

NOVENA OF THE IMMACULATE

2023

Different faces and names



of the sweet heavenly Mother

MISSIONARY SISTERS OF THE IMMACULATE - ROME

On the journey of preparation for the XII General Chapter, this year's novena of the Immaculate brings us together as one apostolic body to contemplate the face of the 'sweet heavenly Mother'. This title, so dear to Giuseppina Rodolfi, orients us to an attitude of filial trust that we find in our apostolic spirituality and that passes through the peoples and cultures in which we are present.

For this reason, the sisters of the organisms that contributed to the realization of this Novena (Italy, Brazil, Bangladesh, Cameroon-Chad, Papua New Guinea, Delhi, Hong Kong and Algeria-Tunisia), help us to participate in the Marian devotion of their countries .

Each patron will guide us to welcome into our prayer a category of people or a step to take, which we entrust to the intercession of Mary.

In particular, we will be introduced to the knowledge of the tradition that gave rise to the cult of Mary in different places. Going back to the source of popular devotion will allow us to appreciate Mary's maternal beauty, her protection and care towards all peoples.

The testimonies, referring to experiences of simple and popular faith, will open a glimpse into religious expressions, symbols, gestures and prayers with which people's filial trust is still experienced today.

The proposed guideline is also entrusted to the creativity of each community in the preparation of the celebratory environment, in the choice of songs and in the implementation of the indicated gestures.

Under the sweet gaze of Mary, we begin to make a spiritual pilgrimage that ideally will lead us, day after day, crossing the sanctuaries of our missions, to the celebration of the solemnity of the Immaculate.

OUR LADY OF ROCCA

THE LOVING PROTECTION OF Mary

❖ *On this day, we invoke Mary as the one who lovingly protects all people, who precedes us and continually confirms us in faith, vocation and mission. May Mary, who freed the people of Treviso from the tyrants of that time, protect us and help us to be able, also today, to free ourselves from the tyrannies that invade our lives, society, the world, such as wars, discords, injustices, inequalities, the vices that lead to physical and spiritual death.*



To the springs of devotion

On the hill overlooking the town of Cornuda (Treviso), at 349 m. above sea level, stands in a particularly panoramic point, the sanctuary dedicated to Our Lady of Annunciation, known as the “**Sanctuary of Our Lady of**

Rocca”, because it was built on the ruins of an ancient fortress.

A papal bull from 1245 shows that even before the demolition of the fortress there was a small church dedicated to the Virgin.

A tradition, or perhaps a legend widespread among the people, attributes the origin of the cult to an apparition of the Virgin Mary on a rocky boulder between whose crevices was rooted a

centuries-old oak tree that remained flourishing until 2008. The most probable opinion is that the shrine was erected by the faithful



in thanksgiving to Our Lady for having freed them from the cruel tyranny of the Ezzelini, an ancient feudal family of Germanic origin.



A manuscript from 1750 tells of a prodigious pardon that occurred in 1725, reporting the story of the person pardoned and was still alive at the time. Mr. Pier Francesco Recco narrates that, at the age of 12, together with one of his companions, he attempted to detach an enormous stone from the wall that was leaning against it. The stone began to roll, hitting Pier Francesco who just

had time to shout: «*Mary, Virgin of Rocca, save me!*». The family members who rushed hearing that cry saw what had happened and they were shocked. With great effort, they removed the stone, and to their amazement, they found the boy perfectly unharmed. A votive tablet, hanging at the side of the altar, still represents and bears witness to the tragic and moving scene.



Listening to the Word of God

From the Gospel according to Mt 2:13-15

Silence of internalization

The passage from the Gospel according to Matthew presents Jesus' childhood marked by threats, hostility and enmity, which forced his parents to migrate to Egypt to escape the threat of death posed by the powerful and cruel Herod. A shadow of death is projected on the Child who has recently come to life. In the specific case of our evangelical text, it is an *act of responsibility* by Joseph, who ensures a future for Mary and Jesus. However, it is also an *act of faith*. The solution, the exit from desperate situations is always

accompanied by an act of responsibility, which is also an act of love and justice, like the one with which Joseph is invited to “take with him”, first Mary as his bride, then “the child and his mother.”



From the Word to life

Let us bring to the altar the situations of tyranny of our time (abuse of power, slavery, war, injustice, ...), naming them out loud; at the end of the gesture you can remember other situations.



The voice of testimony

(testimony of Ferracin Francesco,
Cornuda, 22 April 2018)

I made this act of faith to Our Lady of the sanctuary of Rocca in Cornuda to thank her for helping my 15 month old granddaughter to recover from the virus that hit her heart. The worst was feared, but thanks to the faith I had and the help of Our Lady, through hospitalizations, tests and treatments, the little girl is well now. If we want to say it, little Emma's recovery was truly a miracle, for which we prayed so much to Our Lady. Therefore, in addition to the faith I have always had towards Our Lady of Rocca, I thought of committing all my strength to this pilgrimage, as thanksgiving for the grace received.



Our prayer

Under your protection, we seek refuge,
Holy Mother of God.
Do not despise our petitions
who are in the trial,
Oh glorious and blessed Virgin.

