



**Preaching on the Immaculate Conception and Juan Diego
Saint Elizabeth High School Student Body Mass
Sister Donna Maria Moses, O.P.**

The first question God asks humanity after the incident in the Garden is, “Where are you?” Look around! Where are you? Today God asks you to look around and consider what makes you feel ashamed. Then God tells you not to be afraid and to remember that each one of us is made by God with a natural repugnance to evil. Trust your own heart to know what to avoid and what to embrace in the struggle to fulfill God’s special plan for you. Each of us is conceived by God, chosen, holy, and blameless in God’s sight, destined and appointed for a special purpose—and each of knows in our own heart what distracts us from that purpose.

Today we are remembering three stories, the story of Gabriel appearing to Mary 2000 years ago, the appearance of Mary to a humble worker in Mexico 500 years ago and the appearance of Mary to a teenage girl in France 150 years ago. These three stories speak to us of one common idea, Mystical Vision. They cause us to ask ourselves what is real and what is imaginary. Are the two divided or are they blended in our lives? To some extent reality a result of what is imagined. What is the role of imagination in our lives? Is reality only what can be scientifically proven through our senses? Or is it something more?

Two thousand years ago a teenager about your age looked around one day and saw an Angel who spoke to her about a Mystical Reality that would change the world. This vision was so disturbing that it made her tremble with fear. The angel told her not to be afraid. She was chosen by God to change the world in an extraordinary and special way—and with God all things are possible. I ask you to consider in your heart: was her vision real or imaginary? The truth is that her vision has indeed changed the world for millions of people throughout the centuries, so was it imaginary or was it real?

Five hundred years ago a humble worker named Juan Diego was walking home one day and he heard a mystical choir and Mary, the Mother of God, calling out to him from a bright cloud of gold. He was afraid because he knew no one would believe him. He begged her to appear to someone else instead. She told him not to be afraid. He was chosen by God to change the world in an extraordinary and special way—and with God all things are possible. She promised to help him. I ask you to consider in your heart: was his vision real or was this imaginary? The truth is that his vision has indeed changed the world for millions of people throughout the centuries, so was it imaginary or was it real?

One hundred and fifty years ago another teenager named Bernadette heard a sound like a storm and saw the branches of the trees rustling though there was no wind that day. Mary, the Mother of God, appeared in a golden cloud, smiled at her, and prayed the rosary with her. She told her not to be afraid to pray for healing for the world. She led her to a spring in Lourdes, France which has miraculously healed thousands of people. She told her she was the Immaculate Conception.

The purpose of the title was to confirm that Mary was conceived holy and blameless in the sight of God, and though she was a humble and very young person, she had a special purpose in God's plan, to be the Mother of God. Bernadette believed in her heart that this message would change the world. The fact is that her vision has indeed changed the world for thousands of people with infirmities and life-threatening diseases, so was it real or was it imaginary?

Throughout history Mary has appeared to people young and old, humble and rich all over the world. In the past 50 years alone, there have been over 200 apparitions recorded. Church authorities evaluate these apparitions based on whether they are private revelations, meant for a single person, or public revelations meant for the world. Why is it that Mary keeps appearing? The message is always to look around you, to believe in the Mystical Reality of God's presence in your lie, to trust in God's special plan for you and to pray for conversion and healing for the world.

Do you believe in mystical occurrences? Has anything ever happened in your life that made you realize there was inexplicable force at work in your life, a benign presence that looks out for you and consoles you when you are most in need? Is this mystical occurrence real or is it imaginary—and are reality and imagination opposed to each other? Does what was once imagined become real? Does what was once real become imaginary?

If reality is only what is, what can be seen and heard and felt, what if what you see and hear and feel is not only what is, but what has always been and will be forever. Is that also real? Are you willing to let yourself move beyond humanly constructed boundaries of time and space to wonder and imagine other possibilities? The truth is that the human mind is made not only for reason, but for grace and that grace can change the world. Let that grace kindle your imagination today and you will be an extraordinary and special instrument in God's plan to transform the world into a better place. Let your heart be closed and you are trapped by humanly constructed limitations. The choice is yours.



Amen.