

The Novena in Honor of the Immaculate Conception.

From time immemorial the Church has, on the eighth of December, paid special honor to the Blessed Virgin as being, from the first moment of her existence, free from all stain of sin. In order to pay singular homage to this prerogative, and to increase the devotion of the faithful to the Mother of God, Pope Pius IX, in 1854, declared it a doctrine of faith that the Blessed Virgin was conceived without sin.

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Fifteen years before this solemn declaration a young French priest, with the oils of ordination fresh on his hands, came out to Indiana at the invitation of the Bishop of Vincennes. He was without material resources, but he had a vast, clean mind, with the courage that comes of purity and confidence in the Mother of God. He had in his heart a bold and a noble project, to raise in the wilderness of Indiana a monument to the Blessed Virgin that would vie with the monuments erected in Europe during the ages of Faith.

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After three years of missionary labors in southern Indiana, Father Sorin came to this spot which he sanctified by more than fifty years of labor. Before he died he had the consolation of seeing Notre Dame almost as it is now; and what gladdened his heart most was to see the golden statue upon its golden pedestal, proclaiming to the world that the way to train young men to purity of heart is to place them under the protection and inspiration of the purest of virgins.

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Notre Dame owes its existence to the Blessed Virgin, and her students owe their purity to her powerful intercession. And as long as this old school stands, that debt will not be forgotten. It cannot be. Were that debt forgotten these walls would crumble. And the spirit that will sustain this devotion is the spirit of Blessed Ferdinand, crown prince of Portugal, who, when told in his Moorish dungeon that the price of his liberty was the city of Ceuta, made answer:

Is it right the sacred walls
Of their chapels become stables,
And their holy altars stalls?
Or if this should not so happen,
Turn to mosques! My cheek grows pale;

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For it was not the first time
Stalls and stables gave a lodging
Unto God. But oh! the crime
Of becoming mosques! It seemeth
Like an epitaph -- a wide
Mark of ingamy undying --
Saying, Here did God abide,
And the Christians now deny it,
Giving it a gift instead
To the demon!

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If there were no reason
But that Ceuta doth enfold
A divine church consecrated
To the eternal reverence
Of the Conception of Our Lady,
Queen of Heaven and earth's events,
I would lose, so she be honored,
Myriad lives in her defense, -

Calderon, El Principe Constante.