



# **OUR LADY OF MERCY PARISH**

## **Boca Grande, Florida**

Father Anthony Hewitt, Pastor

Mailing Address:

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### Mass Schedule:

Daily (except Saturday)	8:00 A.M.
Saturday Vigil	5:00 P.M.
Sunday	9:00 & 10:30 A.M.
Confessions: Saturday	By Appointment
Web address:	<a href="http://ourladyofmercy.church">ourladyofmercy.church</a>
OnlineGiving:	<a href="https://ourladyofmercy.church">https://ourladyofmercy.church</a>

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**FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT**

**DECEMBER 3, 2023**

### **TUESDAY ADORATION**

Dear People of God,

**Holy Hour is every Tuesday at 10:00 am.** We will start with Exposition of the Blessed Eucharist, then silent adoration, and ending with Benediction at 11:00 am. This is a beautiful opportunity to spend time before our Lord and to offer prayers for our needs. It is my hope that we pray for vocations to the priesthood and the religious life during this time with Jesus, as well as the renewal of Church in the Eucharist the world over. May this time before Jesus bring us grace and healing. Prayers of Adoration may be found on the table in back of church.

*Father Anthony*

### **RETIREMENT FUND FOR RELIGIOUS**

The annual collection for the Retirement Fund for Religious the **weekend of December 9 and 10, 2023**. Your support provides day to day care of elderly sisters, brothers, and religious order priests. Thank you for your generosity towards these men and women who have given their lives to serve our Lord, the Church and Her Faithful.

### **A MESSAGE FROM FATHER CAROSELLA**

At the Nov. 17<sup>th</sup> celebration in the Parish Life Center in recognition of my 85 years of life and my 60 years as a priest, I spoke of the place of gratitude in our lives. Since most of you who were there are avid readers of the parish bulletin, I am using this means to reach out to all of you to express my profound gratitude for your many kind and generous expressions of love and prayerful good wishes. I am truly humbled and blessed. Fr. Anthony could not have been kinder and more thoughtful, and his warm welcome made me feel right at home. Those who worked so hard to make it such an enjoyable evening for all of us are too numerous to mention: the planning committee members, the cadre of volunteers, kitchen staff, AV technicians, photo-slide show, floral table decorations, etc. The beautiful rendering of the hymn to our Lady, the Salve Regina, was a fitting close to a wonderful evening. My Mass on Thanksgiving Day was offered for all of you. Peace and blessing. Fr. C.

## IMMACULATE CONCEPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

Mass times: Friday, December 8<sup>th</sup>: 9:00 AM

## THE CHRISTMAS EVE AND CHRISTMAS DAY SCHEDULE OF MASSES

Sunday December 24	Fourth Sunday of Advent Mass at 9:00 and 10:30 am*
Sunday December 24	<b>Christmas Eve Vigil Mass</b> at 5:00 pm
Sunday December 24	<b>Christmas Midnight Mass</b> at 8:00 pm
Monday December 25	<b>Christmas Day Mass</b> at 9:00 and 10:30 am

\*Note that the December 24<sup>th</sup> morning Masses are for the Fourth Sunday of Advent.

## THE FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

The First Sunday of Advent begins at the vigil Mass on Saturday December 2. As a gift to parishioners, a copy of the book *Beautiful Eucharist* by Matthew Kelly will be available for each to read during the four weeks of advent. Please take and enjoy this magnificent book of reflections on the life-giving presence of Jesus in the Eucharist.

Jesus said to his disciples: “As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. In those days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying, and giving in marriage, up to the day that Noah entered the ark. They did not know until the flood came and carried them all away. So will it be also at the coming of the Son of Man.” [Matthew 24:37–39](#)

Are we awake? Spiritually speaking? As we begin the liturgical season of Advent, we are given the future coming of the Son of God to ponder. As this passage goes on, Jesus says, “Therefore, stay awake! For you do not know on which day your Lord will come.” By the “day your Lord will come,” we should understand three things. The first coming of Christ is obviously that which we most clearly ponder in Advent and Christmas. The unity of human nature with divine nature, in the Person of Jesus, is truly awe-inspiring. But that already took place long ago. Thus, a second coming of Christ that we must continually ponder is His coming by grace, every moment of every day of our lives, once we have chosen to freely give our lives over to His service, for His glory, in accord with His will. When we live with such an interior disposition by which we seek His ongoing “coming” by grace, then we will find that we need to continually “stay awake!” If we do not, then we can be certain that we will miss countless opportunities to become more united to Christ every day and to be used as an instrument of that very grace for His service and glory. If we do not diligently build a habit of becoming attentive to every prompting of grace in our lives, then we will, unquestionably, begin to become “drowsy” and will fall asleep, spiritually speaking.

A wonderful measure of our daily attentiveness to the innumerable gifts of grace given to us every day is to also consider how attentive we are to the final and glorious coming of Christ at the end of time. Just as Jesus explains, most people will pay little attention to this final coming, presuming it will not even be in their lifetimes. But if we have that attitude, then we have completely missed the point. The point is preparedness—today, tomorrow, and always. True preparedness for the final coming of Christ will not only help us enter the mysteries of these Advent and Christmas seasons by which we ponder the first coming of Christ, it will also help us form a habit of daily attentiveness to grace.

How ready are we for the final coming of Christ at the end of time? Are we ready if Christ were to come today? If not, understand that a lack of preparedness for the final coming also means a lack of preparedness to celebrate His first coming at Christmas long ago, as well as His daily comings by grace. Prepare today. Do not wait. If we do, God will daily transform us in ways that are glorious beyond comprehension.

