

Our Lady of America

The Immaculate Virgin

Text of Homily

**Presented by Father Peter Damian Mary Fehlner, F.I.
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OUR LADY OF AMERICA

This is the title by which the Virgin Mother, in a series of private revelations and apparitions to Sr. Mary Ephrem Neuzil (1916-2000) of the Congregation of Sisters the Most Precious Blood of Jesus, indicated how she wished to be known and honored in the United States, first of all in the Basilica-sanctuary of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C., national Shrine of Mary for the United States, and then in the entire American nation, as it were the connatural extension of this Marian sanctuary under this title.

These revelations, locutions and apparitions began about 1938 and ended in 1984. The central ones, however, which concern the title *Our Lady of America* and the request that the Virgin Coredemptrix made of the Catholic bishops and of the entire nation, occurred over a six year period about a half-century ago, from 1954 through 1959. From their inception these messages, in particular the central ones, were given a certain approval, not only by the seer's religious superiors, but also by Sr. Mary Ephrem's spiritual director of many years until his death in 1972, the then Vicar General and later Archbishop of Cincinnati, Paul F. Leibold, regarded by many as a very holy prelate. The last of these revelations took place in the early 80's of the last century, just after the suppression (1979) of the contemplative branch of the Sisters of the Precious Blood. With the permission of Archbishop Leibold (Auxiliary and Vicar General of Cincinnati, 1958; Bishop of Evansville, 1966-1969, Archbishop of Cincinnati 1969-1972) these revelations were published in a small brochure, first in 1960, subsequently in 1971 (both editions with the approval of Archbishop Leibold), with a final edition of 48 pages in 1989 (with approximately 10 pages of material not in the earlier editions), copyrighted by Sr. Mary Mildred Neuzil as she was known after the demise of her contemplative monastery. Place of publication was Fostoria, Ohio, in the Diocese of Toledo, where the contemplative sisters had retired after their suppression and where the last living member of the community still resides. [All quotations are from this booklet.]

The prayers composed by the visionary either under the direction or dictation of the Blessed Mother received the *Imprimatur* of Bishop Leibold in 1963 (the signature for the *Nihil Obstat* of the *Censor librorum* being that of the Rev. Daniel Pilarczyk, STD, present Archbishop of Cincinnati). In late 1965 Auxiliary Bishop Leibold of Cincinnati carried out the first of Our Lady's requests, viz., to strike the medal of Our Lady of America with her picture on one side and the coat of arms of the Christian family on the other. This medal is a kind of synthesis of the message of Our Lady to America and of the place assigned that nation in her maternal mediation for all mankind.

At no time can it be said that these messages were greeted with much enthusiasm by those to whom they were primarily directed by Our Lady, the Bishops and priests of the Catholic Church in the USA. With the exception of groups of Marian devotees, mostly pious laity and religious, educated Catholics as a class were either indifferent or strongly opposed to their authenticity, despite their approbation by Archbishop Leibold and his implementation of the first of Our Lady's requests. And in fact by 1980 the message-

request, as well as Sr. Mary Ephrem, had been mostly forgotten, until in the last few years interest in them and her has revived. Why such a renewal should have occurred will become clear when the content of the messages is set forth in the context of contemporary events.

Evidently not all private revelations and apparitions are authentic. Many are plainly not what they claim to be, supernatural in origin. But many are genuine. Unfortunately the contemporary secular mentality in the western world often concludes that no such revelations are genuine, that they are a kind of epi-phenomenon in the life of the Church supplying for the religious needs of the less intelligent believers what more mature persons attain by more rational or scientific methods.

Usum non tollit abusus (abuse of a good thing does not invalidate its use). The old Latin axiom underscores the logical mistake of the modern skeptic: an illation from a particular instance of fraudulent claims to a generalization that all such claims are false. The fact is, the value and importance of private revelations in the life of the Church is directly proportionate, not to the religious-emotional needs of this or that group, but to the reality, value and importance of the maternal mediation or ministry of Our Lady in the Church for the good of all souls since Pentecost.

How seriously must we take the mystery of Mary as *Mater et Magistra Apostolorum* (Mother and teacher of the Apostles and of all the faithful), that is, her maternal mediation of all graces distributed by way of hierarchical and charismatic ministries? According to Pope John Paul II and now according to Pope Benedict XVI the ministry of maternal mediation confided to the Mother of Jesus in the Church, the “Marian principle of the Church”, is more central than even that of St. Peter and of his successors. Mary’s presence in the Church is precisely that of her continuous maternal mediation, above all in the hearts of those who are members of the Body of Christ, when they receive the Sacraments worthily.