OUR LADY OF FATIMA IN BOROMARI

Mary, the power of faith

❖ We chose this theme because the people who go to the sanctuary of Our Lady of Fatima believe that Our Lady can do everything for them and ask for many graces. Furthermore, in the pilgrimage, there is a moment (usually after the night adoration) during which people, sharing their faith and the graces received, bring numerous gifts as a sign of thanksgiving to Mary.

Many people belonging to different religions visit this sanctuary: Christians, Muslims, Hindus, etc. Everyone goes with strong faith, believing that they will receive what they ask for.



To the springs of devotion

The sanctuary of Mary Queen of Fatima was inaugurated in 1997, in view of the Jubilee announced by Pope John Paul II for the year 2000.

The sanctuary is located in Boromari, about 200 kilometers north-east of the capital, Dhaka, in the Garo hills, near the Indian border, in the diocese of Mymensingh, which includes the civil districts of Jamalpur, Kishorganj, Netrakona, Sherpur, Tangail and Sunamgonj. The diocese has over 82,000 Catholics, mainly of indigenous ethnicity.

The *Baromari Mariam* pilgrimage is one of the most popular events in Bangladesh. The other two pilgrimages are to the Sanctuary of St. Anthony of Padua in Nagari, Dhaka district, and to Our Lady of Lourdes in Diang, Chittagong district.

The sanctuary, dedicated to the Virgin of the Rosary, attracts 20,000 to 25,000 people from all over Bangladesh every year. Normally the event is organized over two days during which people participate in praying the rosary by candlelight, in reflections, in Eucharistic adoration, in the way of the cross on the hillside and in a special festive Mass.



According to the reports of the pilgrimage committee, over 60 thousand people participated in this year's Marian pilgrimage, including 39 priests and numerous sisters from various congregations in Bangladesh.



Listening to the Word of God

From the Gospel according to Lk 1:39-45

Silence of internalization

Mary is the “woman of faith” because, in all the trials of life, she never doubted God. She trusted that God would be faithful to her. Blessed is she who believed that the promise made to her by the Lord would be fulfilled. Mary, for this reason, is called blessed. Mary is the model of believers and the first Disciple of Christ. She enters with her whole heart in the plan of God through her total submission to God.

It is precisely in this attitude that Mary's greatness appears. She, at a young age, was determined to carry out the will of God that the words of the angel Gabriel indicated to her. This highlights her total trust in God.

We find the same trust in the life of our foundresses in realizing the plan of God.



From the Word to life

Each sister lights a candle and brings near the image of Mary, as symbol of faith, that accompanies our life and of the adhesion to the will of God.



The voice of testimony

(testimony of Sr. Sujatha,
from the community of Dhanjuri)

I want to share my experience of faith. For two months, my father had been suffering from some health problems due to which he was losing weight; he could no longer eat or do anything on his own. When I spoke to him, I felt that I might lose him. So I asked my sisters in the community to pray for him and I too prayed intensely to Our Lady to grant my father good health. Recently, when I spoke to him, I heard that he was in good health. This experience allowed me to increase my faith in Mary and to accept everything as God's will.



Our prayer

Almighty and ever living God,
having trust in the Immaculate Virgin,
fully aware of her maternal power,
we implore you,
come to our aid

and grant us the favor we ask for in this novena.

Through her prayer we can be freed from all evil
and remain faithful to you.

Through her intercession,

we may enjoy continued health of mind and body.

Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

THE VIRGIN OF GUADALUPE

Am I not here, who am your mother?

❖ *The process of unifying our presence in Brazil finds inspiration in the icon of the Virgin of Guadalupe, patron saint of Latin America; just as her appearance helped unify indigenous peoples and Europeans (cf. the symbol of the hands of the Virgin of Guadalupe). Let us turn to the Virgin Mother of Guadalupe so that the conviction may grow within us that together we can be instruments for a greater missionary commitment in bringing Jesus to all peoples and cultures.*

The hands

The right hand is darker and represents the indigenous people, natives of the Americas. The left hand is lighter and represents the white people who came from Europe. The two hands joined in prayer symbolize that whites and Indians must unite and pray for peace, and the growth of all.



To the springs of devotion

The Virgin of Guadalupe appeared to an Aztec indigenous called Juan Diego on December 12, 1531 in Mexico. The Virgin presented herself as an indigenous, pregnant woman and she said to him in the Aztec language: *"Do not let your heart be troubled. Am I not here? Do not be afraid of this illness or distress. Am I not your Mother? Are you not under my protection?"*



The Virgin asked Juan Diego to go to the bishop and ask him to build a chapel in the place of the apparition. The bishop did not believe the words of the simple Indian, but he asked the Madonna for a concrete sign. In the following apparition, the Virgin told Juan Diego to fill the *tilma* (typical cloak made of a rough fabric) with mountain flowers. It was winter, at that time no flowers were blooming in the region and the indigenous knew it, but with filial confidence, he climbed the mountain and filled his *tilma* with a large quantity of flowers.

