**Vox Populi - Voice of the People**

8 December 2022

During the season of Advent there are a number of feast days including two feast days dedicated to Mary.

In some countries the month of December is dedicated to the Immaculate Conception.

Other feast days we have already celebrated are St Francis Xavier on 3 December, St John Damascene on 4 December, and St Ambrose on 7 December.

Today, 8 December, we celebrate the Feast of the Immaculate Conception or Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

This celebrates the belief that Mary was conceived free of original sin and lived a sinless life. It is one of the most important feasts celebrated by the Catholic Church.

Some people may confuse this day with the Feast of the Annunciation when the Angel Gabriel appeared to Mary and told her she was carrying the Son of God, but that feast day takes place nine months before Christmas on 25 March.

Since 2001 in Australia the Feast of the Immaculate Conception has not been a holy day of obligation. The only feast days to be observed as holy days of obligation are Christmas Day, the Feast of the Assumption and all Sundays of the year, however it is a Solemnity many people attend Mass on this day.

On Monday, 12 December we celebrate another feast day of Mary - the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

In 1910 Our Lady of Guadalupe was declared Patroness of Latin America, and in 1945 Pope Pius XII declared her to be the Empress of all the Americas. She appeared to an Indian convert named Juan Diego on 9 December 1531, and left a portrait of herself on the mantle of Juan Diego. This miraculous image has proved to be ageless and is kept in the shrine built in her honour, the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

During this time of Advent when we are preparing for the coming of the Christ Child, we can offer a prayer of intercession to Mary to spiritual strength, remembering her preparation and prayerfulness was complete in every respect.