

Recollection topic for July 2024

Saint Anne, mother of Mary Ever-Virgin



History of Saint Anne

Part 1

Anne and Joachim do not appear in the Bible. We know about them from the later hagiographic tradition and the apocryphal gospels.

Legend has that both were members of the Jewish priestly class. However, several versions attribute to Anne an illustrious kinship with other figures of the religious history, such as Joseph of Arimathea, the man who took care of the recovery and burial of the body of Christ.

What is certain is that although both were noble and virtuous, Anne and Joachim could not bear children.

Birth, Childhood, and Marriage of Saint Anne

In the land of Judea, fifty years before the coming of Christ, there lived a married couple of great virtue. Their names were Stolan and Emerentiana. They lived as **pious** Israelites, **faithful** to the prescriptions of the Law of Moses. Their most **ardent prayer** to God was that they would soon rejoice in the coming of the Desired of all Nations, the heavenly Messiah of Whom the Patriarchs and Prophets had spoken, and whose coming was close at hand.

Soon there was born to them a daughter whom they named Anne, which means ***all gracious, all beautiful***. The girl began, from the first dawn of reason, **to live** her name, inspired as it was by

Heaven. **Docile and attentive** to her parents, **gentle and kind** towards her playmates, at once **vivacious and devout**, it was clear that God had great plans for her.

As the **charming maiden was growing older**, many men pretended her for marriage. But she refused all the proposals, until she was reverently approached by a young man named Joachim. Like her, he belonged to the royal house of David, and like her, he was **virtuous and just**. By divine inspiration, she knew that God had chosen him to be her husband.

According to the Hebrew custom, Anne could only have been fourteen or fifteen years old when she was betrothed to Joachim. Thus, it was common for a woman to be a grandmother at thirty years old. Joachim's young wife left her father's home and strived, through her **love and devotedness**, to make her own home a happy one.

The trial in the Life of Saint Anne

Despite their frequent prayers and exceptionally virtuous lives, Anne and Joachim were childless. For the Israelites, the privilege of motherhood was sharing in the blessing that the Lord bestowed on Abraham and his descendants when He promised him that the Messiah would be born from his posterity.

This, then, was a terrible trial, which weighed upon the home of Anne and Joachim for twenty long years. The shame of this lack led Joachim to retire to the desert, among the shepherds. Their tranquil acceptance of this heavy cross and humble endurance of their shame in a spirit of patience and prayer is a wonderful testimony to their holiness and resignation to the holy will of God.

At last, the pleads of Anne and Joachim were heard. An angel appeared to each one of them, announcing them that their holy marriage would at last bring forth a baby girl, blessed by God. Joachim returned to his home, and Anne soon knew that she was going to become a mother. Following the angel's instructions, the two met at the Golden Gate of Jerusalem.

Although the Holy Scripture is silent on these happenings, we are informed of them by the most ancient tradition. These circumstances closely resemble what the Bible tells us of Anne, the mother of the prophet Samuel, and regarding the parents of Saint John the Baptist. But in the case of Saint Anne, it concerns a matter of even greater significance than the birth of a prophet. Anne was called to be the very mother of the One who is the Mother of God. When, as the angel had promised, a baby girl was born who would forever change the history of the world, Anne and Joachim called her **Mary**, which in Hebrew means "**loved by the Lord**".

This is how the Virgin Mary, the future mother of Jesus Christ, was born. She was born without sin, preserved immune from it from conception, according to the **dogma of the Immaculate Conception**.

Like all mothers, Anne taught little Mary to do housework, clean the house, weave and sew. For this reason, she is invoked as the **protector of tailors, weavers and sellers of linen**. But it is above all her being pregnant in old age what have deserved her over the centuries the role of **patroness of the impossible deliveries** and protector of pregnant women, but also of widows and mothers of family.

We know -and this with great certainty- the main episodes of Saint Anne's earthly life. These have been gathered from various apocryphal sources, some of which date back to the very beginnings of Christianity (the Protoevangelium of James is from the year 150 A.D.).

Points for personal reflection

1. Could we think back to our childhood days, and discover what virtues and qualities we possessed, and whether we could live those virtues in our day-to-day?
2. How would our parents, neighbours, teachers and friends describe us?
3. What virtue and quality outstood in our behaviours and attitudes?
4. What kind of trials have you gone through in your first years of life? How did you overcome them?
5. Can you say that you contributed or rendered your helping hand to do tasks in your family?
6. List at least three good things your mother taught you.
7. "God was there and I did not know it" (Gn 28:16). With the perspective that life currently gives you, where do you see the presence of God in those years of life?

Part II

Mother of Her Who Was Conceived Immaculate

Saint Anne was the **inner sanctuary** in which was formed **the woman** who was going to shelter the Son of God made Man. The solemn definition of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception provides us with even greater insight into the wonderful dignity of Saint Anne.

The Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary took place in the womb of Saint Anne, thus making it her own, just as the Incarnation of the God-Man by the power of the Holy Spirit took place within the womb of Mary. Of course, the difference between the two is great, but there is a close parallel: the Immaculate Mother who was to be the Mother of God was formed from the flesh and blood of Saint Anne, as the God-Man, from the flesh and blood of Mary. In both cases, the Holy Spirit entered their wombs and worked a tremendous miracle of grace.