When he was received by the bishop, Juan Diego opened his *tilma* and the flowers fell to the floor, and to everyone's surprise, the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe was imprinted in Juan Diego's *tilma*. At that moment, the bishop repented of his lack of faith and believed in the apparition of the Madonna to Juan Diego.

In a short time, the story of the miracle spread; a church was built on the premises, later becoming the great sanctuary of Guadalupe, visited annually by thousands of pilgrims and faithful.



Listening to the Word of God

From the Gospel according to John 19:25-27

Silence of internalization

Mary and the women persevere to the end. Mary, the mother of Jesus, who appears at the beginning of her Son's mission in Cana (John 2:1-11), leading his disciples to believe in Him, returns to the scene. This time there is no extraordinary sign. On the contrary, the moment of the cross challenges the faith of his disciples. Mary is close to Jesus, not only as a suffering Mother. She is part of the small group that persevered, that did not flee at the time of

persecution and the cross. She is the courageous disciple of Jesus, who *remains in his love*. Together with her, there are some women disciples, a sign of female participation in the community. The gesture of *standing* means persistence, constancy and adherence. Together with Mary and the women only the 'beloved disciple' remains. He represents the Christian community, the group of those who follow in the footsteps of Jesus.

In this scene, we perceive the strength of Mary's encounter with the 'beloved disciple' at the foot of the cross. In this important moment of the glorification of Jesus, the evangelist wants to communicate something deeper than the fact that Mary is a mother, who conceived, gave birth, nourished and educated Jesus. Here she is again called *woman*, as in the wedding at Cana. Her place is far beyond blood ties and family relationships.

For the will of Jesus, Mary is adopted as mother by the Christian community of all times. The beloved disciple, who represents the community, receives her as mother. Mary is invested with a new mission: she welcomes members of the Christian community as her children. The evangelist says, "From that hour the disciple welcomed her into his house", that is, in what is specific to her identity, which constitutes him as a person. John does not explain what Mary's mission as mother of the community consists of. It seems to be the same as Cana: interceding with her Son. It will allow new generations of Christians, like the first disciples, to believe in Jesus, see his glory and gather around Him.

When we commit ourselves to Jesus and his proposal, we experience numerous difficulties and great joys. We experience the failure of the cross and the victory of the resurrection.

Today we are the beloved disciples of Jesus. The Father gives us the same love with which he loved his Son (Jn 17:26). Moreover, he gives us Mary, mother and guide, to help us live our vocation of consecration and mission in the world.

As women consecrated to Christ and his mission, in our Latin American and more specifically Brazilian context, we are called today more than ever to stand at the foot of the cross. *Remain standing*, as a sign of hope and life.



From the Word to life

We are invited to visit a family, bringing material help and a flower, to symbolize the miracle of the roses in Juan Diego's mantle.



The voice of testimony

(from the sisters of the community of Feira di Santana)

In 2020, the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate present in Feira de Santana, Bahia, in the parish of the Immaculate began, at the request of the Archbishop, a new mission: to establish a new parish on the outskirts of the city.

In the first meeting with the leaders, in which the name of the new parish had to be chosen, all those present were divided into 4 small working groups. Each group had to present a name that would become the Patron or Patroness of the parish. The choice of the Virgin of Guadalupe was unanimous. The main reason was that the Virgin of Guadalupe is the protector of the poor and marginalized. Since then, the devotion to the Mother of Guadalupe and the commitment to being a parish have grown: a community of communities.



Our prayer

Perfect, ever Virgin, Holy Mary,
Mother of the true God, for whom you live.

You who truly are our compassionate Mother,
we seek you and we implore you.

Listen with pity to our cries,
our sadness.

Heal our sorrows,
our miseries and pains.

You who are our sweet and loving Mother,
welcome us in the comfort of your mantle,
in the affection of your arms.
May nothing afflict us or disturb our heart.

Show us and reveal to us your beloved Son,
so that in Him and with Him
we meet our salvation
and the salvation of the world.

Most Holy Virgin Mary of Guadalupe,
make us your messengers,
announcers of the Word
and the Will of God. Amen.

4TH day

(Prepared by the Province of Cameroon-Chad)

MARY, QUEEN OF THE APOSTLES, PATRON OF CAMEROON

Mother of communion

❖ *Mary is presented to us in the Cenacle as she presides with love, over the hope-filled prayer of the apostles and disciples. Mary's presence is fundamental to living in communion.*

Mary is there, at the missionary beginnings of the Church, as she was at the beginning of Jesus' evangelizing activity.

It does us good to think that Mary, the Mother of Jesus, belongs to this community of faithful disciples who listen to the Word with docility and participate in the Eucharist.

In our journey of hope with Mary, this attitude of communion is fundamental: "All, with one heart, were assiduous in prayer".



To the springs of devotion

The Pallottine fathers were the first priests to settle in Cameroon at the beginning of 1880. They had a great devotion to the Virgin Mary, Queen of the Apostles who was also their patroness.

By consecrating the foundation of their mission in Cameroon to Mary, they chose Mary, Queen of the Apostles, as their patroness, so that the Church of Cameroon could take her as a model.

