same holy Virgin is saluted "full of grace" and "blessed among women" (Luke I. 28, 24), by these words, as Catholic tradition has always interpreted, it is plainly indicated that "by this singular and solemn salutation, otherwise never heard of, it is shown that the Mother of God was the abode of all Divine graces, adorned with all the charisms of the Holy Spirit, yea, the treasury well nigh infinite and abyss inexhaustible of these charisms, so that she was never subjected to the one accursed" (Bull Ineffabilis Deus).
9. This doctrine, unanimously received in the early Church, has been handed down clearly enough by the Fathers, who claimed for the Blessed Virgin such titles as Lily Among Thorns; Land Wholly Intact; Immaculate; Always Blessed; Free From All Contagion Of Sin; Unfading Tree; Fountain Ever Clear; The One And Only Daughter Not Of Death But Of Life; Offspring Not Of Wrath But Of Grace; Unimpaired And Ever Unimpaired; Holy And Stranger To All Stain Of Sin; More Comely Than Comeliness Itself; More Holy Than Sanctity; Alone Holy Who, Excepting God, Is Higher Than All; By Nature More Beautiful, More Graceful And More Holy Than The Cherubim And Seraphim Themselves And The Whole Host Of Angels."
10. If these praises of the Blessed Virgin Mary be given the careful consideration they deserve, who will dare to doubt that she, who was purer than the angels and at all times pure, was at any moment, even for the briefest instant, not free from every stain of sin? Deservedly, therefore, St. Ephrem addresses her Divine Son in

these words: "Really and truly Thou and Thy Mother are alone entirely beautiful. Neither in Thee nor in Thy Mother is there any stain." (Carmine Nisibena, Ed. Bickell, 123). From these words, it is clearly apparent that there is only one among all holy men and women about whom it can be said that the question of sin does not even arise, and also that she obtained this singular privilege, never granted to anyone else, because she was raised to the dignity of Mother of God.
11. This high office which the Council of Ephesus solemnly declared and sanctioned against the heresy of Nestorius (Cf. Pius XI, Encyclical Lux Veritatis; Acta Apost. Sedis, Vol. 23, P. 493, ss) and greater than which does not seem possible, demands the fullness of Divine grace and a soul immune from stain, since it requires the greatest dignity and sanctity after Christ. Yea indeed, from this sublime office of the Mother of God seem to flow, as it were from a most limpid hidden source, all the privileges and graces with which her soul and life were adorned in such extraordinary manner and measure.
12. For as Aquinas correctly states: "The Blessed Virgin, because she is the Mother of God, has a certain infinite dignity from the infinite good, which is God" (Cf. Summa Theologiae, I, Q, 25, Art 6 as 4um). And a distinguished writer develops and explains this in these words: "The Blessed Virgin . . . is the Mother of God: therefore, she is the purest and the most holy, so that under God a greater purity cannot be understood" (Cornelius a Lapide, In Matth. 1.16).
13. And again, if we consider the matter with attention, and especially if we consider the burning and sweet love which Almighty God without doubt had, and has, for the mother of His only begotten Son, for what reason can we even think that she was, even for the briefest moment of time, subject to sin and destitute of divine grace. Almighty God could certainly, by virtue of the merits of the Redeemer, bestow on her this singular privilege; that therefore He did not do so, we cannot even suppose. It was fitting that Jesus Christ should have such a mother as would be worthy of Him as far as possible; and she would not have been worthy, if, contaminated by the hereditary stain even for the first moment only of her conception, she had been subject to the abominable power of Satan.
14. Nor can it be asserted that the Redemption by Christ was on this account lessened, as if it did not extend to the whole race of Adam: and therefore something taken away from the office and dignity of the Divine Redeemer. For if we carefully and thoroughly consider the matter, we easily perceive that Christ the Lord in a certain most perfect manner really redeemed His mother, since it was by virtue of His merits that she was preserved by God immune from all stain of original sin. Wherefore, the infinite dignity of Jesus Christ and His office of universal redemption is not diminished nor lowered by this tenet of doctrine, rather it is greatly increased.
15. Non-Catholics and reformers are therefore mistaken when because of this pretext they find fault with, or disapprove of, our devotion to the Virgin Mother of God, as if it took something from the worship due to God alone and to Jesus Christ. The contrary is true because any honor and veneration which we may give to our Heavenly Mother undoubtedly redounds to the glory of her Divine Son, not only because all graces and all gifts, even the highest, flow from Him as from their primary source, but also because "The glory of children are their fathers" (Book of