Because this presence of Mary is so crucial and vital, those extraordinary manifestations of her dynamic presence take on exceptional importance, particularly in directing the attention of all believers and potential believers to questions and issues of fundamental importance for the salvation and well-being of all mankind. Nor are these extraordinary interventions of the Mother of the Church unrelated to one another. We shall see that the messages confided by Mary to Sr. Mary Ephrem are linked very much to those given at Fatima and also to some of those given between 1945-1959 to Ida Peerdeman of Amsterdam (died 1996).

Over the centuries the seers involved in such extraordinary interventions of Mary have been with a few exceptions persons not noted for scholarly attainments, but neither have they been persons lacking in common sense and basic virtue. Sr. Mary Ephrem was no exception to this norm. This norm in its own way clarifies how the supernatural origin of the messages and their reliability rests on something other than the natural gifts of the seer.

Sr. Mary Ephrem was professed a religious at the age of 17 in 1933. From then until 1951 her assignments were those concerned with domestic work. From 1951-1954 she taught kindergarten classes in a parochial school, and later in 1958 was permitted to enter the newly established and semi-autonomous contemplative wing of her community. In no way during the many years in which she enjoyed special extraordinary graces did she appear exteriorly as any different from a religious striving to grow in perfection and remain faithful to all she had promised at profession. That such a person should be able to write accurately and profoundly of the highest mysteries of faith, such as the indwelling of the Blessed Trinity, and that these writings were never found by the official censors to contain anything contrary to faith or morals, or indicating mental debility, is surely a sign of supernatural origin and the workings of the Holy Spirit through the mediation of Mary Immaculate.

The revelations, locutions, messages fall naturally into three groups: those between 1938 and 1954; those from 1954 through 1959; and those thereafter to 1984, in particular between 1980 and early 1984, when the final message was given.

During the first period from 1938 to 1954 it was chiefly Our Lord who spoke to Sr. Mary Ephrem. The content of His messages concerned primarily the personal life of Sister, her growth in holiness and especially in relation to the mystery of the indwelling Trinity above all in the soul of the Virgin Mother. All this, however, was her preparation for a special task for which Our Lord had chosen her. Sister tells us that “in the early 1940’s it was made known to me interiorly that my mission was to converge towards the sanctification of the family. I was not further enlightened at that time as to how this was to be accomplished.”

What this mission would be and how it would be carried out, is the subject of many revelations and messages between May 22, 1954 and the end of 1959. These messages involve principally the active intervention of Our Lord, Our Lady and St. Joseph, with secondary apparitions of the Archangels Michael and Gabriel, that is to say, those who make up the Holy Family, and those who in a particular way are assigned in heaven to serve that Family. The messages are many, but seen in this context they constitute a logical whole, whose central point of reference is the maternal mediation of Mary and the role which particular nations are to play in this for the eternal and temporal well-being of the entire human family.

Logically, Sr. Mary Ephrem tells us, Our Lord appeared first in 1954 to define the frame of reference for the key message of Our Lady concerning the spiritual renewal of souls and the establishment of true peace in the world with an attendant liberation from the threat of nuclear holocaust and the destruction of entire nations.

Our Lord’s first point is crucial: neither the source of life and peace nor the source of war and destruction is to be located in material or temporal things. If life is not sought in Him who is the Resurrection and the Life, then only terror, war and destruction will be found. A second consideration is intimately linked to the first. Men “fear man-made destroyers of life, yet destruction is within themselves. Man destroys himself through the evil that is

in himself.” Further, unless man comes into the light that is Christ, he remains in darkness forever. To come into the Light, one must listen to the voice of Christ which is the voice of mercy: “The voice of my heart is the voice of mercy.” If men will not believe and walk in the Light, there is nothing that can be done to escape destruction, though Christ’s heart beats with compassion for the sorrows of man and the weight of a contemporary cross, for the most part fashioned by man’s own guilt. That faith may once again find entrance into the hearts of men, prayer and sacrifice are necessary and indispensable. Later in 1954 the Angel of peace, or St. Michael, appeared to Sister offering her the palm of victory, viz., the Cross, with the request: “will you accept this?” Only the cross can secure the victory of faith. The request of St. Michael, prince of the heavenly host, is addressed to every American.