To begin their presence, eight priests arrived on October 25, 1880. They settled in a village then called Elog Ngongo and which was immediately renamed Marienberg (Mary's mountain), a name that still remains today.



On 8 December 1880, the fathers consecrated themselves to God through Mary, Queen of the Apostles, patroness of their mission. Subsequently, various parishes, religious associations, schools, families... adopted the name of Mary Queen of the Apostles.

The consecration of the country to Mary, Queen of the Apostles, also occurred due to the heartfelt devotion of the first Cameroonian Christians, who prayed to her incessantly.

Cameroon was then publicly consecrated to the Virgin Mary by Monsignor Paul Etoga, on 8 December 1961, in the grotto of the Monastery of Mont Febe in Yaoundé.

In 1990, the bishops erected the first parish dedicated to Mary Queen of the Apostles, patron saint of Cameroon, as a Marian pilgrimage sanctuary. The foundation stone was laid by Msgr. Jean Zoa on 15 August 1990. This sanctuary, which later became the basilica of Mary Queen of the Apostles on 10 December 2006, is located in Mvolyé.

Even today, devotion to Mary, Queen of the Apostles, is present and alive throughout the nation.



Listening to the Word of God

From the Acts of the Apostles 1:12-14

Silence of internalization

As tradition says, starting from Pentecost until the serene sleep and the glorious Assumption into Heaven, Mary's journey is nothing other than the journey of silence and testimony of the first community.

Our world needs hope; but of a hope that puts the world on the path towards what is totally good, towards the delight of God, towards unalterable communion and encounter, towards the construction of a definitively new society, towards the possession of the new heaven and the new earth where justice and peace will dwell. We are certain that Mary, model of faithfulness, daily accompanies our journey of hope towards the encounter with the Lord.

It is with this hope that Pope Francis, after the Marian prayer of the Angelus on Sunday 13 August 2023, invited the Christians of the world to unite, in prayer, with the Christians of Cameroon «to ask for peace in this country, which is a victim of violence and war.»



From the Word to life

Each sister brings near the image of Our Lady a symbol that expresses her contribution to the communion in community.



The voice of testimony

(Testimony of a mother *Jeanne Bindzi*,
Lay MSI in Cameroon)

Formerly, one of my sons, who was 18 years old, had become "a street boy". He had left the house and was sleeping outside. I started praying. One day the Archbishop of Yaoundé came to say

Mass in our parish. In the homily, he said «... if you have problems, trust in Our Lady, recite the rosary and see». So I started praying the rosary every day and, after quite some time, my son came home. This happened in 2016.



Our prayer

Mary, woman of listening,
open our ears;
grant us to know how to listen
to the word of your Son Jesus
among the thousands of words of this world.
Grant that we may listen
to the reality in which we live,
to every person we encounter,
especially those who are poor, in need and in hardship.

Mary, woman of decision,
illuminate our mind and our heart,
so that we may obey, unhesitating,
the word of your Son Jesus;
give us the courage to decide,
not to let ourselves be dragged along,
letting others direct our life.

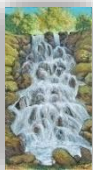
Mary, woman of action,
obtain that our hands and feet
move “with haste” toward others,
to bring them the charity and love of your Son Jesus,
to bring the light of the Gospel to the world, as you did.
Amen.

(Prayer of Pope Francis to Mary, 31/5/2013)

MOTHER MARY, PATRON OF THE MISSION OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Patron of unity and cultural harmony

❖ *The veneration of Mary has transcended cultural boundaries and played a vital role in shaping the spiritual landscape of this unique island nation. Today, Mother Mary remains a guiding light for the people of Papua New Guinea, offering comfort, strength and inspiration as they continue their journey of faith.*



To the springs of devotion

The history of the Christian mission of Papua New Guinea is closely intertwined with the reverence and devotion towards Mother Mary, who holds the esteemed title of "Patroness of the Mission". Her profound influence became evident.

Her image and veneration of her became a symbol of hope and a source of spiritual comfort for converts and missionaries alike.

Over the years, various shrines and churches dedicated to Mother Mary were established throughout Papua New Guinea, each becoming a focal point for community worship and religious gatherings. Her presence in these sacred spaces not only provided a spiritual



center, but also became a meeting point for cultural exchange and solidarity between different ethnic groups.

As Christianity took root in people's hearts, the role of the Madonna continued to grow. Stories of her intercession in times of adversity and of her miraculous apparitions spread among the faithful, strengthening the beloved and dear Mother's role. Mary as Patroness of the Papua New Guinea Mission represents a testimony to the persevering strength of faith and the unifying power of religious devotion.



Listening to the Word of God

From the Acts of the Apostles 2:42-47

Silence of internalization

In this passage, Luke describes the community life of the first Christians in enthusiastic terms. He uses the Greek term *koinonia* to describe the idea of common life, which involves both communion in Christ and sharing life in unity.

Common life includes sharing faith education, meals in fraternity (ordinary and ritual meals) and worship (at home and in the place of worship). The Christians were living a dream: they cared for each other, no one went hungry, they were generous and joyful and the community was growing.