Proverbs, XVII 6).
16. Wherefore, right from ancient Church times, this tenet of doctrine both among pastors and in the minds and hearts of the people became daily more illustrious and more widespread. The writings of the Fathers bear witness to it; the Councils and the acts of the Roman Pontiffs declare it; and, finally, the ancient liturgies, in whose oldest sacred books this feast is mentioned as traditional, testify to it.
17. And even among all the communities of Oriental Christians which long since have broken away from the unity of the Catholic Church, there were not wanting, nor are there wanting, those who, although animated by prejudices and wrong opinions, have embraced this doctrine and celebrate annually the solemnity of the Immaculate Conception; which would undoubtedly not be so, had they not received this doctrine from ancient times, before they were cut off from the one fold.
18. It is therefore, a pleasure for us, a full century having passed since the Pontiff of immortal memory, Pius IX, solemnly proclaimed this singular privilege of the Virgin Mother of God, to summarize the whole doctrinal position and conclude in these words of the same Pontiff, asserting that this doctrine "vouched for in Sacred Scripture according to the interpretation of the Fathers, is handed down by them in so many of their important writings, is expressed and celebrated in so many illustrious monuments of renowned antiquity, and proposed and confirmed by the greatest and highest decision of the Church" (Bull Ineffabilis Deus), so that to pastors and faithful there is nothing "more sweet, nothing dearer than to worship, venerate, invoke and praise with ardent affection the Mother of God conceived without stain of original sin. (Ibidem.)
19. But that most precious gem with which, one hundred years ago, the sacred diadem of the Blessed Virgin was adorned, seems to Us today to shine with brighter light, since by Divine providence it fell to Our lot, toward the close of the Jubilee Year of 1950 -- We recall it with gratitude -- to define that the Mother of God was assumed body and soul into Heaven; and thus to satisfy the wishes of the faithful, which had been more urgently expressed after the solemn definition of the Immaculate Conception. For then, as we Ourselves wrote in the apostolic letter Munificentissimus Deus (AAS, 42: 754) "the faithful were moved by a certain more ardent hope that the dogma also of the corporal Assumption of the Virgin Mary into Heaven should be defined as soon as possible by the supreme magisterium of the Church."
20. Henceforth, it seems that the faithful can with greater and better reason turn their minds and hearts to the mystery of the Immaculate Conception. For the two dogmas are intimately connected in close bond. And now that the Assumption of the Virgin Mary into Heaven has been promulgated and shown in its true light -- that is, as the crowning and complemeent of the prior privilege bestowed upon her -- there emerge more fully and more clearly the wonderful wisdom and harmony of the Divine plan, by which God wishes the most blessed Virgin Mary to be free from all stain of original sin.
21. And so these two very singular privileges, bestowed upon the Virgin Mother of God, stand out in most splendid light as the beginning and as the end of her earthly journey; for the greatest possible glorification of her virgin body is the complement, at once appropriate and marvelous, of the absolute innocence of her