Our Lord’s second point is this: faith can only gain entrance into the hearts of men, if it gains entrance into the home. Every home must be modeled on the Holy Family, because every home is primarily a house of prayer, and only if it is a house of prayer will God dwell there. Where this is not the case, where parents have no time to teach their children to love Jesus, there they never learn to listen, not even to the voice of the Mother of Jesus. The breakdown of family life, indeed, the attempt at a radical redefinition of marriage not based on monogamy and purity, appears as a refusal to love Jesus and listen to his voice. Jesus calls this breakdown a conversion of the temple of God into a den of thieves. This is the root of the tragic nuclear holocaust threatening to overtake the entire world. Or in the simple, profound words of Jesus: the refusal to love Jesus in this way is the reason for the Father’s anger. Only with the return of God to his first home, the family, can the terrible destruction threatening the world be averted. Only through love of the heart of Jesus will this be accomplished.

Toward the end of 1954 (Nov. 8) Our Lady appeared to ask Sister’s help in bringing peace to the world, precisely by restoring the family as a dwelling place of the divine Trinity. Our Lady told Sr. Mary Ephrem it was Our Lord’s desire that “fathers and mothers strive to imitate me and my chaste spouse in our holy life at Nazareth. We practiced the simple virtues of family life, Jesus our Son being the center of our love and activity. The Holy Trinity dwelt with us in a manner far surpassing anything that can ever be imagined. For ours was the earthly paradise where once again God walked among men.” Characteristic of the Holy Family was the total absence of sin. So too must every family strive to be: holy and immaculate in the sight of God. Then peace will come.

Nearly two years later, on the eve of the feast of the North American Martyrs, 25 Sept., 1956, did what Sister calls the “official” visits of the Virgin Mother begin: official because they define quite precisely what is meant by the title Our Lady of America and what in assuming this title Our Lady asks of the American nation. According to Sister Our Lady came as Our Lady of Lourdes and promised to work more miracles in America, particularly in the United States, than worked either at Lourdes or Fatima, if Americans would do what she asked:

I am pleased my child, with the love and honor my children in America give to me, especially through my glorious and unique privilege of the Immaculate Conception. I promise to reward their love by working through the power of my Son's Heart and my Immaculate Heart miracles of grace among them. *I do not promise miracles of the body, but of the soul.* [The emphasis here, according to Sister, is that of the Immaculate who is anxiously concerned about our inner life.]

For it is mainly through these miracles of grace that the Holy Trinity is glorified among men and nations. Let America continue and grow in its love for me, and I in return, in union with the Heart of my Son, promise to work wonders in her. My child, I desire that this be known.

And the next morning, in a stupendous vision of the Immaculate during which Sister saw the heart of Mary appear "encircled with red roses, the symbol of suffering as it was revealed to me, and sending forth flames of fire," Our Lady said: "I am Our Lady of America. I desire that my children honor me, especially by the purity of their lives."

Later, on the same day, Our Lady of America said:

My child, I entrust you with this message that you must make known to my children in America. I wish it to be the country dedicated to my purity. The wonders I will work will be the wonders of the soul. They must have faith and believe firmly in my love for them. I desire that they be the children of my Pure Heart. I desire, through my children of America, to further the cause of faith and purity among peoples and nations. Let them come to me with confidence and simplicity, and I, their Mother, will teach peoples and nations. Let them come to me with confidence and simplicity, and I, their Mother, will teach them to become like to my Heart that their own hearts may be more pleasing to the Heart of my Son.

Sister adds, that though Mary came in this manner as a token of her love for Americans, nevertheless Our Lady of America welcomes her children of all nations to her feet, for there will be found true peace. Our Lady of America is such because she is Lady of all nations, the Queen of men and angels.

The next day Our Lady appeared with tears in her eyes, because of the ingratitude of so many sinful men, and asking that her children in America comply with her requests to cleanse their hearts in the Precious Blood of her Son and to live in His Heart, and to take her that she might teach them to live in purity of heart. She concluded thus:

I desire to make the whole of America my shrine by making every heart accessible to the love of my Son.

Shortly after, in early October, 1956, St. Joseph also appeared to Sister Mary Ephrem and in illustrating how he participated in the mystery of the Immaculate Coredeptrix confirmed the meaning of the above.

It is true, my daughter, that immediately after my conception, I was, through the future merits of Jesus and because of my exceptional role of future Virgin-Father, cleansed from the stain of original sin.

I was from that moment confirmed in grace and never had the slightest stain on my soul. This is my unique privilege among men.

