

Reflection Offered by  
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 Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception  
 08 December 2022  
 Gen 3:9-15,20;  
 Eph 1:3-6,11-12;  
 Luke 1:26-38

On Nov 10, 1845, Fr. Louis Florent Gillet offered Mass in the church of St. Antoine just down the street from us. The parish was founded in 1794 to serve the French speaking community. After Mass, he laid his stole on the shoulders of Theresa Maxis, Charlotte Shaaf, and Theresa Celestine Renauld as a ritual signaling a beginning, a founding moment. One month later on Dec 8, the small community gathered again in the parish of St. Antoine. Now, however, this church was to be consecrated as St. Mary Immaculate.

Before the church gathering, there were local people uniformed and marching in parades to the beating of the drums. The bells rang out and canons were shot across the Raisin River. Father Louis had a banner dedicated to Mary Immaculate flying from the church steeple, given as he was to exuberant celebrations! Bishop Lefevere attended and circled the church many times, consecrating it to Mary Immaculate. This also marked the time when December 8<sup>th</sup> became our Congregational Feast, one shared as well by the Redemptorists. It was nine years before the Church proclaimed this day as the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception.

In early 1846 Louis Gillet and Theresa Maxis traveled to Toledo to consult with the Sisters of Notre Dame (SND) about the habit that the new community was to wear. The SND's advised on the headwear and the wide cape. The habit was essentially the Redemptorist garb, but with widened sleeves and a scapular. It included the 15-decade rosary hung from a belt in the shape of an M. and *thankfully* a smaller crucifix than what the Redemptorists wore. Fr. Gillet was recalled to Baltimore in September, 1847 and the Redemptorist Fr. Egidius Smulders replaced him. Fr. Smulders decided that the habit would be blue and he also shifted the name from the Sisters of Providence to Sisters, *Servants* of the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

And what a name we have inherited! Some 45 years later, Louis Gillet - now Pere Marie Celestin, a Cistercian of Mary Immaculate in Hautecombe, Savoie, France - re-established contact with the IHM's in West Chester, PA. In one of his letters, he wrote: *"It is to the immaculate Heart of Mary that I confide them; it is to that sweet heart that I shall tell my wishes for their spiritual and temporal happiness."*

Louis Gillet knew the words from Luke that we have proclaimed today. The angel addresses Miriyam by name and says: *"Hail, full of grace! The Lord is with you! ... Do not be afraid, for you have found favor with God. ... The Holy Spirit will come*

*upon you and the power of the most high will overshadow you.” And Miriyam responds: “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord. May it be done unto me according to your word.” And so did Theresa Maxis recognize these words. She wrote in her Prayer Book: “O Immaculate Mary! Mother of sorrow and of love, our guide and our mother! May your amiable heart attract ours and your example animate us; may your constancy sustain us and your heart enflame us.”*

Theresa Maxis knew the words of Paul to the Ephesians, too: that we are in God “before the foundation of the world.” Again, in her *Prayer Book*, she wrote: “My heart is reserved for you, my God. You are in me and I in you. You are with me, I with you; you are for me, I am for You. To be where You desire me to be, to accomplish Your most holy will, to suffer all things for you ... this is the science of joy!”

Today is a great feast for the Universal Church and it is *also* a marvelous feast for *all of us* gathered here in this Immaculate Heart of Mary chapel, on channel 11, and on livestreaming. Look around you and contemplate the images of Mary: Our Lady of Guadalupe at the entrance to this chapel in the front foyer; the young Mary placed at the bottom of the stairs leading to the lower level that was in the novitiate for many of us; Mary as Perpetual Help holding Jesus as she looks out at us which is just outside this chapel; all the icons here in this holy place; Mary looking down at us in prayer; faithful Joseph parenting Jesus; and Mary holding her Son in sorrow, and also in the hope of his resurrection.

Let us thank God today for calling us into the fullness of Love before the foundation of the world! Let us give thanks to our founders, Louis Florent Gillet and Theresa Maxis Duchemin, for the paths they have shown us, who *both* endured troubles in faith and hope and love and grace and joy! Let us listen to our angels for they too invite us into the fullness of grace and joy!

May God renew us all in the banquet of this Eucharist for we are *already* in God’s creating love, in Christ’s healing love, and in the Holy Spirit’s transforming love, giving us all the strength and courage to pursue the healing of our earth and all who suffer from poverty and from exclusion in our churches and societies today.

**MAY OUR TRINITARIAN GOD AND MIRIAM AND JOSEPH  
BE PRAISED FOREVER!  
AMEN! ALLELUIA!**

Riley, Maria Alma, IHM. *Louis Florent Gillet: His Life, Letters and Conferences*. (Philadelphia, PA: Dolfin, 1940) p, 127.

Keenan, Michel, IHM, editor, and Margaret Loftus, IHM, translator. *Prayer Book of Mother Theresa Maxis Duchemin, IHM*. (Scranton, PA, 2015) pp. 150, 183.