soul, which was free from all stain; and just as she took part in the struggle of her only-begotten Son with the wicked serpent of Hell, so also she shared in His glorious triumph over sin and its sad consequences.
22. Yet this centenary celebration should not only serve to revive Catholic Faith and earnest devotion to the Mother of God in the souls of all but Christians should also, in as far as possible, conform their lives to the image of the same Virgin. Just as all mothers are deeply affected when they perceive that the countenance of their children reflects a peculiar likeness to their own, so also our Most Sweet Mother wishes for nothing more, never rejoices more than when she sees those whom, under the cross of her Son, she has adopted as children in His stead, portray the lineaments and ornaments of her own soul in thought, word and deed.
23. But if this devotion is not to consist of mere word, is not to be counterfeit coin of religion or the weak and transitory affection of a moment, but is to be something sincere, true and efficacious, it is necessary that each one of us should according to his condition of life, avail of it for the acquisition of virtue. The commemoration of the mystery of the Most Holy Virgin, conceived immaculate and immune from all stain of original sin, should, in the first place, urge us to that innocence and integrity of life which flees from and abhors even the slightest stain of sin.
24. And it seems to Us that the Blessed Virgin, who throughout the whole course of her life -- both in joys, which affected her deeply, as in distress and atrocious suffering, through which she is Queen of Martyrs -- never departed from the precepts and example of her own Divine Son, it seems to us, We say, that she repeats to each of us those words, with which she addressed the servers at the wedding feast of Cana, pointing as it were to Jesus Christ: "Whatsoever He shall say to you, do ye" John. 2. 5).
25. This same exhortation, understood, of course, in a wider sense, she seems to repeat to us all today, when it is evident that the root of all evils by which men are harshly and violently afflicted and peoples and nations straitened, has its origin in this especially, that many people have forsaken Him "the fountain of living water and have dug for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water" (Jer. 2. 13). They have forsaken Him Who is the "Way, the truth and the life" (John XIV, 6). If, therefore, there has been a wandering, there must be a return to the straight path. If the darkness of error has clouded minds, it must be dispersed immediately by the light of truth. If death, death in the true sense, has seized upon souls, eagerly and energetically must life be taken hold of. We mean that heavenly life which knows no ending, since it comes forth from Jesus Christ; which, if we faithfully and confidently pursue in this mortal exile, we shall surely enjoy for ever with Him in the happiness of the eternal home. This is what she teaches us; to this the Blessed Virgin Mary exhorts us, our Most Sweet Mother who, with true charity, loves us more than any earthly mother.
26. Today, as you well know, venerable brethren, men are greatly in need of these exhortations and invitations by which they are admonished to return to Christ and diligently and effectively to conform their lives to the Commandments, since many are trying to root out the Christian Faith from their souls, either by cunning and secret snares, or else by open and arrogant preaching of those errors of which they wantonly boast, as if they were to be considered the glory of this progressive and

enlightened age.
27. But once holy religion is rejected, once the Divine Majesty, establishing what is good and evil, is ignored, it is plain that laws and public authority have little or no value. Then again, once hope and expectation of eternal reward are lost through these fallacious doctrines, men will greedily and without restraint seek the things of earth, vehemently covet their neighbor's goods, and even take them by force as often as occasion or opportunity is given. Hence hatred, envy, discord and rivalries arise among men; hence public and private life is perturbed; hence the very foundations of society which can scarcely be held together and maintained by the authority of government are gradually undermined; hence, deformation of morals by evil theatrical performances, books, periodicals and actual crime.
28. We do not doubt that much can be done in this cause by those who hold the reins of government. However, the remedy for such great evils is to be sought from a higher source; namely, a power that is greater than human must be called in as aid, which will illumine minds with heavenly light, which will touch souls and renew them with Divine grace and render them better by its inspiration.
29. Then only can it be hoped that Christian morality will everywhere again flourish; that the true principles upon which society depends will become consolidated; that mutual, impartial and sincere estimation of values, together with justice and charity, will be established among the classes; that finally hatred will be quelled, whose seeds bring forth new miseries, and not rarely provoke exasperated souls to the shedding of blood -- that, in fine, having mellowed and settled the contentions between the upper and lower classes, the sacred rights of both parties be composed with equity, and by mutual agreement and reasonableness be made conformable and consistent with the public utility.
30. Without doubt, all these principles of Christianity, which the Virgin Mother of God incites us to follow with eagerness and with energy, can be entirely and lastingly productive only when actually put into practice. Taking this into consideration, We invite each and every one of you, Venerable Brethren, by reason of the office that you exercise, to exhort the clergy and people committed to you to celebrate the Marian Year which We proclaim to be held the whole world over from the month of December next until the same month of the coming year just a century having elapsed since the Virgin Mother of God, amid the applause of the entire Christian people shone with a new gem, when, as We have said, Our predecessor of immortal memory, Pius IX, solemnly decreed and defined that she was absolutely free from all stain of original sin. And we confidently trust that this Marian celebration may bring forth those most desired and salutary fruits which all of us long for.
31. But to facilitate matters and make the project more successful, We desire that in each diocese there be held for this purpose appropriate sermons and discourses, by means of which this tenet of Christian doctrine may be more clearly explained; so that the Faith of the people may be increased and their devotion to the Virgin Mother of God become daily more ardent, and that henceforth all may take upon themselves to follow in the footsteps of our heavenly mother, willingly and with promptitude.
32. And since in all cities, towns and villages, wherever the Christian religion

thrives, there is a sanctuary, or at least an altar, in which the sacred image of the Blessed Virgin Mary is enshrined for the devotion of the Christian people, We desire, Venerable Brethren, that the faithful should throng thither in great numbers and should offer to our Most Sweet Mother not only private but also public supplications with one voice and with one mind.

