



What is the Significance of a

CANONICAL CORONATION?



S PART OF THE CELEBRATION of the 150th anniversary of the Diocese of St. Augustine, the statue of Our Lady of La Leche will be crowned in a canonical coronation on her diocesan feast day, Oct. 11, 2020. This is a rare honor for

the diocese, so we asked Father Tom Willis, director of liturgy for the diocese and pastor of the Cathedral Basilica of St. Augustine to explain the significance.

Q: What is a canonical or papal coronation?

A canonical coronation is a formal act of the pope, as supreme pontiff of the church, to crown in his name an image of Christ, the Blessed Virgin Mary or St. Joseph in the name of the Holy Father. The crowning acknowledges that the specific image, while having local significance, also has a universal importance for the Catholic Church as it pertains to the Salvation Christ won for us by the Paschal Mystery of his death and resurrection. The practice began in the 17th century but became increasingly popular from the late 1800's.

Many people are familiar with a May crowning as many parishes and schools annually have one as a sign of their devotion to Mary. A canonical coronation is different in that this will only happen once to this specific image of Our Lady of La Leche. Once the ceremony of coronation takes place on Oct. 11, 2020, no other crowning of this specific image will take place since the pope, as vicar of Christ and successor of St. Peter, has had placed on this image crowns to symbolize the universal and perpetual nature of the

graces that flow to the church from Christ through Mary's intercession under her title as Our Lady of La Leche.

Q: Why is this big deal for the diocese?

A canonical coronation places a "papal stamp" on a particular devotion of the church, in this case to Mary under the title of Our Lady of La Leche. Devotion certainly dates back centuries in various parts of the world; however, this particular shrine – which recently was named a national shrine in the United States – is noteworthy for the centrality of the devotion for almost 400 years.

It also is only the fourth site in the United States to receive this honor. The others are Our Lady of Prompt Succor, crowned in 1895, in New Orleans; Our Lady of Mount Carmel, 1904, in New York City; and Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception, 2013, in Lake Charles, La.

Q: What happens at the coronation?

As it pertains to the coronation of the image of Our Lady of La Leche, a papal legate will place crowns on the heads of

the Baby Jesus and then the Virgin Mary. The Order of Crowning an Image of the Blessed Virgin Mary, which is an official liturgical rite in the Catholic Church for use by bishops, will be celebrated. The ritual designates that, in the celebration of Mass, the coronation takes place following the homily. Our Lady of La Leche already wears a crown. How is this different?

New crowns are being designed to place on Mary and the Baby Jesus she holds as he nurses at her breast. These crowns will be considered permanent on the image in the historic chapel at the shrine in St. Augustine. Other images of Our Lady of La Leche will continue to have the crown on Mary's head as it presently is used.

Q: What kinds of devotions does this encourage?

In the first place, as devotion to Mary under this title manifested over the centuries, the Blessed Mother's intercession is an important one for mothers and families at the time of a baby's birth and in the first years of life as the baby suckles at its mother's breast. In this, the church also calls to mind that Jesus, the Son of God and Son of Mary, was born into this life – the mystery of the Incarnation – and was similarly nurtured at his Mother's breast. This leads to a second importance which is the sanctity of human life. The care which mothers (as well as fathers and all family members) must have during pregnancy and the early years of an infant's life is foundational to one's human life as well as one's life in Christ.

Thus devotion to Our Lady of La Leche incarnates the scripture verse of all that was said about Jesus at his birth:

Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart (Luke 2:19), and

Jesus went down with them (Mary and Joseph) and came to Nazareth and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart (Luke 2:51).

Devotion to Mary also points to the centrality of family life which St. Paul writes about most especially in his *Letter to the Ephesians* (5:21-6:4). 