

From December 8<sup>th</sup> through the beginning of the year, we are privileged to honor the Blessed Virgin Mary five separate and distinct times.

Beginning on Thursday, December 8<sup>th</sup>, we reflect on her Immaculate Conception, acknowledging that Mary was preserved free from all stain of original sin. On Monday, December 12<sup>th</sup>, the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, we see the image of Mary, "clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars," a representation of the Immaculate Conception. In 1961, Pope John XXIII bestowed on her the title "Mother of the Americas", denoting her role as Mother and Teacher of the Faith of All American populations.

On Christmas Day, the nativity brings us to Mary, giving birth to our Lord, Jesus Christ in the humble stable, bringing to the world the Son of the Most High. On Friday, December 30<sup>th</sup>, we again honor the Blessed Virgin Mary, Jesus, and Saint Joseph, as the Holy Family, a model for all marriages and families to strive to emulate. Then on January 1<sup>st</sup>, the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God, we celebrate Mary's motherhood of Jesus.

As we reflect on Mary and the gift she is to us, it is easy to perceive how through her ageless beauty and compassion, we are drawn to her to intercede for us in our lives today. But sometimes we may be reluctant to ask for her intercession, not sure if she will understand, forgetting how similar our world and the situations she experienced 2000 years ago truly are.

For example, during Mary's life, due to the Jewish triple tax (10% to priests and Levites, 10% for temple sacrifice, and a bit over 3% for the poor) added to the normal Roman taxes (about 25%), Jews could pay more than half their income in taxes. As we debate concepts such as the trillion dollar debt, tax reform, NAFTA, a struggling economy, are we not tempted to think this is a new phenomenon?

Mary's homeland was occupied by the Romans and life was difficult under Roman rule, filled with violence and poverty. The Jews prayed for the Messiah to liberate them from the oppressive rule of Caesar. In her Magnificat, Mary notes the injustice of the world around her when she recalls God's promise to throw "down the rulers from their thrones, but lifted up the lowly." (Luke 1:46-55). We are faced with our religious liberties threatened, radical changes in societal norms, a push to sequester our religious beliefs to the inner sanctum of personal life, and a lack of respect of not only our religious freedoms, but for the dignity of life itself. The words from Mary's Magnificat beckon us to put everything in perspective, "The Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is from age to age to those who fear him."

Mary holds out to us this glimmer of hope. Hope that we, as a nation, will turn back to God. That we will, in our compassion for our neighbors, no matter what language they speak, the color of their skin or their country of origin, treat each and every person with the dignity and respect we are called to do as members of the human family and as Christians. That we will continue to hold our legislators responsible to promote and enact laws that provide for our religious freedom, the sanctity of life, from the moment of conception to a natural death. That we make our voices heard to restore marriage to its natural state, only between one man and one woman, but with respect for those who do not

understand. And that we entrust our nation to our loving, almighty God, showing him honor and glory for his wonderful creation in all.

Since Mary always points us to Christ, may we ask for her assistance. May we in our families pray the Rosary, asking for Mary's powerful intercession to help us repent, turn away from our sinful ways, to be beacons of light in this dark world. And as the words from the closing prayer after the rosary, "that while meditating on these mysteries of the most holy Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary, we may imitate what they contain and obtain what they promise, through the same Christ our Lord. Amen."