



A Special Gift for the Faithful

The Diocese of St. Augustine prepares for a Canonical Coronation

BY LARA PATANGAN



THE CANONICAL CORONATION of the image of Our Lady of La Leche (Nuestra Señora de la Leche y Buen Parto) in the historic chapel at Mission Nombre de Dios in St. Augustine is a timeless honor that promises to be worth the wait.

The once-in-a-lifetime occasion acknowledging this specific image of Our Lady's universal importance was originally planned last year as part of the 150th-anniversary celebration of the Diocese of St. Augustine. Still, due to the pandemic, the Canonical Coronation was postponed. So instead, it will take place on Sunday, Oct. 10, 2021 – the day before the diocesan feast day for Our Lady of La Leche.

Although this rare honor bestowed by Pope Francis can be given to crown in his name an image of either Christ, the Blessed Virgin

Mary, or St. Joseph, this particular Canonical Coronation will be given to Mary under the title of Our Lady of La Leche (Nuestra Señora de la Leche y Buen Parto).

“It is fitting that this Mother Diocese of Florida will celebrate the crowning of the Mother of our Lord for her accompaniment through the centuries. The first Christians in Florida, including the Timucuan and Apalachees, had such a love for Our Lady that the recently discovered foundation of a chapel built in the early 1600s was dedicated to her,” shared Bishop Felipe Estévez. “The crowning will be the summit of a year and a half journey of personal and communal consecration taking place in the diocese.”

According to Father Tom Willis, director of liturgy for the Diocese of St. Augustine, this formal act by the Holy Father acknowledges

that this specific image of Our Lady is universally important to the Catholic Church for the salvation Christ won for us through his death and resurrection. The October crowning will be only the fourth time a Marian image has received a Canonical Coronation in the United States.

While many people are familiar with a May crowning that takes place annually in parishes and schools, a Canonical Coronation is different in that it only happens once to this specific image of Our Lady of La Leche.

“Once the coronation ceremony takes place, no other crowning of this specific image will occur 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,” explained Father Willis.

Italian artisans are designing new crowns to place on Mary and baby Jesus for the coronation. While these crowns will be considered permanent for the image in the historic chapel at the National 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. During the ceremony, the Archbishop of Madrid, Cardinal Carlos

Osoro Sierra, acting as a papal legate (representative), will place crowns on the heads of the baby Jesus and then the Virgin Mary.

Gifted to the diocese by the Holy Father, the Canonical Coronation of the image of Our Lady of La Leche is in response to more than 400 years of intercession to this nursing Madonna.



The first Marian Shrine in the United States underscores the important message of the mystery of the Incarnation and the sanctity of human life.

“Devotion to Mary also points to the centrality of family life,” said Father Willis. It’s that devotion that dates back centuries that draws pilgrims to the small mission-style chapel to pray for Our Lady of La Leche’s powerful intercession.

According to Dr. Mary Soha, chair of the Canonical Coronation Committee, the coronation will occur at the Cathedral Basilica of St. Augustine following the homily on Sunday, Oct. 10. While Mass will not be open to the public, it will be live-streamed beginning at 2 p.m. so that everyone can see it. Parishes are encouraged to live stream the coronation and Mass as well. “It’s important that people understand the uniqueness of this communal event and participate in it,” said Soha.



■ Sculptor Reto Demetz, of Demetz Studio in Northern Italy, lovingly carves the new image of Our Lady of La Leche, which will be crowned on Oct. 10, 2021.

A large part of the preparations for the coronation is prayer. “We have to be a people worthy of receiving Our Lady as our Queen. This helps us to prepare to be a better kingdom of God,” said Soha. Preparation can be done through the Eucharist, confession, and the works of mercy so that we are in a spiritual state of grace.

“I can’t emphasize enough how special this gift from our Holy Father is to our diocese,” said Bishop Estévez. “It is joyful to witness the Mother of our Lord being recognized and loved by our people. Just as God honored this humble servant to be the Mother of our Savior, so do we choose her to be our Mother and Queen.” 🙏

■ **Our Lady of La Leche (Nuestra Señora de la Leche) is only the fourth site in the United States to receive the honor of a Canonical Coronation. The others include:**

- Our Lady of Prompt Succor, crowned in 1895, in New Orleans, La.;
- Our Lady of Mount Carmel, 1904, in New York City, N.Y.; and
- Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception, 2013, in Lake Charles, La.

In addition to the Canonical Coronation, the Mass will include a diocesan consecration to Jesus through Mary.

To view the live stream of the Canonical Coronation, visit the diocesan YouTube channel at www.YouTube.com/dosacatholics, the diocesan Facebook page at www.Facebook.com/dosacatholics, or the diocesan website at www.dosafl.com/livestream.

To learn more about Canonical Coronation and to view a schedule of pre-coronation festivities, visit <https://coronation.dosafl.com/>.