

Catholic Daughters of the Americas

Words of Welcome

Every day we pray the Our Father and the Hail Mary. We pray these prayers as children of our loving Father, adopted through Baptism. By baptism we are the brothers and sisters of Christ. And thus we also invoke the holy name of Mary for we are her spiritual sons and daughters.

How wonderful, then, that we have come together here in this historic Basilica on the feast of the Holy Name of Mary to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Catholic Daughters of the Americas. I am delighted to welcome you and to thank you for your deep faith and for your devotion to the mission of the Church, especially through so many works of charity for those in need. Thank you for a century of service! Thank you for a century of love modeled on Mary's love for her Church and all her children. Thank you for a century of exemplifying the Gospel principles of unity and charity. And, as the Supreme Chaplain of the Knights of Columbus, let me say that I regard you as our sisters in Christ, who share the principles of unity and charity.

The Annunciation

In the Hail Mary, we repeat the words of the Angel Gabriel addressed to Mary at the Annunciation: "Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you." Mary's name is holy because she is full of grace, because the Lord is with her. In his loving Providence, God had prepared Mary for this moment by preserving her from original sin and indeed for all sin and by bringing her to the very holiness her Son would one day make manifest. As the ancient Christian writers are fond of saying, 'Mary conceived the Word of God in her heart before she conceived Him in her womb.'

In the Annunciation, the Angel spoke directly and personally to the Virgin Mary, but, like all the mysteries of salvation, the Annunciation took place for our sakes, for the sake of our salvation in Christ Jesus. When we listen to the words of the Angel in the Gospel, it is as if we become witness to the beginnings of our salvation. So when we pray the Hail Mary, when we invoke the holy name of Mary, we are being reminded continually of that moment when the Son of God entered the world to save us from our sins.

The Fruit of Mary's Womb

As we pray the Hail Mary each day, we quickly come to the deepest reason why Mary's Name is holy. After the words, "blessed art thou among women", we say, "and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus." Mary is the Mother of God, the Mother of our Savior. As St. Louis de Montfort taught, "[she] brought to a dry and barren world the Fruit of Life."

In the Blessed Virgin Mary, in the holy name of Mary, the Mother of God, we see the grand fulfillment of Jesus' words in today's Gospel: "A good tree does not bear rotten fruit, nor does a rotten tree bear good fruit. For every tree is known by its fruit" (Luke 6:43). In an Advent homily, St. Bernard of Clairvaux compared Mary to "the tree of Paradise, whose fruit is Christ" (cf. H. DeLubac, *Splendor of the Church*, 240-241). From the fullness of Mary's heart, we have received Christ and, as those adopted by God in Baptism, we too, as members of the Church, are Mary's children.

The Good Fruit of the Catholic Daughters of the Americas

In this centennial year of the Catholic Daughters here in Maryland, we celebrate a wonderful legacy of service. In the garden of the Church, the Catholic Daughters is a good tree, a good and sound tree that bears the good fruit of the Gospel, especially the good fruit of unity and charity.

Throughout my years as priest and bishop, I have had many contacts with the Catholic Daughters of the Americas. One thing that has always impressed me is your love for the Church and your spirit of love and collaboration. I want to thank for your warm support and your encouragement. In an age when there is so much contention, even in the life of the Church, you exemplify that unity within your own ranks and through your influence you foster that unity Christ willed for his followers. The fruit of Mary's womb is Jesus, the Prince of Peace. By dying and rising, he conquered sin and death and in his mercy he gives us peace the world cannot give.

In organizations such as the Catholic Daughters, we bear witness to the peace of Christ by our unity of faith and purpose, by being a living answer to Jesus' prayer for his disciples: "...may they all be one, as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they may be in us, so that the world may believe that you sent me" (Jn. 17:21). Through the intercession of Mary, you strive to be of one mind and heart in bearing

witness to the Lord and thus bring many to Christ and to the Church.

You are united in faith and you are also unity in charity. Here too you are bearing the abundant fruit of the Gospel. Often I think of what holy Mary did as soon as she learned that her cousin Elizabeth was with child in her advancing years. Mary did not sit home pondering her unique privilege as the Mother of the Messiah but rather undertook an arduous journey to the hill country to minister to Elizabeth in her need. In her charity, Mary brought Christ, the fruit of her womb, to Elizabeth and both exalted in the name of the Lord God. Whether you are helping improve the quality of life for those in need, or work with youth or advocating for legislation that is just and compassionate, or striving to support sound education ... in all of these areas and more you are practicing what St. John Paul II called, “a charity that evangelizes...” How necessary and how welcome are the fruits of your labors.

Solid Rock

One of the aims of the Catholic Daughters is to deepen your own formation as followers of Christ and as members of his Church. Through participation in the activities of your courts, you support one another in knowing, loving, and living the faith that you eloquently express that faith through works of charity. You help one another live your vocations in the life of Church, especially the vocation of marriage and family life, such a beautiful, life-giving vocation but so challenged in our times.

Through prayer, through solid spirituality, through your work of attracting new members, especially the young, you are seeking to build your house on solid rock. This includes your personal homes but it also includes the home of the Catholic Daughters of the Americas here in this Free State that proudly bears the name of “Mary”.

Through the intercession of Mary, may we all bear the good and lasting fruit of the Gospel and may the Catholic Daughters be set on the solid rock of God’s truth and love here in Maryland and beyond, ad multos annos! God bless you and keep you always in His love!