

Gold.

With that one word, in 1849, the San Francisco area of California grew from a population of around 4,000 to 400,000. It was the biggest expansion and migration the United States had seen to that point.

Man's greed and reverence for gold has built nations. It has also destroyed them.

It is one of the most precious metals we know of. It is reasonably rare.

Gold needs to be purified in order for us to use it. Gold that contains impurities is too brittle, too vulnerable and too weak to be put to good use.

Once made pure, it is easy to work with because it is very malleable – that is it bends and shapes easily. It has a very high tensile strength, that is, you can stretch it very thin without breaking it.

Gold is one of the most perfect and reliable conductors of electricity and is used in the most sensitive of scientific and medical interests. It does not tarnish, it does not rot, it does not corrode.

It has had an important place in history. It was a Golden Calf that brought God's wrath and it was gold that was brought to the Christ child.

It was used to line the inside and the outside of the Ark of the Covenant in Ancient Israel and covered the face of the Pharaoh Tutankhamen in his tomb.

It was a Golden Spike that united the east and west coasts of our great country. Sheets of gold protected the lunar lander of Apollo 11 when the first human being walked on the Moon.

It has adorned the heads of Kings and Queens and Emperors as well as the fingers and necks of us common folk.

But, it's most noble purpose is one that we see so often that we run the risk of taking it for granted.

(Pick up Chalice)

It is gold that holds the Body and Blood of our saving God. The use of gold in these Sacred Vessels proclaims His Kingship to all who see it. Because He is King, we make a place for Him of the finest material gift we can give.

It is Christ the King that I recognize when I elevate this cup. But I also see other things. I have seen my gold wedding band in the reflective surface, and when I do, I say a prayer for my wife or a prayer of thanksgiving.

I might see the reflection of the priest, who stands in the person of Christ, and again, I pray.

Every once in a while, when the light is just right and I am standing in just the right spot, I see the reflection of all of you – and I am taken aback because I see the reason for the passion and glory of Christ – and again, I pray, **for** you, and in thanksgiving that God has allowed me to serve you.

But today, when I look at this chalice, I see Mary.

This gold vessel speaks of her in that its gold is malleable and stretchable. Her fiat, her yes in today's Gospel shows her willingness to be molded and shaped by God. The sorrows of Our Lady must have pulled her to the point that most of us would break. Its incorruptibility is mirrored in her Blessed Assumption.

But, it is the necessary purity of the gold that speaks clearest to me.

What we celebrate in this Feast of the Immaculate Conception is that at the very moment that she was conceived, Mary was free from the stain of original sin. She was the perfection that God intended all of us to be had our first parents not fallen.

This was not of her doing, nor of her parents, but it was the work and will of God and a part of His plan of salvation. This explains the angel's strange words –

“Hail, Full of Grace” and “you have found favor with God.”

God will visit His people in a new and wondrous way. He will be born of a woman.

Doesn't it just make sense that if God is to share in our humanity only the purist and finest and most precious of all human vessels would be fit to hold, the King of Kings?