My pure heart also was from the first moment of existence inflamed with love for God. Immediately, at the moment when my soul was cleansed from original sin, grace was infused into it in such abundance that, excluding my holy Spouse, I surpassed the holiness of the highest angel in the angelic choir.

My heart suffered with the Hearts of Jesus and Mary. Mine was a silent suffering, for it was my special vocation to hide and shield as long as God willed, the Virgin Mother and Son from the malice and hatred of men.

The most painful of my sorrows was that I knew beforehand of their passion, yet would not be there to console them.

Their future suffering was ever present to me and became my daily cross. I became, in union with my holy spouse, co-redemptor of the human race. Through compassion for the *sufferings of Jesus and Mary* I cooperated, *as no other*, in the salvation of the world.

It is perfectly clear here the link between purity of heart or sanctity and fruitful participation in the passion and Cross of the Savior, and that this link is concretely established through the maternal mediation of the Immaculate Coredeptrix.

In this context Sister Mary Ephrem was inspired to compose the prayer to Our Lady, Patroness of our land, to be found on the last pages of the booklet *Our Lady of America*.

The following month Our Lady taught Sister this prayer: "By thy holy and Immaculate Conception, O Mary, deliver us from evil." Our Lady then asked Sister to draw a picture of her first appearance and have a statue made according to its likeness, to be placed after being carried in solemn procession in the Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C., there to be honored in a special way as Our Lady of America, the Immaculate Virgin.

During 1957 Our Lady made many warnings about the urgency of carrying out her requests, noting that the time was short, but persecution and punishment would be long for lack of compliance, and for some eternal. The Bishops in particular were to be informed of her desires and urged to carry these out. In particular Our Lady stressed the need of prayer and penance on the part of all. Peace will come as promised, but not until the children are purified and cleansed of defilement, their lives reformed and clothed with the garment of grace. The Rosary is to be a family prayer, but prayed devoutly and with meditation on each mystery. In this context, on Nov. 22-23, 1957, Our Lady identified herself as "Our Lady of the Divine Indwelling, handmaid of Him Who dwells within."

On the feast of Our Lady of Lourdes, Feb. 11, 1958, Our Lady stressed in particular the centrality of the cross and the need to participate in the sufferings of Christ in order to contribute to that interior renewal of life and the purification of hearts so much desired by Jesus. Our Lady described herself as “the Mother of the sacred humanity, and it is my special work as Coredemptrix of the human race to help souls reach the sanctity of the Father in eternal union by showing them how to put on Christ, to imbibe His Spirit, and thus become one with Him.”

Our Lady then indicated that St. Joseph would come for his feast that year, and so he did, marvelously explaining the mystery of divine fatherhood represented by him in relation to Jesus and Mary, and so underscoring the link between the renewal of family life based on the mystery of Mary’s purity and the indwelling of the divine Trinity. On the evening of the feast (March 19, 1958) St. Joseph said: “The Holy Trinity desires to honor me that in my unique fatherhood all fatherhood might be honored.” Only by way of a reform of family life based on the immaculate purity of the Virgin Mother can the dignity and role of the man as head of the family be secured, particularly in an age where so much is calculated to degrade fatherhood and so destabilize the family and society.

Throughout the rest of 1958 and 1959 Our Lady continued to exhort and warn about the urgency of her requests. “See, I weep, but my children show me no compassion. They behold the sword in my heart, but will make no move to withdraw it. I give them love, they give me ingratitude. Weep, then, dear child, weep with your Mother over the sins of men. Intercede with me before the throne of mercy, for sin is overwhelming the world and punishment is not far away.”

The third group of messages (1960-1964) begins with the request of Our Lady, 4 April, 1960, that Sister Mary Ephrem write the then Archbishop of Cincinnati, Karl Alter, that he strike the medal of Our Lady of America. This request of Our Lady was carried out by his auxiliary, Bishop Paul Leibold in late 1965.

Our Lady insisted upon this first step, most probably because of the symbolism of the medal. One side bears the image of Our Lady of America, viz., of The Immaculate Virgin, Patroness of Our Land. Around the image are the words: “By your Holy and Immaculate Conception, O Mary, deliver us from evil”, an aspiration profoundly expressive of the mystery of the Immaculate Coredemptrix whose preservative redemption is the means of our liberative or deliverative redemption.