In the midst of this new way of living together was Mary, the mother and first disciple of Jesus, their Lord and Savior. No wonder they were all “*of one mind*” as they were all united with Mary in one faith that accepted everything Christ had taught them over the years.

The early Christians knew that the same woman who had cradled the baby Jesus to sleep, picked him up when he fell, and held his broken body in her arms, could help them in their trials, both spiritual and material.

It becomes apparent that they saw Mary not simply as a historical person, but as a source of protection, unity, harmony, and intercession. This points to the reality of their relationship with her, who reached out to all of them as any good mother would: teaching about her, helping them with her prayers and her motherly advice, strengthening them in their loyalty.

As she has acted in their lives since the founding of the Church, she continues to do the same for us, the Mystical Body of Christ, lovingly exhorting us to share our time, our talents, and our treasures with our brothers and sisters in need.



From the Word to life

This symbol (developed by MSI Lay Associates of the Community of Alotau) is brought to the center of the celebrative place, reading the meaning contained in the image.

Mother Tree

A mother tree is the guardian of the small trees and provides them with nutrients.

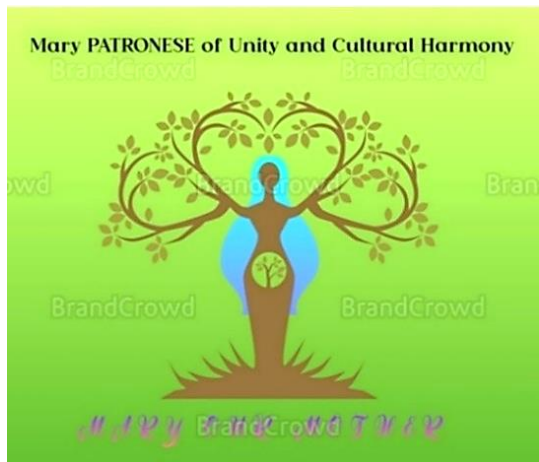
Green

Represents peace, harmony, hope and optimism.

Blue

Virgin purity symbolizes heaven and labels her as empress.

Heart formed by branches, centre of emotion, affection and love.





The voice of testimony

(testimony of Sr. *Celine*, from the community of Alotau)

Mary our Mother is always attentive to our needs and never disappoints us. I was involved in pastoral care before being transferred last year to the formation house in Alotau. Here we take care of the Association of the Children of Mary, the Association of Missionary Childhood and the Lay Associates.

I knew something about these activities but not in detail. At the beginning of last year, we had planned the Holy Mass with the Association of the Children of Mary. To prepare the Eucharistic celebration, the sister in charge had worked hard. Unfortunately, later, she had to leave for the capital for a medical visit and I was entrusted with the responsibility of that celebration. I was calm because everything was ready, I just had to help the children and other people participate well.

The day before the Holy Mass, I went to the Bishop to hand over the progress of the celebration. The Bishop asked me many questions and asked me to return the Manual of the Children of Mary, which had been lent to the sister in charge. I could not answer any of the Bishop's questions and was hearing about the Manual for the first time. I came home without knowing where to look for it or even what kind of book it was. I asked everyone in the community and no one knew, I turned the whole library upside down without success. I was worried about how to face the Bishop the next day.

I prayed to Our Lady to help me. With a troubled mind and heart, I went to bed not knowing what I would do the next day.

The next day, when I woke up, I heard an inner voice telling me to go to the guest room and open the drawer. The feeling was very strong inside me. It was already time for Lauds and I rushed to the chapel, but the message remained within me. After the prayer, I ran into the guest room and opened the drawer: the Manual was there; it was a very old book, with pages now yellowed by time. I took it with gratitude and thanked Our Lady for her help.

The celebration took place peacefully. After Holy Mass, I recounted my simple experience and the Bishop added that the book had been given to him when he was a boy.

After this episode, my interest in learning more about this Association grew, as did my devotion to Our Lady.



Our prayer

We ask you loving Mother to unite us,
to make us see through the fog of ignorance
and deception,

which makes our fellow men
appear as strangers and enemies.

We implore your maternal assistance
so that we can make serious efforts
to guard and maintain the harmony and unity of the
Spirit in the name of Jesus.

According to the power of God that works in us,
help us to be of one heart and one soul,
loving each other as members of the same family,

Make us compassionate,
people with tender hearts and humble minds,
who do not return evil for evil, or insult for insult,
but pray for the well-being and happiness of all.
Amen.

THE VIRGIN OF SHESHAN

Mary, help of Christians

❖ *The statue of Our Lady of Sheshan, seen from afar, looks like a cross, but as we get closer, we realize that the figure is that of the Virgin who raises baby Jesus above her head, like a trophy, a sign of victory. On the doors of the sanctuary, according to Chinese tradition, there are two proverbs: “Stop in the chapel which is halfway up the hill: rest and offer Mary your respect as a son”. The sanctuary is at the top of the hill. “Continue your ascent and implore the mercy of the Mother of God.” Even in our daily lives, let us stop to rest under the mantle of the Blessed Virgin, where nothing can harm us.*



To the springs of devotion

The sanctuary dedicated to Our Lady of Sheshan is located in the Song Jiang district, on the outskirts of Shanghai, China, and is dedicated to Mary Help of Christians.

