



# Mary in America

Monday, June 8, 2026

•Marian Shrines of the United States•



If your Parish bulletin or the Diocesan newspaper advertised an upcoming Marian pilgrimage, your imagination may take you on a tour of some the major Marian Shrines across the globe – Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico City, Our Lady of Lourdes in France, Our Lady of Fatima in Portugal, and possibly ending at St. Mary Major – one of the four Papal Basilicas in Rome, the spiritual heart of Christianity and Marian devotion.

But maybe international travel is not possible for you right now. Are there any Marian Shrines in the United States? I am glad you asked. Yes! This evening, I would like to take you on a quick, whirlwind tour to various Marian Shrines that could be a future destination, or maybe just a prayerful stop on a future trip.

Before we begin our trip, a quick look at the “Marian numbers” for the United States. Out of over 200 active Catholic cathedrals across the country – 58 of them are named after the Blessed Mother, including our own Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in the Diocese of Wichita. There is no exact official count of how many Catholic churches in the United States are named after the Blessed Mother. However, the general estimate is that about 1 in 4 Catholic churches in the U.S. are dedicated to Mary in some form. In the great state of Kansas, there are 56 Catholic Churches named after the Blessed Mother. These parishes are dedicated to her under various titles such as St. Mary’s, Immaculate Conception, the Assumption and various titles of Our Lady of \_\_\_\_\_, such as Guadalupe, the Rosary, Perpetual Help, Lourdes, etc.

The major international shrines have a common thread – they were primarily places where Our Lady appeared to one or more people for a heavenly purpose. Of the recognized National Marian Shrines in the United States – only one falls into this category. All the other Marian Shrines we will be “visiting” during this talk were established in order to provide an opportunity for those in the United States to receive and reflect upon Our Lady, her motherly love and her desire to lead us to her Son, Jesus. Most of these shrines have extensive grounds on which a pilgrim can walk and pray during their visit. In addition to a chapel, where Mass is said and the Blessed Sacrament is reserved, a pilgrim will usually find many small outdoor shrines, including the Stations of the Cross and rosary walks, shrines of the “big



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three” Marian apparitions of Guadalupe, Lourdes and Fatima, as well those of various saints.

This will be a quick, whirl-wind tour. If you are interested in additional information on any of the Shrines I mention, links to the various Shrine’s websites will be at the end of my talk – which will be available in print form on our website shortly after the end of the Novena.

The first shrine to Our Lady in the United States is the **National Shrine of Our Lady of La Leche y Buen Parto** (“Our Lady of the Milk and Happy Delivery”) in St. Augustine, Florida. It was initially built by the Spanish around 1620, and it is located on the grounds of the Nombre de Dios (Name of God) Mission in St. Augustine.

The devotion to Our Lady of La Leche can be traced to the Milk Grotto Church in Bethlehem - it is believed to be the site where the Blessed Mother breastfed the baby Jesus. Devotion to Our Lady of La Leche, was very strong with the Spanish people who settled in Florida. Many women seeking to conceive pray and light candles at this shrine. The Shrine receives many letters telling of answered prayers for conception as well as safe deliveries of problematic pregnancies.

In Washington, DC, we will find one of the most well-known shrines: the **Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception**. Known as America's Preeminent Marian Shrine, it contains over 80 chapels dedicated to Mary. We won't spend much time here today – you will hear more about this Basilica during an upcoming Novena presentation.

Traveling north we will make a visit to **The Basilica of the National Shrine of Our Lady of Fatima** in Youngstown, New York, just north of Niagara Falls. The dome of the basilica is 100 feet in diameter and 55 feet high. At the top of the dome, there is a statue of Our Lady of Fatima that is 13 feet high and weighs 10 tons. In front of the basilica is a giant rosary of 59 lights and a rosary pool shaped like a heart in honor of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. A unique feature is found on Fatima Hill - a rosary of beads made of authentic cannon balls. These symbolize the need to surrender weapons of war to the Queen of Peace.

For those who love Our Lady of Fatima, we travel south to the **National Blue Army Shrine of Our Lady of Fatima in** Asbury, New Jersey. This shrine, dedicated to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, was built in 1978 as a response to Our Lord’s question to Sister Lucia: “What is being done to spread devotion to the Immaculate Heart of My Mother?” The Shrine’s purpose is to be a place where people can encounter Our Lady of Fatima’s message of prayer, repentance, and conversion. It also serves as a conduit through which the message of Fatima can spread throughout the Americas and the rest of the world. The Capelinha–Portuguese for “little chapel”–is one of only two exact replicas of the chapel built at Fatima on the site of Our Lady’s apparitions. It houses the Pilgrim Virgin Statue, which is itself an exact replica of the miraculous Pilgrim Virgin Statue carried in procession at Fatima.