On the other side is the Coat of Arms of the Christian Family. The divine indwelling is represented by the Triangle and the Eye on the red shield of the Precious Blood through which sanctifying grace was made possible to fallen man. The sanctification of the family through the imitation of the Holy Family is represented by the Cross and two lilies, on each of which is depicted a burning heart. The flaming sword is a symbol of Divine Love so necessary to attain union with God, while the Rosary indicates a most profitable means of drawing closer to the Holy Family, through devout meditation on the various Mysteries. The scroll above bears the inscription: “Gloria Patri et Filio et Spiritui Sancto” and the one below: “Jesu, Maria, Joseph.” These aspirations are simply

explanations of the whole theme and are also acts of praise to the Trinity and the Holy Family.

This medal is to be worn with great faith and fervent devotion to Our Lady for the grace of intense purity of heart and for the particular love of the Holy Virgin and her divine Son.

With the death of Archbishop Leibold in 1972, and the subsequent suppression of contemplative branch of the Precious Blood Sisters, all promotion of the messages so profoundly and simply synthesized in the Medal effectively ceased. Between 1980 and Jan. 3, 1984, date of the final message, Our Lady often spoke with Sister Mary Ephrem, lamenting the fact that nothing was being done to renew that faith so precisely described by the Medal and for the sake of which the Medal is to be worn. The Virgin Mother further warned that the time remaining to do penance for world peace and to avoid a nuclear holocaust was very short, that her efforts to avert human catastrophe were being frustrated by teachers of false doctrine, by persons in high places in the Church disobeying the Pope, by those promoting false spirits rather than the Spirit of Jesus.

During the final appearance of Our Lady Sr. Mary Ephrem asked her whether there would be a nuclear war. The question no doubt was prompted by earlier warnings concerning the role expected of America in the plans of the Immaculate Coredemptrix for peace. She had more than once pointed out that the role of America was precisely that of leading the nations in the restoration of family life based on the purity of Mary and Joseph. If America cooperated wholeheartedly as a consequence of the initiative of the American Bishops taken to promote devotion to the Immaculate Coredemptrix under the title Our Lady of America, and the rest of the world accepted this, no nuclear holocaust would occur. If America did its part, but the world failed to respond, America at least would be spared. But if Mary's love for America continued to be met with ingratitude and refusal on the part of the majority to do penance and reform, particularly on the part of the clergy, then America would suffer more than others.

Here is how Our Lady replied in 1984:

My faithful one, if my warnings are taken seriously and enough of my children strive constantly and faithfully to renew and reform themselves in their inward and outward lives, then there will be no nuclear war. What happens to the world depends upon those who live in it. There must be much more good than evil prevailing in order to prevent the holocaust that is so near approaching. Yet I tell you, my daughter, even should such a destruction happen because there were not enough souls who took my warning seriously, there will remain a remnant – untouched by the chaos who, having been faithful in following me and spreading my warnings, will gradually inhabit the earth again with their dedicated and holy lives. These will renew the earth in the power and light of the Holy Spirit. These faithful ones of my children will be under my protection and that of the Holy Angels, and they will partake of the life of the Divine Trinity in a most remarkable way.

Let my children know this, precious daughter, so that they will have no excuse if they fail to heed my warnings.

Sister Mary Ephrem writes “From this final message I received the very strong impression that Our Lady was telling us that She had done everything She could do to help and warn us. Now it was up to us. Whatever happens we will have brought on ourselves, so whatever we decide and do now is our responsibility.”

In the face of the worldwide disaster which could be the first and immediate result of a nuclear conflict between two forms of tyranny: Islam and the secularized western nations, the relevance of the messages of Our Lady of America , the Immaculate Coredemptrix, are perfectly evident. These messages concern renewal of family life based on the purity of Mary and Joseph and on their love for Jesus, a renewal effected through a loving embrace of the Cross. That the world as a whole, including large numbers of Catholics and other Christians, has neither accepted or acted on these messages, or knows nothing of them because they have not been proclaimed from the rooftops, is a tragic fact, a further reason for doing as soon as possible all that Our Lady asked, beginning with the re-consecration of America to the Immaculate under the title Our Lady of America, the wearing of the Medal, to be followed by a genuine life in the Spirit of Jesus after the example of the Holy Family, and in a sense as part of the Holy Family.

Let this renewal include first of all a repudiation of contraception and the contraceptive mentality, abortion, euthanasia, same sex marriage and all that directly attacks and undermines the sanctity of the family, the dignity of fatherhood, the exalted vocation of motherhood and sanctification and salvation of every child conceived of woman. Only such a program can eradicate the root of that inhuman terrorism overtaking the world and bring that much yearned for peace. Let all pray that our Bishops will take the lead in this as the Immaculate so much desires.

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