



The Devotion to Our Lady of La Leche

BY DR. MARY SOHA

IN ALL CULTURES the image of a nursing mother signifies peace, intimacy, protection, nurturing, and the wonder of new life. The image of Our Lady of La Leche in the historic chapel at Mission Nombre de Dios in St. Augustine, represents more than 400 years of devotion to this nursing Madonna.

Through her intercession, pilgrims have discovered their vocations to married or consecrated life, conception and delivery of healthy children to loving families, healing of physical, mental, and spiritual wounds, and most importantly – a personal call to visitors to witness the Incarnation of Jesus Christ – the presence of “the Word made Flesh.”

The clothes she wears and her posture while nursing the Christ Child, help continue the story begun by the miraculous image of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico. Our Lady of Guadalupe appears as an expectant mother carrying the one true God.

Scholars and scientists have learned much from the miraculous image that appeared on Dec. 12, 1531. The story is beautiful, the science amazing, and her love for the people of the “New World” led to the conversion of more than 9 million indigenous people in less than five years.

More than 60 years after Our Lady’s image was given to Central America, the small image (11 inches tall) of Our Lady of La Leche was brought to St. Augustine from Spain. The love of the catechized native people for their new mother was genuine, and their understanding and belief in the real presence of Christ, fully human and fully divine, was overwhelming.

Every color, every pattern,

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■ The historic chapel at the National Shrine of Our Lady of La Leche was destroyed and rebuilt many times, most recently in 1925.

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everything about the image of Our Lady of La Leche takes us into the divine presence:

First, she is crowned Queen of both heaven and earth. Heaven is signified by the deep blue mantle speckled with golden stars. Earth is the rich terra cotta tone of her gown. She is God's beloved – his chosen one to bring his son into the world.

Second, the terra cotta of her gown is now ribbed with layers of gold, signifying that the son of God is now present on earth.

Third, the white mantle that encases her head and face, and the crown underscores not only the virgin birth of Christ but also Mary's perpetual virginity.

Fourth, while the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe's humility is known by the simple brown slipper she wears on her right foot, Our Lady of La Leche, after the birth of her son, humbles herself

even more by having nothing on her feet.

Fifth, her arms support her infant son in an open embrace. He is relaxed, his right arm is free, his hand is opened and not clenched, and his legs extend gently over her left arm. When he is ready, she is poised, willing to share her son with pilgrims who are present.

Sixth, her shoulders are square, and her head slightly bent – she is able to see both her son and the devout who pray at her feet. Through her eyes, she conveys our love to her son and his grace, through her, to us. She is quiet – so quiet that you know that her heartbeat and Christ's are one.

Seventh, Christ is nursing – showing all the world that he and his mother are one. Because of her "yes," Christ came into the world to redeem it. Through her, grace is given to help each one of us to be included in redemption. She

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nurtures the “bread of life,” which is offered up for us.

In the image of Our Lady of La Leche, we are drawn into the great mystery of the Incarnation. She offers to us the true sustenance we need for eternal life – that of the true God and true man found only in the Eucharist. 🕊️



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