

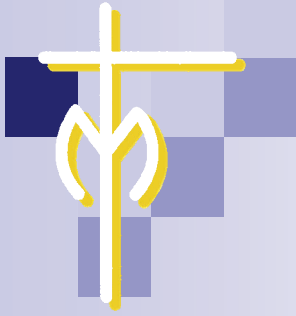


Marianist World Day of Prayer



MESSAGE TO THE MARIANIST FAMILY

**Presentation of the
Shrine of Notre Dame du Cap
Site of our Pilgrimage for the Marianist World
Day of Prayer 2007**



The Marianist Family of Canada is very happy to represent all of you at the Marian Shrine of Notre Dame du Cap, Our Lady of the Cape.

Presentation

The shrine of Notre Dame du Cap is located near Trois-Rivieres, halfway between Quebec and Montreal. Dedicated to Our Lady of the Rosary, for the last 120 years it has attracted pilgrims from all over Canada as well as from the United States and elsewhere – especially in the summer season, from May to October – with the celebration of the feast of the Assumption on August 15 as its high point.

Located on the banks of the St. Lawrence River in a park planted with trees, with sculptures for the devotions of the Rosary and the Way of the Cross and for “spiritual resting places” at various points on the grounds, it has taken shape around a modest stone church dating back to 1714, the oldest in Canada preserved in its “original state.” In 1964 a large basilica was also inaugurated.

At the heart of the Shrine, on the altarpiece behind the altar of the primitive church, a polychrome stucco statue of Mary, about a meter high, with a peaceful look, downcast eyes, open arms, treading on the serpent in the style of Mary Mediatrix, the Immaculate Conception, made popular through the apparition of the Miraculous Medal made to Catherine Labouré at Rue du Bac in Paris in 1830. It is called *miraculous* as a result of the signs and favors from Heaven recognized by pilgrims and church authorities.

History

How did this simple *mission*, first Jesuit then Franciscan, in the first years of New France, and later erected into a parish around 1660, become a Marian shrine almost 250 years later in 1888? Through the signs and marvels demonstrating the will of Heaven.

A first significant fact: the first resident pastor affiliated the new parish of St. Mary Magdalene of the Cape to the *Confraternity of Our Lady of the Rosary*. From 1714 to 1720 he replaced the wooden church building with a modest stone church, the same as that of the Shrine today. Then he died without being replaced. The parish remained without a resident priest nearly 100 years. As a result of the ups and downs of history, the British conquest in 1760, the spirit of resistance and later of insurrection, and the progress of rationalism and liberal laicism at the beginning of the 19th century, faith and fervor became very weak and the Confraternity of the Rosary forgotten...

Around 1840 there was a setting to rights, a reawakening of the faith throughout the country. A local example of the influence of a faraway post-revolutionary France, rediscovering faith and stimulated by the apparition of Mary at Rue du Bac? At the Cape two facts demonstrated and promoted a renewal. The new resident pastor, Fr. Désilets, wanting to remedy the spiritual problems he saw, restored the Confraternity; it took as its task to make the riches of the Rosary better known and to instruct the few faithful about these riches. Then a generous parishioner made a gift to the church of a large and beautiful statue of the Virgin Mary, what has become today the *miraculous statue*. This was in 1854, the year of the proclamation of the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception.

Showers of Blessings: The Rosary Bridge

Soon the little stone church was not big enough. A larger stone church was needed. But it was neces-

sary to look for the stone on the opposite bank of the St. Lawrence, 2 miles away. Transporting it by boat would be too costly: they would wait until winter, when it was coldest and when there would be a natural bridge of ice for transporting the stone by sled. The parishioners prepared themselves and prayed the rosary for this intention...

This was the winter of 1878. January and February, the coldest months of the year came and went but still the river had not frozen sufficiently. March came and still nothing. Would they have to give up their idea? Some parishioners proposed to begin demolishing the little church in order to reduce the number of stones to be transported. Father Désilets could not agree to this. He made a vow to Our Lady, "If you give us the ice on the river for the feast of Saint Joseph, we will not destroy your little church, but we will dedicate it to your Holy Rosary."

Now this is what gives the story a biblical flavor. *During the night of March 15-16, a Sunday, the ice, which was breaking up and floating down the river, jammed and formed a natural barrier of ice connecting the two banks right at the Cape. The wind began to blow. A wet snowfall followed by a strong cold snap joined the ice together and formed the bridge of ice so long awaited. A sled pulled by a horse led the way with the first load of stones on March 18. The bridge held!*

*The next day, March 19, the feast of Saint Joseph, the parishioners, dressed in work clothes, attended Mass and recited the rosary. Then a long line of 80 to 100 sleds went over the bridge of ice one after the other, while in their homes everyone else was reciting the rosary. The bridge held, and the stones piled up on the site! This lasted eight consecutive days without incident... In this marvel in which they had had their part, the parishioners did not hesitate to see divine intervention and spontaneously called it **the Bridge of Rosaries**. Today, 100 yards from the small Shrine a commemorative Rosary Bridge recalls the event, and today pilgrims pass over it in procession.*

The Marvel of the Eyes: The Face of the Statue Moves

Beginning in the spring of 1880 the parishioners built their new church and inaugurated it before the return of winter. Two years later the first pilgrimages took place. The time seemed to have arrived for Father Désilets to fulfill his vow to restore the old church and consecrate it to Our Lady of the Rosary. This was done on June 22, 1888. The statue was moved so as to be placed in the center of the altar backdrop. The celebration was magnificent and enthusiastic...they were perhaps waiting for a miracle; there was none. All the same everyone was joyful over this gesture.