We travel inland and a little west to visit the **National Shrine Grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes** at Mount St. Mary's in Emmitsburg, MD, the home of one of the major theological seminaries our Diocesan priests attend. This beautiful mountainside shrine features the oldest US replica of the Lourdes shrine in France, built just 17 years after the apparition of Our Lady to St. Bernadette in 1858. This shrine features a 26-foot, gold-leafed statue of the Virgin Mary placed on top of a 95-foot tower, and it is a prominent geographical and navigational beacon for all those who travel in the area. This Marian statue serve as a federally registered air landmark for aircraft navigating the Route 15 corridor. Everyone who flies that way looks for her – how's that for a bit of evangelization?

We're going to leave the East coast and travel south to the **Basilica of Our Lady of San Juan del Valle** in San Juan, TX: A major shrine in the Rio Grande Valley. With its annual visitor count surpassing a million, it stands among the most frequented Marian shrine in the United States.

The veneration of Our Lady of San Juan del Valle has its roots in the town of San Juan de los Lagos, Mexico, which emerged near Guadalajara after the Spanish colonization. There, Spanish missionaries placed a revered image of the Immaculate Conception within the town's church. A miraculous event in 1623 catalyzed the devotion to Our Lady of San Juan. An acrobat's family, performing in the area, suffered a tragedy when their youngest daughter fatally fell during a routine. In their grief, an indigenous caretaker of the church urged the parents to lay the image of the Virgin Mary atop their daughter, while she invoked the Virgin's intercession. The child miraculously returned to life, which ignited the widespread devotion to "La Virgen de San Juan," a devotion that now extends beyond Mexico into the United States.

We move up the Gulf coast to the **National Shrine of Our Lady of Prompt Succor** in New Orleans, LA. French Ursulines arrived in New Orleans in 1727 and established the oldest school for girls currently operating in what is now the United States. During a period of crisis Mother St. Andre Madier appealed to her cousin, an Ursuline Sister in France to come and help. Her first request to leave France was refused. One day while praying before a statue of the Blessed Mother, she was inspired to say, "O most holy Virgin Mary, if you obtain a prompt and favorable answer to my letter, I promise to have you honored in New Orleans under the title of Our Lady of Prompt Succor." Her request was approved. Generations of Ursulines and friends of Our Lady of Prompt Succor have learned about many of the favors granted through the intercession of Our Lady in response to pleas for quick and favorable help.

Two outstanding interventions: On Good Friday in 1788, frightened residents joined the sisters in the Ursuline convent chapel, begging Our Lady to save them and their homes from the raging wind and fire that was sweeping across New Orleans. The Superior saw Sister St. Anthony, one of the older nuns, climbing the stairs. Following her, Reverend Mother discovered she was carrying the small statue of

Our Lady. As the Superior watched, Sister hurried to the window on the second floor. She set the statue on the sill facing the fire, then knelt and prayed with great confidence: "Oh, Lady of Prompt Succor, save us or we are lost." At that very instant, the wind veered and the flames were blown back over their path of destruction and soon died out, leaving the convent unharmed, while nearly 800 buildings in the city were destroyed.

The victory of General Andrew Jackson's small, little-prepared and ill-equipped band of soldiers against the British Army's attack on New Orleans in 1815 is also accredited to the intervention of Our Lady of Prompt Succor.

Leaving the south, we travel north to three Marian Shrines in Wisconsin. These are: the **Basilica of the National Shrine of Mary Help of Christians at Holy Hill**; the **Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe in La Crosse**; and the **National Shrine of Our Lady of Champion**. This later shrine is the only shrine in the United States where an approved Marian apparition took place – and which our faithful Novena-goers will hear more about tomorrow night.

The history of the **Shrine of Mary, Help of Christians at Holy Hill** begins with a hermit in the mid 1800's. He found an old French diary and map dated 1676 showing a cone-shaped mountain in Wisconsin. The diary described how the author placed a stone altar, raised a cross, and dedicated the hill to Jesus's mother Mary, an account which corresponds with Jesuit missionary work in the area in the late 1600's. Irish settlers first called the area Holy Hill, and in 1863 a log chapel was dedicated as the first Shrine of Mary, Help of Christians. The third and present shrine and church await all those who visit Holy Hill, seeking Our Lady's help.

The **Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe** in La Crosse, Wisconsin, was established under the guidance of Cardinal Raymond Leo Burke. The Shrine remains dedicated to the continuing work of evangelization, bringing souls to Christ through the intercession of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Here a visitor is able to spend time contemplating the beauty of the shrine, and nature, which draws the heart and mind God.