It is interesting to know the history of the sanctuary.

In 1863, the superior of the Jesuit community of Shanghai purchased the southern part of Sheshan Hill. On 1 March 1868 the then bishop of Shanghai, Msgr. Adrien Languillat, sj, consecrated the chapel and blessed the image of Mary Help of Christians.

During the Tai Ping revolt, the superior of the Jesuits of Shanghai, Fr. Gu Zhen Sheng went to Sheshan Hill and prayed to the Virgin Mary: *“If the diocese is saved from the rebel attack, we will build a basilica in honor of Mary, in thanksgiving for her special protection.”* The territory of the diocese was spared from destruction.



On 15 April 1873, Bishop Languillat consecrated and inaugurated the new basilica. Since then, “Our Lady of Sheshan” became the patroness of the diocese of Shanghai. Every year, on May 1st and 24th, a large number of pilgrims go to the sanctuary. In 1874, as requested by Bishop Languillat, Pope Pius IX granted special indulgence to all pilgrims who go to the sanctuary in the month of May.



Listening to the Word of God

From the Gospel according to Lk 1: 39-56

Silence of internalization

The story of Mary’s visit to her cousin Elizabeth is the best example of Mary’s attitude of charity. *“In those days Mary got up and went with haste into the hill country, to a city of Judah. Entering Zechariah’s house she greeted Elizabeth.”* Mary went *“in a hurry”*, that is, she ran, she rushed to help the elderly Elizabeth in the most important moment of her life, when every woman needs help. Mary understands and takes the initiative to respond to Elizabeth’s need. It is because of this attitude of hers that today we all invoke Mary in moments when we need her.

Our Lady of Sheshan, knowing the pain and danger of the people of the Diocese of Shanghai, interceded for them at the appropriate time. Just as a mother knows her child’s needs even before she is able to speak, because she shares her emotions, so Our Lady of Sheshan is venerated as a Helper. She is there to help us in our needs, problems, and sufferings. Let us continue our journey with courage, trusting in Mary who supports us with her arms raised.



From the Word to life

When singing a Marian song, you can put these two writings on the right and left of the statue of Our Lady of Sheshan, as is used in churches and homes in China as a sign of devotion and trust in her intercession.

The writing says:

“Our Lady of Sheshan, pray for us”.

為我等祈

余山聖母



The voice of testimony

(testimony of Sr. Luigia Mindassi)

While I was following various catechumenate groups in the parish, one day a very simple, middle-aged woman, who wanted to participate in the catechumenate, but did not know how to read, showed up. She had come to Hong Kong from China years ago. By introducing herself, Wong Mei Ling told me how she had managed to get in touch with me.

Part of her family was in China, including one of her Catholic sisters, who encouraged her to begin the catechumenate to prepare for Baptism. Since she did not know who to turn to, her sister gave her a rosary, telling her: “When you see a church, stand at the door, holding the rosary in your hand and you’ll see what happens.”

Since Wong Mei Ling lived in the area where I worked, she happened to be in our parish. A Catholic lady, going to church, saw her near the door with the rosary in her hand and, feeling

inspired by the Lord to come closer, asked her what she was looking for and if she needed anything. She told her the personal story and so the Catholic woman led her to me.

Shortly after, Wong Mei Ling began the catechumenate, participating in the entire journey, despite not knowing how to read, with great attention and devotion, also bringing a very agitated grandson, the son of her daughter-in-law who had abandoned him to her care.

When she received Baptism, she asked help for her so that the child could enter Catholic school.

This story shows how devotion to Mary leads to faith in Jesus.



Our prayer

Virgin Most Holy,
Mother of the Incarnate Word and our Mother,
venerated in the Shrine of Sheshan
under the title *“Help of Christians”*,
the entire Church in China
looks to you with devout affection.

We come before you today to implore your protection.

Look upon the People of God
and, with a mother’s care,
guide them along the paths of truth and love,
so that they may always be
a leaven of harmonious coexistence among all citizens. [...]

Our Lady of Sheshan,
sustain all those in China,
who, amid their daily trials,

continue to believe, to hope, to love.

May they never be afraid to speak of Jesus to the world,
and of the world to Jesus.

In the statue overlooking the Shrine
you lift your Son on high,
offering him to the world
with open arms in a gesture of love.
Help Catholics always
to be credible witnesses to this love,
ever clinging to the rock of Peter
on which the Church is built.

Mother of China and all Asia,
pray for us, now and for ever. Amen!