But that same evening at seven o'clock, a handicapped man arrived who insisted on praying at the shrine. They reopened the shrine, which had already been closed, and he went forward to the foot of the altar, assisted by Fathers Duguay and Frédéric. He fell into prayer and lifting his head towards the statue of Mary he saw her eyes fully open. He ascertained that the two priests moving together, had their eyes fixed on the face of Mary... Illusion or reality? "No," says the handicapped man, "I see the same thing as you." This lasted five to ten minutes, then the statue went back to its usual position with eyes cast down. The Virgin said nothing; the handicapped man was not cured; but the three witnesses understood the message, and their faith became greater!

"The statue," they say, "had its eyes fully open: the look of the Virgin was fixed; she was looking in front of her, straight ahead. It was difficult to believe that it was an illusion. Her eyes were black, well formed and in complete harmony with her face. The Virgin's look was that of a living person; it was a severe look mixed with sadness." One could think it is the description of an icon!

The look came as a confirmation of the prophecy of Father Frédéric that same morning at the time of the dedication: *This shrine will be Mary's. Pilgrims will come from all families, from all parishes, from all the dioceses of Canada.* This is, in fact, what will happen...

Father Frédéric? A French Franciscan came to help Father Désilets in animating the shrine. He came directly from the Holy Land as Director of Holy Places for Canada. Formed over a long time in the organization of pilgrimages in Jesus' homeland, he brought to the work his infectious faith and his gifts as an animator and preacher, strongly influencing the development of the shrine. He died while still at work and was beatified by John Paul II in 1988.

At the turn of the century, the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate took charge of the Shrine. The miraculous events, the Rosary Bridge, the movement of the Statue's face, were recognized by the competent episcopal authorities. The miraculous statue was crowned by the Bishop in 1904. This was done again in 1954 by the legate of Pope Pius XII at the time of the closing of the Marian Year, commemorating the centenary of the proclamation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. During the seven previous years, a pilgrim statue, a replica of the original statue, traveled throughout Canada, and Notre Dame du Cap, Our Lady of the Cape, was recognized as the National Madonna of Canada.

The flow of pilgrims has never ceased growing and it continues up to our days. Pope John Paul II stopped at the Shrine during his visit in 1984, welcomed by a considerable crowd in a heavy rain. Tears from heaven or a shower of blessings, herald of a new fruitfulness?

The Graces of Our Lady of the Cape.

What grace-filled messages does this Shrine give us?

- God's intervention, through Mary and signs and wonders to support faith
- The richness and power of the Rosary
- The deep regard of Mary for the pilgrims and the world to be saved
- Mary's prayer which contributes to the building up of the Church and which leads to the Eucharist and to the renewal of Christian life and the entire people of God
- The example of a Marian style of church and of a Marian devotion which is biblical, missionary, and ecclesial
- The place of Saint Joseph at Mary's side, the initiator of the bridge of ice



Our Pilgrimage on October 14, 2007

In preparing its pilgrimage to Notre Dame du Cap in your name, the Marianist Family of Canada wants to share with you some reflections and convictions. Time passes; our world changes; what becomes of the life of faith? Everywhere new anti-Christian spiritual movements and an unfavorable globalized culture undermine faith.

In Quebec at the time of Father Désilets great churches were built and the people of God celebrated their faith there. Today many of these churches are torn down or sold... The pastors are few. It is the same in the "old Christendom." Weakness of faith or a call to re-center in this changing world?

In the poorer counties, joyous and fervent Christian groups arise supported by numerous vocations. But the sects attack these churches which are still weak, at a time when the old pagan spirit, materialistic and opportunistic, tries to dominate.

Mary, Mother of Christians, Mother of the Church, She who has conquered all heresies, always desires to attract children of God to the Father leading them to Jesus through the Holy Spirit in communities of vibrant faith. But she always needs our conscious and collective assistance. Let us be among those who believe that her power is not diminished; let us rise to the challenge of rekindling the flame of faith, sustaining the thrust of Blessed Chaminade.

This is why we want to share, in solidarity with you, a missionary pilgrimage in gratitude, with some general intentions:

Pilgrimage of Gratitude for the grace from God for the Marianist Family, its progress, its development, its hopes, its projects, but also for the difficulties and challenges which stimulate us to turn towards God with Mary, in particular:

- The evolution of the future of the Marianist Family, vocations, the future of consecrated life
- A renewed consciousness and conviction of our **commitment in Alliance with Mary** and of our belonging to a Marian style of Church.

Missionary Pilgrimage with the desire of bringing us closer together in the Marianist Family, both local and world-wide, in order to assist Mary more than ever in her universal mission:

- A new look at the world **with the eyes of Mary**, a renewed consciousness of the urgent need for evangelization wherever we are
- Relearning how to live our faith in the digital era for an appropriate missionary witness
- In communion with the next International Eucharistic Congress in 2008

With Mary **let us build new bridges** between this world and a revived faith. And then what new marvels will heaven have us witness? To request them for ourselves, to promote them by invoking Our Lady of the Rosary....

Renew your marvels, your prodigies of old; fill Sion with your praise and your sanctuary with your glory... (Si 36)

Saint Henri de Lévis, Pentecost, 2007

VIRGIN MARY

You who believed that the word of God would be accomplished
You who were the first
To follow Jesus step by step
Look with love
On the Sisters and Brothers of your Son.

Intercede for us all
Holy Mother of the Church
Obtain for us the grace
Of always walking in the truth of love.

Help us to do our part
In order that your Son
May be better known and loved.