### **Friday December 8: Holy Day of Obligation Immaculate Conception:**

In 1854, Pope Pius IX issued an apostolic constitution called *Ineffabilis Deus* by which he declared the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary to be a dogma of faith. This definition was a response to the longstanding devotion and theological consensus that had built up over the centuries. By declaring a dogma of faith, the holy father used his highest papal teaching authority, binding every Catholic to accept this teaching.

*Ineffabilis Deus* begins by stating that the creation of the Blessed Virgin Mary was in the mind of God from all eternity. She is the Father's "singular delight," and "under God, one cannot even imagine anything greater, and which, outside of God, no mind can succeed in comprehending fully." This statement should leave us with a profound faith in the Immaculate Conception and an acknowledgment of the great and incomprehensible mystery we celebrate. Only in Heaven, as we behold the Beatific Vision, will our minds also behold the beauty and profound mystery of God's greatest act of creation in the person of the Mother of God. Her life is not an end in itself. She is not worshiped. She is not God. She is, however, to be loved and honored in a singularly unique way, for she is God's most glorious creation and will be honored as such forever.

The first thing we must know about our Immaculate Mother is that she needed a Savior, just as all humans do. Her Savior is her Son, just as He is our Savior. However, in her, salvation was given "by a singular grace and privilege." We are saved by the washing away of original sin through baptism. The Blessed Virgin Mary was preserved from original sin from the first moment of her conception. She still suffered the effects of original sin, just as her Son did, in that He suffered and died. But her salvation transcended time in that the merits of salvation won by her Son Jesus' Incarnation, death, and resurrection saved her from original sin at the very moment of her creation.

Mary's role is first alluded to in the book of Genesis. We read about the fall of Adam and Eve, introducing Original Sin into human nature, thus requiring a Savior. [Genesis 3:15](#) presents what many have called the *Protoevangelium* or "First Gospel" because, in mysterious language, it presents Christ as the New Adam and the Blessed Virgin Mary as the new Eve: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; They will strike at your head, while you strike at their heel." The "enmity" between the serpent and the "woman" reveals Mary's complete opposition to the evil one and to sin. The "offspring" is Jesus and He will crush the head of satan, destroying sin and evil forever. This passage also reveals that Jesus invites His mother to participate in this act of salvation in a unique way. "*They will strike at your head...*" implying both Jesus and the Blessed Virgin Mary overcame sin and satan together, by the power of God, but through the motherhood of Mary, the new mother of all the living and the mother of those in the new order of grace.

The Blessed Virgin Mary has also been traditionally seen as the new Ark of the Covenant. The first Ark was a sacred vessel that contained the Ten Commandments, manna, and Aaron's rod. The Ark was a symbol of God's divine presence that only the High Priest could approach once a year after rigorous purification rituals. The Blessed Virgin Mary, being the new Ark of the Covenant, should also be treated with the greatest veneration, for she bore the divine within her womb and He came forth from her own body. Only the Great High Priest, Jesus her Son, could dare to approach and dwell within her.

At the Annunciation, the Archangel Gabriel came to the Virgin and said, "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you!" ([Luke 1:28](#)). This passage points to the Immaculate nature of the Blessed Virgin Mary. To be "full of grace" affirms the fact that grace so permeated Mary's soul that sin had no place within her. Not only was she created free from sin, she also remained sinless throughout her life through the merit of her ongoing assent to God. Her prayerful response to the archangel was not only her response at that moment but was her continuous response to God throughout her life, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word" ([Luke 1:38](#)).

From at least the seventh century, churches in the East celebrated in the liturgy Mary's conception in Saint Anne's womb. The Church in the West soon followed, emphasizing the immaculate nature of her conception. In the fifteenth century, Pope Sixtus IV approved a liturgical celebration for the Feast of the Immaculate Conception and then extended that feast to the entire Western Church. In the centuries that followed, successive popes issued clearer teachings in support of the definition of the Immaculate Conception. Because of this ongoing and deepening definition of the Immaculate Conception, Pope Pius IX lifted this teaching to the highest level possible when he issued *Ineffabilis Deus* in 1854.

If we turn again to the beginning of that constitution in which the holy father said that "no mind can succeed in comprehending fully" the Blessed Virgin Mary, then we will realize that the little we know and understand about her remains a deep mystery that we will only fully comprehend in Heaven. Therefore, as we honor the Immaculate Conception and Mary's immaculate nature, we also must anticipate a continual unfolding of who she is. The dogma of the Immaculate Conception was not the end but the beginning. After that pronouncement, subsequent popes have continued to deepen their teaching on her. In 1904, Pope Pius X spoke of Mary as the Mediatrix of Graces. In 1950, Pope Pius XII defined the dogma of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary into Heaven; in 1954, he established the Feast of the Queenship of Mary. Vatican II spoke of Mary as Mother of the Church and the Mediatrix of Grace.

As we celebrate this great Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, try to ponder the incomprehensible nature of the Mother of God. Knowing that she is an impenetrable mystery will help us honor her with the reverence and awe she deserves. The best news of all to ponder is that this perfect creation of God is not a distant icon to adore, she is our own caring mother, a mediatrix of God's grace. Her tender care for her children will never waver, and her intercession will always bring to us all good things we need to achieve salvation.

### **OUR ANNUAL SHOE BOX**

As is our custom each year, we have placed a shoe box on the table in the rear of the church for donations for Christmas gifts to the children of the migrant families of St. Paul's Parish of Arcadia. Please make checks out to: Catholic Charities of DeSoto County. Do not make check out to Our Lady of Mercy. Thank you for your generous support.

### **FOOD PANTRY**

As the holiday seasons are quickly approaching, please remember the food pantry at St. Francis of Assisi Parish in Grove City. They are always in need of non-perishable (and unopened) food items. Please place donated items in the plastic bin under the table inside the church. To give you some helpful hints, they are in need of canned vegetables, mac and cheese, toothbrushes, and toothpaste. Thank you for your support.