(From the prayer of Pope Benedict XVI to the Virgin of Sheshan, written on
the occasion of the day of prayer for the Church in China, 24 May 2008)

7th day

(Prepared by the Delegation of Delhi)

OUR LADY OF GRACES OF SARDHANA

Mary, full of grace

❖ *With this title, we honor Our Lady of Grace, our guiding light in north India. By recognizing Mary as “full of grace,” we pay homage to her purity and her unique ability to host the divine. In a world contaminated by sin, Mary stands as a beacon of unparalleled purity and humility. Let us unite in prayer to ask for her intercession and find inspiration in her example.*



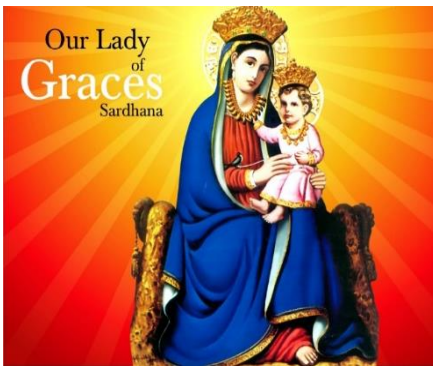
To the springs of devotion

Our Lady of Graces of Sardhana is the Patroness of our Mission in North India.

The Basilica-Shrine of Our Lady of Grace is a lively parish of the Catholic diocese of Meerut located in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh.

Begum Samru, a Muslim, inherited the Jagir of Sardhana after her husband's death in 1778. On 7 May 1781, she was welcomed into the Catholic Church in Agra, by Rev. Fr. Gregory, a Carmelite priest. He had been sent from Bombay to take care of the Christians of Agra, when the Jesuit fathers had to leave. Begum took the name Joan, the name of another warrior woman who guided the destiny of her people: Joan of Arc. Joan Samru holds a unique place in history as the only Catholic ruler in India, reigning over the Principality of Sardhana in the 18th and 19th centuries.

She subsequently decided to build a church in Sardhana, dedicated to the Virgin Mary. The Basilica is the largest in northern India.



In 1955, when the Coadjutor Archbishop of Agra, Msgr. J.B Evangelisti, OFM, was in Italy, he had the opportunity to speak to the inhabitants of Livorno, a town in the Tuscany region. Near Livorno, on the hill of Montenegro, is the famous sanctuary of Our Lady of Graces. He expressed the desire to have

a copy of that miraculous image of their Madonna for his church in Sardhana.

People responded enthusiastically and asked a good painter to do the job. The picture is painted on wood, the Madonna is depicted sitting, holding Jesus in the Mother's arms, while in her left hand she holds a string, tied to the leg of a bird, which rests on Mary's arm. The

bird represents the soul. The meaning is evident: To Jesus through Mary. The soul that seeks Mary comes closer to Jesus.

Receiving this precious gift, he took it with him when he went to an audience with the Holy Father Pius XII on September 25, 1955. The Pope venerated the Image and blessed it, expressing his conviction that the Blessed Virgin would do great things for the people of India.

On 7 November 1957, the image of Our Lady of Graces was placed in the niche of the side chapel. God seemed to place the seal of his overall approval on the undertaking, when, on the very day of the inauguration, a child from Ghaziabad, abandoned by the Doctors, was healed instantly when he touched the sacred image. News of his miracle spread the healing power of "Our Lady of Graces" throughout northern India.

On 19 December 1961, Pope John XXIII elevated the church to the dignity of a minor basilica.

The annual pilgrimage to this Marian sanctuary takes place on the second Sunday of November in which thousands of people participate.



Listening to the Word of God

From the Gospel according to Lk 1:26-38

Silence of internalization

Dones, RN, to Sr. Antonia, April 1949, p. 48.

“Pray, pray much to Mary Most Holy; consecrate to her all your affections, all your work and thoughts. She will reward you by being your Mother, your guide, your counsellor...”

Rodolfi, UT, to Manna, 17/9/1935, p. 203

“Mary is all my comfort and all my hope”



From the Word to life

With filial affection towards our Blessed Mother, we go in procession carrying the sacred image of Our Lady of Graces - Sardhana from the entrance door of the house to the altar that is prepared for her.

As we go in procession, we will sing the Hail Mary or pray the Hail Mary in different languages.



The voice of testimony

*(testimony of Fr. Lawrence Rayappan,
priest brother of Sr. Arul Rayappan)*

When I became a priest, in the year 1982, I had a miraculous experience of Our Lady of Graces: a child who was almost dead was brought to me to pray. Invoking the powerful intercession of our Blessed Mother, I applied the Holy Oil to the child's forehead and prayed. The child was healed.

In 1985, when I was posted as assistant parish priest in Sacred Heart Church in Ghaziabad, the construction work of the church was underway and by mistake, one of the construction workers fell from the roof of the church and was declared dead. At that crucial moment, I prayed for him through the intercession of Our Lady of Graces and he was brought back to life.

When I was assigned as a parish priest and sent to a place called "Hut Hut" which in Hindi means "Go away". In fact, due to the communal revolt between Hindus and Muslims, the Christians are sent out of the village. By praying to Our Lady of Graces, the faith of Christians was strengthened and a good relationship between Christians and Muslims grew. With the help received from the

parishioners of Padua, several houses were built and the village was renamed with the name of Padua Puram.

On several occasions, during the annual feast of the Our Lady of Graces, thousands of people with various illnesses come to receive the blessing, invoking her maternal protection. I pray for them and bless them with the Holy Oil. Often these people experience miraculous healings and share their testimony.