33. But where -- as is the case in almost all dioceses, there exists a church in which the Virgin Mother of God is worshipped with more intense devotion, thither on stated days let pilgrims flock together in great numbers and publicly and in the open give glorious expression to their common Faith and their common love toward the Virgin Most Holy. We have no doubt that this will be done in an especial manner at the Grotto of Lourdes, where there is such ardent devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary conceived without stain of sin.

34. But let this holy city of Rome be the first to give the example, this city which from the earliest Christian era worshipped the heavenly mother, its patroness, with a special devotion. As all know, there are many sacred edifices here, in which she is proposed for the devotion of the Roman people; but the greatest without doubt is the Liberian Basilica, in which the mosaics of Our predecessor of pious memory, Sixtus III, still glisten, an outstanding monument to the Divine maternity of the Virgin Mary, and in which the "salvation of the Roman people" (Salus Populi Romani) benignly smiles. Thither especially let the suppliant citizens flock, and before that most sacred image let all put forth pious prayers, imploring especially that Rome, which is the principal city of the Catholic world, may also give the lead in Faith, in piety and in sanctity. We address you, children of Rome, in the words of Our predecessor of saintly memory, Leo the Great, "For although the whole world, should flourish with all the virtues, you, however, above all other peoples, should especially excel in deeds of piety, you who are founded on the citadel of the Apostolic rock, you whom Our Lord, Jesus Christ redeemed with all and the Blessed Apostle Peter instructed above all." (Sermon 111, 14; Migne, PL, LIV, 147-148).

35. There are many things, indeed, which all, in the present circumstances, should petition from the protection, patronage and intercessory power of the Blessed Virgin. In the first place, let them ask that, with the assistance of Divine grace, the way of life of each one may be daily made more conformable to the Christian Commandments, as We have already said, since Faith without works is dead (Cf. James, 2. 20, 26), and since nobody can do anything befitting for the common good unless he himself first shines as an example of virtue before others.

36. Let them also ask with supplication that there may grow up a generous and promising youth, pure and unblemished, and that the beautiful flower of youth may not suffer itself to be infected by the corrupt breath of this world and grow up in vice; that their unbridled zeal and bursting ardor may be governed with even moderation, and that, abhorring all deception, they may not turn toward what is harmful and evil, but raise themselves up to whatever is beautiful, whatever holy, lovable and elevating.

37. United in prayer, let all implore that both in manhood and in old age men may shine by their Christian probity and fortitude; that domestic life may be conspicuous for inviolate faithfulness, that it may flourish through proper and saintly education of its children, and be strengthened by true concord and mutual

