

the prayers. He himself had inspired, and sent an angel to tell her that He would give her a daughter.

Then her womb became august like unto heaven and wonders were accomplished such as the world had never seen and will never see again. Mary was conceived but conceived without sin, without corruption. She was conceived in the very use of grace and in the perfection of grace. She was conceived in holiness and in such eminent holiness that not one of the saints or angels has ever equalled or will ever equal her. Anne began to bear Her whom all the ages had impatiently awaited, whom the Cherubim and Seraphim looked upon with astonishment as the master-piece of divine power, and whom the three persons of the adorable Trinity loved in a singular manner owing to their great designs for her. Who can doubt that Anne had a share in the inestimable graces conferred upon her daughter, and that they were reflected upon her to increase her purity and fervor at all times? For if St John the Baptist at the moment of his sanctification caused the spirit of piety and prophesy wherewith he was endowed to be reflected upon his mother, what should we think of Mary, with regard to St Anne at the precious moment of her Immaculate Conception when so many blessings were showered upon her? What an abundance of graces and supernatural favors was poured upon this holy woman!

The intention of the Church in celebrating the feast of Mary's Immaculate Conception is not only to celebrate the anniversary of the happy moment when the life of the most glorious Virgin began in the womb of the pious Anne; but also to honor the sublime privilege, by virtue of which Mary was preserved from the stain of original sin that all sons of Adam contract in their mother's womb. The faith of the Catholic Church that proclaimed the apostolic oracle through the mouth of Pius IX amidst the applause of all Christendom, teaches us that at the moment when God united Mary's soul which He had just created, to the body it was to animate, that ever blessed soul, not only had not the stain that at this moment soils every human soul, but that it was filled with immense grace, rendering it from that moment the mirror of God's own holiness, in so far as is possible in a created being.