

**Homily on The Blessed Virgin Mary – Mother of Consolation
Novena in Honor of the
Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary**

**Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception
Springfield, Illinois**

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First Sunday of Advent**

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My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, it is good that we are here on this, the third night of our annual novena in honor of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. It is quite fitting that over the course of this novena we are afforded the opportunity to reflect on a number of the images used by the Church to describe our Blessed Mother. Tonight, we gather to reflect on the Blessed Virgin Mary as Mother of Consolation.

As one of the earliest titles of honor for our Blessed Mother, “Our Lady of Consolation” is believed to have been used even as early as the second century. According to the tradition of the Augustinian religious community, Saint Monica, the mother of Saint Augustine, suffered much from her wayward son’s sinful ways. It is said that she confided her distress to our Blessed Mother, who appeared to Saint Monica wearing a leather cincture,

which Mary removed and gave to Saint Monica with an assurance that whoever wore this cincture would receive her special consolation and protection. Saint Monica gave this cincture to her son, Saint Augustine, who, after his conversion to Christ, gave it to the members of his monastic community.

Since the time of Saint Augustine, devotion to Our Lady as Mother of Consolation, (from the Latin *Consolatrix Afflictorum*, which translates as Consoler of the Afflicted), has grown to become a popular devotion to our Blessed Mother.

In 1642, devotion to Our Lady of Luxembourg, Comforter of the Afflicted, was initiated by the Jesuits. This devotion led to Our Lady under this title being named as the protectress of the city in 1666 and of the country in 1678. Statues depicting Our Lady of Luxembourg, Comforter of the Afflicted, can be found throughout the city of Luxembourg.

Here, in the United States, immigrants from Luxembourg helped to popularize devotion to Our Lady of Consolation. During the Civil War, three Union soldiers, who were parishioners of St. Augustine Parish in Leopold, Indiana, were imprisoned at the Andersonville Prison in Georgia, one of the largest Confederate military prisons during the Civil War. They vowed that

if they survived, one of them would make a pilgrimage to Luxembourg and obtain a copy of the statue of Our Lady of Consolation. In 1867, Lambert Rogier, one of the three men who had been imprisoned, journeyed to Luxembourg and upon his return enshrined the statue of Our Lady of Consolation in St. Augustine Church, where it remains today.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, while we are not combatants in a physical war, devotion to Our Lady, Comforter of the Afflicted, is a timely devotion for us as we fight in the spiritual battles of our day. In a particular way, let us entrust Holy Mother Church to our Blessed Mother under this title that she may intercede on our behalf, that we may be delivered from the scourge of clergy sexual misconduct afflicting the Church due to the actions of some of her wayward sons.

Just a few moments ago, we heard one of the most well-known passages in the Gospel according to Saint Matthew, the Sermon on the Mount. This "Sermon on the Mount" encompasses one of the central teachings of our Lord during His public ministry. This teaching is one of humility, charity, and brotherly love. Our Lord gives His disciples the Beatitudes in a positive sense. These are not a list of "thou shalt nots." Rather, they are ways of living a virtuous life which will bring peace in the

midst of our trials and tribulations in this life and ultimately lead to one's heavenly reward in the life to come.

St. Gregory of Nyssa, a mystic who lived in Cappadocia in Asia Minor around 380 AD, described the Beatitudes this way:

Beatitude is a possession of all things held to be good, from which nothing is absent that a good desire may want. Perhaps the meaning of beatitude may become clearer to us if it is compared with its opposite. Now the opposite of beatitude is misery. Misery means being afflicted unwillingly with painful sufferings.¹

In light of this explanation of the Beatitudes, let us call on our Blessed Mother, Comforter of the Afflicted, to intercede for us, that we may be given the grace to live as Christ's disciples in the midst of the world today and experience the comfort of her maternal consolation as we face the painful sufferings of this life.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ St. Gregory of Nyssa. *The Lord's Prayer and The Beatitudes*. Ancient Christian Writer Series, Paulist Press, Mahwah, New Jersey.