help.
38. Let them finally ask that the aged may so rejoice over the fruits of a well-spent life, that, as the end of their mortal course approaches, they may have nothing to fear, no pricks or anxieties of conscience, no cause for shame, but rather firmly trust that they will soon receive the reward of their long labors.
39. Let them, besides, supplicate the Divine Mother, asking bread for the hungry, and justice for the oppressed; return to the fatherland for those banished and exiled; a hospitable roof for the homeless; due liberty for those unjustly cast into prison or custody; for those, who, after so many years have elapsed since the last war, still silently languish and sigh in captivity, the long desired homecoming; for those blind in body or soul, the joy of refulgent light. And for all those separated from each other by hatred, envy and discord, let them implore reconciliation through fraternal charity and through that harmony and peaceful industriousness which is founded on truth. justice and mutual friendship.
40. We desire in a special way, venerable brethren, that through the prayers which will be offered to God during the celebration of the coming Marian Year, supplication be made -- through the intercession of the Mother of the Divine Redeemer and our Most Sweet Mother -- finally the Catholic Church throughout the world may be allowed to enjoy the freedom that is its right: which freedom, as history clearly teaches, the Church has always used to promote the good of peoples, never their detriment; always to foster concord among citizens, nations and peoples, never strife.
41. Everybody knows what difficulties the Church is experiencing in many parts of the world; with what lies, detraction and spoliation she has to contend. All know that in many places pastors of souls are either unhappily banished or thrown into prison without just cause, or else are so harassed that they are unable to carry out their duties properly. Finally, all are well aware that in those same places they are not allowed to have their own schools and training colleges, that they cannot publicly teach, defend or propagate Christian doctrine in periodicals or commentaries, and cannot properly train the youth in accordance with the same doctrine.
42. Therefore, in this Encyclical Letter We earnestly repeat those exhortations made by Us more than once before as the occasion arose: and We firmly trust that during the celebration of this Marian Year fervent prayers be offered throughout the world to the most powerful Mother of God who is also our tender mother; and that in those prayers special requests be made of her efficacious and ever-present patronage, that the sacred rights which are proper to the Church, and which the very exercise of human and civil liberty demands, may be openly and sincerely recognized by all, and this without doubt will conduce to greatest common good and an increase of common concord.
43. We desire in the first place to direct Our exhortation, inspired by ardent charity, to those who, reduced to silence and trapped by all sorts of cunning snares, look with anguish of soul at the affliction and distress of their Christian community, left destitute of all human help. Let these, our dearly beloved brothers, also join with us and all other Christians in invoking before the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation (Cf. 2 Cor. 1. 3) the most powerful patronage of the

Virgin Mother of God, our mother also, and let them ask her for heavenly aid and Divine consolation. Persevering in the ancient Faith with undaunted courage, let them take as their motto of Christian fortitude in this time of trial the words of the Mellifluous Doctor: "We shall stand and fight to death, if needs be, for (the Church) Our Mother, and with lawful weapons: not with the sword and shield, but with prayers and sighs to God (St. Bernard, Epistle 221. 3: Migne PL 182. 36, 387).
44. Furthermore, We call on those also who are separated from Us by ancient schism and whom none the less We love with paternal affection to unite in pouring forth these joint prayers and supplications, knowing full well how greatly they venerate the Mother of Jesus Christ and celebrate her Immaculate Conception. May the same Blessed Virgin Mary look down on all those who are proud to call themselves Christians, and who, being united at least by the bond of charity, humbly raise to her their eyes, their minds and their prayers, imploring that light which illumines the mind with heavenly rays, and begging for that unity by which at last there may be one fold and one shepherd (Cf. John 10. 16).
45. To these unanimous prayers, pious works of penance should be added. For the effect of devotion to prayer is this: "The soul is sustained, is prepared for arduous deeds and ascends to things Divine. The effect of penance is that we control ourselves, especially our body, which is, because of original sin, most rebellious against reason and the law of the Gospel. It is clear that these two virtues are intimately connected, help one another, and combine to withdraw man, who was born for Heaven, from transitory things, and carry him close to heavenly intimacy with God" (Leo XIII, encyc. Octobri mense, Sept. 22, 1891; Acta Leonis X01, XI, p. 312).
46. Since, however, solid, sincere and tranquil peace has not yet appeared in souls and among peoples, let all strive with pious prayer to fully and fruitfully obtain and consolidate it, so that, just as the Most Blessed Virgin brought forth the Prince of Peace, so also may she, by her protection and patronage, unite men in friendly agreement. For then only can they enjoy whatever peaceful prosperity may be given to us during the course of this mortal life -- when they are not divided by rivalries, not wretchedly torn by dissensions, not forced into opposite camps by threats and intrigues; but when, joining hands in friendly affection, they exchange the kiss of peace, that peace "which is tranquil liberty" (Cic, Phil. II. 44), and which, guided by justice and nurtured by charity, unites in one harmonious family the various classes of citizens, nations and people.
47. May the Divine Redeemer, moved by the favor and intercession of His most benign Mother, grant the widest and most fruitful effects to these Our most ardent desires, to which will correspond, We are sure, the wishes, not only of Our own children but also of all those who have at heart the interests of Christian culture and the progress of civil life.
48. Meanwhile, may the Apostolic Benediction which We impart most lovingly in the Lord to all of you, Venerable Brethren, as also to your clergy and people, be a pledge of heavenly gifts and a token of Our paternal benevolence.
49. Given at St. Peter's Rome, on the eighth day of September, on the Feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, in the year 1953, the fifteenth of Our Pontificate.