I have taken you far and wide – now to the three “closest” Marian shrines on our pilgrimage

First – **The National Shrine of Our Lady of the Snows** in Belleville, IL (around 7.5 hours from Wichita). This Shrine was established and is staffed by the Missionary Oblates of Mary. The devotion to Our Lady of the Snows was first introduced to the Midwest in 1941 by one of the OMI's, known as “the flying priest of the Arctic.” He was a pilot who brought medical aid and supplies to remote Oblate missions, particularly north of the Arctic Circle. He developed a strong personal devotion to Our Lady of the Snows while working in the Oblate missions, and built a small chapel in her honor. This same priest, following his ministry in the Arctic, came to reside at St. Henry's Seminary in Belleville, Illinois. A painting he had commissioned

of Our Lady of the Snows was hung in the seminary chapel – and hence the name of the Shrine.

In Perryville, MO, we find the **National Shrine of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal** (approximately an 8-hour drive from Wichita). In order to spread devotion to Mary as Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal, an association was formed in France shortly after the first medals were distributed. As devotion to the miraculous medal spread across the globe, other associations were established to continue this work. In 1918, an Association was established in Perryville, Missouri. In the Shrine Church, pilgrims can contemplate the beautiful architecture, statues and paintings depicting the elements found on the miraculous medal.

Finally, we end with one of our favorites – the **Shrine of Our Lady of Sorrows** in Starkenburg, Missouri (approximately 6-hour drive from Wichita). The area was settled by Germans from the Hermann, Missouri area. They brought with them a statue of Mary, which the Germans named "White Lady." Whenever they had a procession, they would carry her in their midst. She was placed in the parish Church built by the settler. After a few years, a larger and more elegant statue replaced it, and the "white lady" was placed in an attic.

In the year 1888, during the month of May, near the parish Church, a dogwood bush was in its full beauty, covered with hundreds of fragrant blossoms. In the attic of the monastery, the sacristan and nephew of the pastor found an old, white faded statue of the Blessed Mother. This he took and placed in the midst of the flowers of the bush. The addition of a few candles completed the May altar. Eventually a log hut was built to protect "the White Lady". Hardly two persons could kneel within, the rest had to kneel outside. And people came to honor her.

The history of the Shrine continues, with many miracles worked through the intercession of Our Lady of Sorrows. To the left of the main entrance of the chapel is the aisle leading to the altar of Our Sorrowful Mother. It looks like a small chapel of its own. Before this altar lie crutches and braces, as well as plaques of thanks, many of which are engraved in German, all bearing testimony to the graces received through the intercession of Our Lady.

A word about this shrine: it is very remote, and, unless you come on day when they are having a parish or shrine celebration, such as September 15<sup>th</sup>, you are very likely to have the place to yourself. I would encourage you to not come alone, but instead to come with a friend and share the beauty of this shrine, Our Lady's presence and motherly intercession with them.

As we end our tour of Shrines dedicated to Our Lady, let us, in all things and everywhere, wherever we may be, turn to Our Lady, confident in her motherly care for us, and implore her intercession for all our needs and intentions: *Memorare*.

### Internet Links used in this presentation

**National Shrine of Our Lady of La Leche y Buen Parto**

<https://catholiccourier.com/articles/six-u-s-shrines-dedicated-to-the-virgin-mary/>

<https://dosafll.com/2014/09/24/americas-oldest-marian-shrine/>

**Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception**

<https://www.nationalshrine.org/>

**The Basilica of the National Shrine of Our Lady of Fatima,**

<https://fatimashrine.com/>

**National Blue Army Shrine of Our Lady of Fatima**

<https://bluearmyshrine.com/about/>

**The National Shrine Grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes**

<https://www.nsgrotto.org/>

**Basilica of Our Lady of San Juan del Valle**

<https://www.olsjbasilica.org/>

**National Shrine of Our Lady of Prompt Succor**

<https://www.shrineolps.com/>

**The National Shrine of Our Lady, Help of Christians at Holy Hill**

<https://www.holyhill.com/>

**The Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe in La Crosse**

<https://guadalupeshrine.org/>

**The National Shrine of Our Lady of Champion**

<https://championshrine.org/>

<https://catholiccourier.com/articles/six-u-s-shrines-dedicated-to-the-virgin-mary/>

**The National Shrine of Our Lady of the Snows**

<https://snows.org/>

**The National Shrine of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal**

<https://amm.org/>

## **Shrine of Our Lady of Sorrows**

<http://vivaro-hshrine-primary.cluster2.hgsitebuilder.com/home>

<https://www.historicshrine.com/History.htm>

**GCatholic.org – a list of the 70 National Shrines in the United States**

<https://gcatholic.org/churches/data/shrineUS>