Overall, I owe a lot to Our Lady of Graces for her powerful intervention in every step of my life as a priest of God. As an itinerant missionary, I continue my priestly ministry serving the people of God in Northern India.



Our prayer

Psalm 16 is the song of trust and security in God. Let us pray to him together, remembering in particular our mission in the northwestern part of India - Delhi

Delegation.

Let us implore God's protection for people facing communal violence, especially for the leaders.

We shall find Psalm 16 (15) in the Bible or at Compline on Thursday.

OUR LADY OF AFRICA

Mary mother of all peoples

❖ *Our Lady of Africa is a meeting place, particularly between Muslims and Christians. Once a year, Marian Day is held there, a cultural and spiritual day on a Marian theme, which involves Muslims and Christians.*



To the springs of devotion

Anyone, coming from to Algiers from any direction glimpses immediately the Basilica of Notre Dame d’Afrique (Our Lady of Africa), on a hill overlooking the sea.

At the origin of the construction of the basilica, there are two young women, Marguerite and Anna Cinquin, originally from Lyon, who worked at the seminary of Saint Eugène. Dreaming of a church built in honor of Our Lady, they placed a statue of the Holy Virgin on the trunk of an old olive tree and gathered in prayer in front of that image.

Almost immediately, a popular and spontaneous pilgrimage of the faithful began, especially the wives of sailors, especially in times of storm. Subsequently, pilgrims from all classes and social categories arrived and a chapel was built.



Marguerite Berger continued to dream of a church that would dominate Algiers, and she insisted to the bishop, Msgr. Pavy. Finally, the project was approved.

While awaiting construction, a small temporary church dedicated to St. Joseph was built in 1852 and a bronze statue of Our Lady from Lyon, until then kept by the Trappist Monastery of Staoueli, 25 km from Algiers, was placed there.



On February 2, 1858, the seminarians, led by the bishop himself, began digging the foundations of the Basilica. Msgr. Pavy's successor, Msgr. Lavigerie, inherited his love for Our Lady of Africa. Construction work continued quickly and the Basilica was consecrated on 2 July 1872. On 30 April 1876, the statue of the Virgin was solemnly crowned, and this date later became that of the feast of Notre Dame d'Afrique.

It should be remembered that the history of the White Fathers, founded by Msgr. Lavigerie, is one with that of Notre Dame d'Afrique. In the chapel of St. Joseph, the first members of the Institute pronounced their vows for the service of the Church in Africa. The patron saint of Algeria is a missionary!

Inside the Basilica, there is a large quantity of "ex-votos", which tell us about the trust in the intercession of Notre Dame d'Afrique. Many people come to this church every day, from 200 to 800 a day, almost all of them Muslims. There are simple visitors, but many also come to pray, to express their heart's desires, for example to have a child, or their gratitude.

Algerians call the basilica Madame l'Afrique. It is a place of prayer, peace and meditation for all.



Listening to the Word of God

From the Gospel according to Luke 11:27-28

Silence of internalization

Among the crowd, a woman whose name is unknown, praises the mother of Jesus, following the miracle he performed on a man possessed by a spirit that rendered him mute.

Let us imagine the position of a woman in the society of Palestine at the time of Jesus; her name is not mentioned. These realities make us think... How often do the marginalized and vulnerable to whom society does not give enough importance remain excluded.

On the contrary, Jesus looks at the little ones and gives them importance. However, what is most important in these verses is to meditate on the response given by Jesus to this woman. *“Blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it!”*

Mary is the first to listen to and keep the Word of God.



From the Word to life

Images of different peoples or faces of women, cut out from magazines are prepared in a basket at the entrance to the chapel and each sister takes one and places it at the feet of the Virgin to express that everyone goes to her.



The voice of the testimony

In the Maghreb, especially in Algeria and Tunisia, there are many words of praise and blessing that we hear: *بارك الله فيك May God pour out his blessings upon you* *يفضلك May God favor you*, *بارك لك May God bless you*, *ة الصح يعطيك That God may give you health* *يكثر خيرك May God multiply your good*, *الحمد الله Thanks be to God...*

The Muslim religion is in fact imbued with declarations of praise to God and blessings. This custom makes us reflect on how the thought of God is rooted in this people.

In our daily meetings, even with children, we repeatedly hear and receive these phrases of blessing. We discover that their

spontaneous desire is to entrust others to the protection and grace of Almighty God and this even if they do not know us.

These words spoken in faith bring us a message of great hope and, in a certain sense, help us to enter Muslim culture, which is not far from what the verses of the Gospel of Luke say. They show us the importance of always having an attentive gaze and listening, to discover the presence of God in our lives and develop relationships that arise from our common belonging and our trust in God.

This gaze is possible for those who listen and meditate on the Word, like the Virgin Mary who guides us in learning to listen.



Our prayer

Let us repeat together, with each spontaneous invocation, the prayer, which is unique in its kind, written in the apse of the basilica:

Our Lady of Africa pray for us and for the Muslims



9TH day: *First Vespers of the Solemnity of the Immaculate*