



Ubi Primum

On The Immaculate Conception

Encyclical Of Pope Pius IX

February 2, 1849

To Our Venerable Brothers, Patriarchs, Primate, Archbishops and Bishops of the Entire Catholic World.

We Give You Greetings, Venerable Brothers, and Our Apostolic Blessing.

No sooner had We been elevated to the sublime Chair of the Prince of the Apostles and undertook the government of the universal Church (not, indeed, because of Our own worthiness but by the hidden designs of Divine Providence) than We had the great consolation, Venerable Brethren, in recalling that, during the pontificate of Gregory XVI, Our Predecessor of happy memory, there was in the entire Catholic world a most ardent and wondrous revival of the desire that the most holy Mother of God -- the beloved Mother of us all, the immaculate Virgin Mary -- be finally declared by a solemn definition of the Church to have been conceived without the stain of original sin.

2. Both to Our Predecessor and to Us this most devout desire was clearly and unmistakably made manifest by the petitions of illustrious bishops, esteemed canonical chapters, and religious congregations, among whom was the renowned Order of Preachers. These appeals vied with one another in the insistent request that official permission be granted for the word Immaculate to be publicly used and be added to the sacred liturgy, particularly in the Preface of the Mass of the Conception of the Blessed Virgin. With the greatest delight, both Our Predecessor and We acceded to these requests.

3. Moreover, Venerable Brethren, many of you have sent letters to Our Predecessor and to Us begging, with repeated insistence and redoubled enthusiasm, that We define as a dogma of the Catholic Church that the most blessed Virgin Mary was conceived immaculate and free in every way of all taint of original sin.

Nor do we lack today eminent theologians -- men of intellectual brilliance, of virtue, of holiness and sound doctrine -- who have so effectively explained this doctrine

and so impressively expounded this proposition that many persons are now wondering why this honor has not already been accorded to the Blessed Virgin by the Church and the Apostolic See -- an honor which the widespread piety of the Christian people so fervently desires to have accorded to the Most Holy Virgin by a solemn decree and by the authority of the Church and the Holy See.

4. Welcome indeed have such requests been to Us. They have filled Us with joy. From our earliest years nothing has ever been closer to Our heart than devotion-filial, profound, and wholehearted-to the most blessed Virgin Mary. Always have We endeavored to do everything that would redound to the greater glory of the Blessed Virgin, promote her honor, and encourage devotion to her. Accordingly, from the very beginning of Our supreme pontificate We have most fervently directed Our energies and Our thoughts to this matter of such great importance. Nor have We failed, through humble and fervent prayers, to beg almighty God to enlighten Our mind with the light of His grace in order that We might know what We should do in this matter.

Great indeed is Our trust in Mary. The resplendent glory of her merits, far exceeding all the choirs of angels, elevates her to the very steps of the throne of God.[1] Her foot has crushed the head of Satan. Set up between Christ and His Church,[2] Mary, ever lovable and full of grace, always has delivered the Christian people from their greatest calamities and from the snares and assaults of all their enemies, ever rescuing them from ruin.

5. And likewise in our own day, Mary, with the ever merciful affection so characteristic of her maternal heart, wishes, through her efficacious intercession with God, to deliver her children from the sad and grief-laden troubles, from the tribulations, the anxiety, the difficulties, and the punishments of God's anger which afflict the world because of the sins of men. Wishing to restrain and to dispel the violent hurricane of evils which, as We lament from the bottom of Our heart, are everywhere afflicting the Church, Mary desires to transform Our sadness into joy. The foundation of all Our confidence, as you know well, Venerable Brethren, is found in the Blessed Virgin Mary. For, God has committed to Mary the treasury of all good things, in order that everyone may know that through her are obtained every hope, every grace, and all salvation. For this is His will, that we obtain everything through Mary.[3]

Accordingly, We have appointed certain priests of recognized piety and theological learning, as well as several cardinals of the Holy Roman Church who are renowned because of their ability, piety, wisdom, prudence, and knowledge of the things of God; and We have directed them to make, carefully and thoroughly, a most diligent examination into this most important matter and then provide Us with a complete report. Through such a procedure, We feel that We are following in the clearly marked footsteps of Our Predecessors and that We are emulating their example.

6. Wherefore, Venerable Brethren, We sent you this communication that We may effectively encourage your admirable devotion and your pastoral zeal and thus bring it about that each of you, in such manner as you will see fit, will arrange to have public prayers offered in your diocese for this intention: that the most merciful Father of all knowledge will deign to enlighten Us with the heavenly light of His Holy Spirit, so that in a matter of such moment We may proceed to do what will redound to the greater glory of His Holy Name, to the honor of the most Blessed Virgin, and to the profit of the Church Militant.

We eagerly desire, furthermore, that, as soon as possible, you apprise Us concerning the devotion which animates your clergy and your people regarding the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin and how ardently glows the desire that this doctrine be defined by the Apostolic See. And especially, Venerable Brethren, We wish to know what you yourselves, in your wise judgment, think and desire on this matter.

7. And inasmuch as We have already granted to the clergy of Rome permission that, instead of what is contained in the common breviary, they may recite the special canonical hours, in honor of the Conception of the Blessed Virgin, which were recently arranged and published, We likewise, by this present Letter, grant to you, Venerable Brethren, the faculty, if you wish to use it, of permitting the clergy of your own diocese to recite, licitly and validly, the same canonical hours of the Conception of the Blessed Virgin now in use with the clergy of Rome. This may be done without obtaining further authorization from Us or from the Sacred Congregation of Rites.

Knowing well, Venerable Brethren, your tender devotion toward the Blessed Virgin Mary, We are sure that it will be your pleasure to cooperate, zealously and diligently, with Our wishes and that you will hasten to supply Us with the replies which We have requested.

8. Meanwhile, receive as a pledge of all celestial favors, and above all as a witness of Our good will towards you, the Apostolic Benediction which We give from the bottom of Our heart to you, Venerable Brethren, as well as to all the clergy and the faithful entrusted to your guidance.

Given at Gaeta, on the 2nd day of February, in the year 1849, in the third year of Our Pontificate.

1. St. Gregory, Pope, de Exposit. in libros Regum.
2. St. Bernard, Serm. in cap. XII Apocalyps.
3. St. Bernard, In Nativit. S. Mariae de Aquaeductu.