The intervention of the Holy Spirit in the womb of Saint Elizabeth was also a great miracle of grace, when Mary brought her Divine Son to her cousin, on the day of the Visitation.

At the moment of Conception, Anne and Joachim handed on Mary, who would soon transmit them to Jesus, the flesh and blood they had received from their forefathers. But, this flesh and blood, which they had received soiled by Original Sin, they handed on to her son without any

stain. Bossuet could say: "**The Conception of Mary** (in which Anne and Joachim took part) is **the first and original source of the blood of Jesus**, which flows in our veins through the Sacraments, and which brings the breath of life to every part of the Mystical Body of Christ: the Church."

The Blessed Virgin Mary was Immaculate at her Conception so, in consequence, her father and mother were the ministers of God in accomplishing a work which will remain unique forever in the history of mankind.

There we see the basis for the glory of Saint Anne. To create angels and men, the Blessed Trinity, so to speak, sought no assistance from outside Itself. In accomplishing the Immaculate Conception, that same Blessed Trinity summoned to its aid the two who would be the mother and father of the Blessed Virgin. By that act, a character of singular grandeur was conferred upon them.

We cannot speak of the Incarnate Word without at the same time mentioning her whom God chose to be His Mother. Failing to do so, as the Fathers of the Church prove, opens the door to heretical attacks upon the very Person of Christ. So too, to speak of the Immaculate Conception without mentioning Saint Anne, who so wonderfully participated in this admirable creation, would be to minimize the dignity and grandeur of the Mother of God.

Before the birth of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Anne of Nazareth was a woman filled with God's Grace and Anne was chosen by Him to be the mother of Our Lady and the maternal grandmother of Jesus Christ.

Barren and childless for a long time, Anne remained **faithful and hopeful**. With **eyes up and heart open**, she fervently prayed for a child with her husband Joachim. The godly couple's faith was beautiful and unbreakable. Their **way of life pleased and moved God**. In response to Anne's patience, God granted her prayers and blessed her with a daughter like no other: the Mother of God. God loved Anne so much that He did the impossible and made conception at an old age possible. To receive the Mother of God in Anne's womb was a blessed gift and a special grace. The waiting was worth it! Being **docile**, Anne was able to be **an instrument of God**, and **her obedience to God made space in her womb for God's Love to bear fruit**. Thus, she was able to fulfill God's will: salvation for mankind.

As a pious woman, she not only received and recognized the gift God blessed her with, but she also responded to the gift, that only she could give. **She consecrated herself to a life of service to God and His Temple. In this way, Anne embodied the ultimate act of love, and the highest expression of feminine genius, by giving herself and her most beloved daughter at an early age to God.** Saint Anne could **carry life and cooperate with God**. Because of her **maternal love and receptivity to God**, Saint Anne was **able to raise Mary with grace**. She generated a life of purity in Mary by educating her with God's wisdom. Mary's womb was blessed just like her own mother's. Mary, thus, inherited her mother's capacity to receive another, who was, and ultimately, God. Saint Anne is **significant because by giving herself, she blessed the world** with Our Lady and Queen Mother who gave birth to Jesus Christ Our Saviour.

“She was no an ordinary woman; by being faithful, she became an extraordinary one.”

May Saint Anne’s history serve as an inspiration to all women. It made me realize that God loves women for what and who they are, not for what they have. It seems to me He comes to women like Saint Anne and Mary knowing how busy they are with their responsibilities at home and the family. **He respects women to the extent that He entrusts them to carry life –His creation– and foster a community.** Motherhood is our God-given strength as women. **He chose women to be spiritual mothers** because He believes they are strong enough to extend their nature with **generosity, sensitivity, receptivity and maternity.** He knows women can serve, and multiply this world responsibly with beauty, truth and goodness. This is a very revelatory, empowering, and revolutionary key. Saint Anne is a witness to the divine and to the unique function of the woman, especially as wives and mothers. She was not an ordinary woman; **by being faithful, she became an extraordinary one.** Saint Anne is today known and celebrated as the patron saint of grandparents, mothers, married couples, and the infertile people. Our Congregation is named after her; she is our mother and patroness. Let us also not forget her humble, simple and faithful husband, Joachim. Let us pray to them for guidance in the path of the spiritual and earthly motherhood!

Saint Anne was **very religious** and **increased her sanctity** by giving birth to the mother of Jesus, the Saviour of the World. Saint Anne desired and prayed for having a child, therefore, God sent an angel to her saying, "Anne, the Lord has heard your prayer and you shall conceive and bring forth, and your seed shall be spoken of in all the world." Anne replied: "As the Lord my God lives, if I beget either male or female, I will bring it as a gift to the Lord my God; and my child shall minister Him in holy things all the days of the life."

Points for personal reflection

1. Let us list the miracles of grace we have received from the Lord however small or great and thank God for them.
2. Are you aware of being part of the Body of Christ that is the Church? When you become aware of it, what feelings arise in your heart?
3. On what occasions do you lose faith and hope? How do you overcome it?
4. Why at times, are our prayers not heard? What do we lack according to the passage?
5. Can you say that you are very religious, and have been increasing in sanctity with each passing day?
6. What would you like to offer to the Lord?

To share in the community

Share the two answers or points that strike you the most.

St. Anne and St. Joachim, our Patrons, pray for us.

