

THE PATRONESS OF THE UNITED STATES

While our infant nation was peacefully slumbering in her cradle of ease and prosperity about the middle of the nineteenth century, a number of bishops representing the Catholic hierarchy of the United States gathered together in the city of Baltimore. This convocation was called the Sixth Council of Baltimore, the purpose of which was to consider the then status of our country, and to propose any means that appeared necessary for the future spiritual well-being of our richly endowed commonwealth.

These good shepherds quickly perceived that our land was unsurpassed in natural resources and beauty. Likewise too, they keenly felt that since it was of such promise it should be placed under the protection of a powerful spiritual guide, according to the counsel of the Royal Psalmist; "Unless the Lord keep the city, he watcheth in vain that keepeth it."

Their task was somewhat perplexing, since the patrons of all other nations were outstanding figures among their people. France had her Saint Denis; Ireland her Saint Patrick; England her Saint George; Spain her Saint James. But these forefathers of ours found the pages of our history void of even one whom they could select to be our mediator before the everlasting throne of the King of kings, and the God of all nations.

Far from being disheartened on account of such circumstances, these ambassadors of Christ, mindful of those hopeful and encouraging words of their Blessed Master, "Ask, and it shall be given you: seek, and you shall find: knock, and it shall be opened to you," sought the solution of their difficulty from Him, through the channel of prayer. The wisdom of their action shows itself in the admirable selection of the Blessed Virgin Mary, under the title "Immaculate Conception."

Now, in the words of a learned writer, "A patron is one who has been assigned by a venerable tradition, or chosen by election, as a special intercessor with God, and the proper advocate of a particular locality, and is honored by clergy and people with a special form of religious observance." As citizens of the United States we owe the greatest honor and reverence to the memory of those bishops who selected as our patron her whom God chose for His own mother, and to whom the Archangel said, "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee."

Then, further favor with God was shown her, in being the first adorer of the long-expected Messiah in the stable at Bethlehem. This high esteem with her Creator was still more manifested when Our Lord performed His initial miracle at her solicitation, by changing water into wine at the wedding-feast in Cana. But not only was Mary privileged to be the Mother of the Prince of Peace, she was also assigned by Him to be the Mother of all His faithful followers, when our Crucified Saviour addressed those memorable words to her and His beloved disciple: "Woman, behold thy son; Son behold thy Mother."

From the earliest days of Christianity, history and tradition have amply testified to the fidelity with which the Blessed Virgin has fulfilled this everlasting charge. Among the traditions handed down by Holy Mother Church showing how powerful is her intercession in heaven in behalf of her clients, two are especially worthy of our consideration during the crucial days through which our country is at present passing.

The first is that of the powerful aid rendered by the Blessed Virgin in answer to the prayer of Saint Dominic. This happened in the thirteenth century when the Albigensian heresy was making deep inroads throughout Christian Europe. The false doctrines and loose morals of this heretical sect enticed many souls to enroll themselves among its adherents, thereby causing an alarming diminution of the followers of Holy Mother Church. Various were the endeavors made by Catholic defenders to offset this formidable enemy, but all proved futile. Saint Dominic, reared up by God at that time, as a true client of Mary, centered his entire hope of victory in his supplications to her. That his confidence was not misplaced Saint Dominic soon became assured, for Our Lady appeared to him in a vision and presented him with her Rosary as the weapon with which to gain his victory over the heretics. Animated by a spirit of unquenchable zeal the glorious Founder of the Order of Preachers went among the people preaching Mary's Rosary, and in a comparatively short period it became evident that the Albigensian heresy would be short-lived.

The second singular instance of prayers offered to the Mother of God proving most fruitful against a stalwart enemy of Christianity occurred in the sixteenth century. Europe at this time having been considerably affected by the so-called Reforma-

tion afforded a most favorable opportunity to the Turks to make advances against those Catholic countries with which she had been warring for centuries. Grasping the occasion by the strength of a large army and navy they succeeded in occupying not a little territory in Southern Europe.

So rapid were the strides of these followers of the Sultan that the situation grew very alarming. Pope Saint Pius V, realizing the need of active opposition, took the initiative. He aroused King Philip of Spain and the Venetians to collect forces and in addition a large fleet was prepared at Messina. Having thus instilled a spirit of resistance into the civil authorities, the Pope inaugurated a still more effective campaign among the faithful by inciting them to recite daily the Most Holy Rosary to the Immaculate Mother of God. His Holiness, quite satisfied over the preparations instituted, gave his benediction to the fleet embarking from Messina in search of the Turkish ships. Eager to bring down as much assistance as possible from on high, the Pope redoubled his supplications to the Queen of Heaven.

At length, on the 7th of October, 1571, the Christian fleet met and totally destroyed the Sultan's squadron at Lepanto, thereby removing all fear of any further trouble. On the day of this overwhelming victory the Vicar of Christ while engaged in the transaction of business with his secretary, became informed of it through a vision. Immediately he made known the glad tidings, and bade him announce them to the people that they might give thanks to their Sacramental God.

America's confidence in the power and influence of the Blessed Virgin Mary was also exhibited in the world-wide war. Shortly after our country's entrance into the throes of this most savage contest, a message came forth from the spiritual watch-tower of our nation in the united words of America's Cardinals, "Let us, each day, until the peace for which we fight crowns our efforts, say daily three times, morning, at rising, at noon, and in the evening, the Angelus for the guidance of our rulers, the success of our arms, the unity of the nations and the welfare of heroes." In other words the shepherds of our nation exhorted us, the physical children of Adam and Eve, and the spiritual children of Jesus and Mary to cast our highest hope in the Mother of the King of kings and the Prince of Peace.

God alone only knows with what degree of confidence in our holy patroness our beloved soldier and sailor boys took up their material weapons in accordance with the wishes of our civil authorities and went forth into a foreign land to fight for liberty, justice and right. Daily are the reports being circulated now, of how usefully and fruitfully did our noble heroes wield their spiritual weapons throughout the entire campaign in their victorious conquest, especially that most cherished prayer of Mary, the Most Holy Rosary.

Filled to overflowing with a spirit of gratitude to Mary Immaculate for her inestimable assistance rendered to our supposedly unprepared martial nation, our present hierarchical superiors are sending forth their clarion notes of appeal to all the faithful of our beloved country to lend their greatest possible aid toward erecting a national shrine on the grounds of the Catholic University of America, Washington, D. C., in honor of our holy Patroness, the Immaculate Conception. May each devotee of the Virgin Mary warmly support this most praiseworthy movement of our benign and prudent spiritual directors until the pinnacle of success crowns their efforts, and this fitting symbol of our gratitude to Mary for the success of our arms stands at our nation's capitol to evidence the depth of our faith in her loving protection.

—Bro. Charles Kelly, O. P.