

September 1, 2018 8:30 a.m. Kellogg Arena, Battle Creek

National Conference of Burmese American Catholics (NCBAC)

Opening Mass: Votive Mass in Honor of our Blessed Mother

(Revelation 12:1-6; Luke. 1:46-50)

Conference Theme: "From now on all generations will call me blessed."

Dear Archbishop Basilio, my brother priests, Sisters, and all my brothers and sisters---***Praised be Jesus Christ!***

Once again, I warmly welcome you to the Diocese of Kalamazoo for your 9th annual national conference of Burmese American Catholics! We are very happy to have you meet here in Battle Creek, the new home for a large number of very faithful Burmese Catholics. Our Diocese is enriched by the presence of our Burmese Catholics; and in fact, one of our Seminarians, Biak Thuantho, is from this very community of faithful Catholics. (Biak will be joining you tomorrow since he's finishing the retreat to begin the new academic year at Sacred Heart Seminary in Detroit.)

This Conference has the theme: "*From now on, all generations will call me blessed*", the words we heard just a few moments ago in our Gospel reading, spoken by our Blessed Mother. And we dedicate this entire conference in praise of our Lord Jesus Christ, and asking the loving intercession of our Blessed Mother by offering this Holy Mass in her honor.

What a powerful model of grace and holiness Mary is for all of us. While we know very few details, the "highpoints" of Mary's life consistently show her to be totally and joyfully responsive to whatever it was that God asked of her.

At the Annunciation, when the Archangel Gabriel greeted her with those words that are the first part of one of our most treasured prayers: "*Hail Mary, full of Grace, the Lord is with You!*" What a compliment—hello, you who are filled with Grace—it is the Lord of all Eternity Who abides with, and in, you. And when Gabriel told her what God was asking of her—the incredible, unimaginable reality of bearing the Son of God thru the power of the Holy Spirit, Mary's only thought was for God, not for herself, and she said: "*Fiat!*" —Let it be done as You say.

Immediately, as we heard in our Gospel reading this morning, she went to visit her cousin Elizabeth, so that she could help her in what would be a difficult

pregnancy, where Elizabeth greeted her with the 2nd part of the Hail Mary: *“Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the Fruit of your Womb”*, the One Who will be Jesus, the Savior! And of course that’s when we heard Mary’s response—nothing at all about herself; it was all about God: *“My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.”* Those words, which we heard Mary speak for the first time in today’s Holy Gospel, makes up the loveliest prayer of the Church known as the Magnificat, the prayer which we pray every day as part of the Church’s official Evening Prayer.

We can see Mary’s response at every other moment in her life—during the trip to Bethlehem, the Flight into Egypt, the Presentation in the Temple—throughout all of Jesus’ “Hidden Years”. Her response was always: “Fiat—Let it be done as you say”!

My dear Friends, Mary is the perfect Model of Holiness—and the one who shows us that we too are capable of that kind of holiness—but only with God’s Grace, and only when we have a humble heart and docile spirit. Because as Mary showed us at every moment in her life, it was not about her; it was always about loving God and magnifying His greatness in every way she could do.

But we have to be very clear what a life of holiness means. There are some who think that to be holy, one must retreat from the world—enter into a convent or a monastery—spend 24 hours a day in fervent prayer—never participate in anything that could trip us up or distract us. While that is one way to live a holy life, it is by far not the only way. That’s not what Mary did, is it? It is not what most of the great saints did either.

Mary lived a life of holiness, in the midst of a life of busyness, but she always lived her busy life with the spirit of blessedness; in a spirit of what we would come to know as the Beatitudes.

It’s quite possible that when Jesus taught us the Beatitudes in the great Sermon on the Mount, that He developed that list of blessed attitudes of life from watching His Mother Mary, and His foster father Joseph, hard at work every day. They were “poor in spirit”; and they were “merciful”, and “pure in heart”.

It’s quite possible that Mary taught Jesus these “blessed-attitudes”, or “beatitudes”, as a boy in the process of becoming a man. She probably taught Him that for one to be one with God, one must be “a peacemaker”; but she also taught Him, and as He would certainly experience for Himself, that when one

stands up for what is right, one might very well be persecuted, made fun of, get bullied, or laughed at—and that too can be a blessing if we see it as helping to advance God’s Kingdom.

Living a life of holiness, dear sisters and brothers of Christ, requires not a retreat from the world, but an immersion in the world, and doing all that we can to live our lives according to Jesus’ teachings and example, and through the intercession of our dear Blessed Mother.

While Mary was certainly “pure and lowly”, “meek and mild” as a number of our Marian hymns portray her, she was also strong and bold, and courageous and fearless, once again, not because of her own abilities, but because she was the vessel for God’s graces —she was “full of Grace” and the “Lord was always with her”. Let’s not think for one second that Mary’s life was easy or simple; it was anything but that. Mary had to constantly be ready to do battle with the sinful realities in which she lived, and certainly the temptations that she encountered from the Evil One.

That is what we heard in today’s powerful First Reading from the Book of Revelation—the awful scene of the “*woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and on her head a crown of twelve stars*”. She was with child, and about to give birth. And the great Dragon, the Evil One, was waiting to somehow try to destroy the child to be born.

That scene describes the cosmic, and ongoing battle between Good and Evil, a battle which God of course has already won through the suffering, death and Resurrection of Jesus our Lord, but a Battle which the Evil One never tires of waging against any and all of the Holy Ones—all of us—the entire Church.

In fact the very next lines of that chapter in the Book of Revelation describe the war in Heaven between Michael and his Archangels who battle and cast out of Heaven Lucifer, the Evil Angel and his minions. And of course, as the Scriptures tell us, they are here on the earth, seeking the ruin of souls, and working to attack the Church. The Prayer of St. Michael is an important prayer for all of us: “*Dear St. Michael, the Archangel, defend us in battle; be our protection against the wickedness and snares of the Devil. May God rebuke him, we humbly pray: and do thou, O Prince of the Heavenly host, by the power of God, cast into hell Satan and all the evil spirits who prowl about the world seeking the ruin of souls. Amen.*”

As we all know, we have great need for that prayer, and many other prayers and sacrifices during these days of turmoil in the Church, and seeing the attacks against the Church coming both from without, as well as, unfortunately, from within.

My dear sisters and brothers in Christ, we are called to a life of holiness. We are called to constantly choose a life of virtue over a life of sin. We are called to rise above, and fight against, any and all distractions and temptations, and keep focusing on doing what God calls us to do, and living as God calls us to live. These are turbulent and difficult days. We can be tempted to allow this turmoil to draw us away from our Faith in Jesus, and our devotion to His Church. **Do not allow that to happen.** As painful as it is to realize, there are those within the Church who have done wrong---terribly sinful, and even criminal deeds. We must condemn those deeds and those actions. But, dear friends, we must also stand strong and defend our Faith in Jesus Christ, and to continue to protect His Church, which He established with the promise that the powers of Hell shall not prevail against it.

Mary is our model for how to be holy. Mary is our model for how to be strong. Mary is our model for how to continue to let our focus be on what God wants of us, and to say, with Mary: "Fiat! Let it be as You say."

Let us conclude by praying the final part of our beautiful Hail Mary: "*Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.*"

God bless you, now and always!