

# MARIANIST WORLD DAY OF PRAYER

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October 15, 2006  
At Our Lady of Verdélais



**Verdelais** – in Latin “Viridi luco” green forest... The shrine is located in a small winegrowing valley of the Bordeaux region of entre-deux-mers, a mile and a half (2 km) north of the Garonne River and thirty miles (50 km) southeast of Bordeaux.

The known history of the shrine goes back to the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Several religious congregations have successively served at the shrine. Shortly after their foundation, the Marist Fathers in the 1830’s restored the shrine and monastery giving them their present form. Today the Passionists are the Marists’ successors.

One reads on the internet: “A beautiful church with numerous and magnificent ex-votos, memorials to the many cures. The Holy Spirit is very much present in this church and most particularly in connection with the statue of the Our Lady of Verdélais and the right hand altar dedicated to Christ. The numerous cures show that this place is blessed by the presence of the Holy Spirit – a corner of Paradise where your heart cannot avoid being

opened to the presence of love.”

Even non-Christian tourists know Verdélais. They think of a great novelist whose family château is there, François Mauriac, and of a great 20<sup>th</sup> century painter, Henri Toulouse-Lautrec, who is buried in the cemetery at Verdélais.

**The present statue of Our Lady of Verdélais**, 32 inches tall (80 cm) and carved out of chestnut wood, was donated by Isabelle de Foix in 1390. An earlier statue would have been brought back from the First Crusade by a knight in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. The statue presents the Virgin, seated and crowned, holding the infant Jesus seated majestically on her lap. Here Mary is invoked as the **Consolation of the Afflicted**. The miraculous statue has survived several destructions of the shrine in the course of the centuries – the French-English war of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, its pillaging by the Huguenots in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the French Revolution of 1789.... In 1856 Cardinal Donnet of Bordeaux crowned the statue in the name of Pope Pius IX. Today



a bell tower which rises high into the heavens welcomes pilgrims at the end of the long village square. On its top, as on the tower of the Cathedral in Bordeaux, stands a large golden statue of the Virgin. During the summer, above all two great feasts attract many pilgrims, the Assumption on August 15 and the Birth of Mary on September 8.

**Chaminade at Verdelaï:** The walls of the basilica of Verdelaï are covered with ex-votos which testify to the popularity of the shrine and to the many graces received by pilgrims to Our Lady. On the first column to the right, near the sanctuary, a large marble plaque recalls



the thanksgiving pilgrimage that William Joseph Chaminade made here in his youth, when he was a student of about fourteen years of age at the minor seminary of Mussidan.

One day on a walk with his fellow students – Fr. Georges Caillet related much later – he was at the bottom of a quarry, and his friends were playing and running above him. One of them dislodged a large rock which hit William Joseph and fractured his ankle. He had to be taken home where care was lavished upon him. Nevertheless, more than six weeks passed by and the injury kept getting worse. His brother, Jean Baptiste suggested that William Joseph have recourse to the Virgin Mary, “who is never invoked in vain.” William eagerly and happily took up his suggestion, and the two brothers vowed to make a pilgrimage to Notre Dame de Verdelaï if the Blessed Virgin would obtain the cure they were seeking from her goodness. How could Mary have remained deaf to the prayers of one who was to work so much for her glory? They did not have a long wait. The healing occurred so quickly that William Joseph always regarded it as miraculous. A short time later, he and his brother were able to walk on

pilgrimage to Verdelaï, about fifty miles (80 km) from Mussidan, where they thanked the Blessed Virgin for her favor.

William Joseph Chaminade was thus so attached to the shrine of Verdelaï that he proposed to the Archbishop of Bordeaux to be put in charge. This desire, however, was never realized.

### **A Pilgrim for a Day**

Fr. Jakob Gapp, Austrian Marianist, who was forced to flee Austria, migrated to France and arrived in Bordeaux where he took refuge in the Chapel of the Madeleine from January to May 1939. During the month of Mary, a Marianist from the Madeleine accompanied him to Verdelaï. Having arrived at the shrine he fell in tears in front of Our Lady of the Afflicted. The pilgrim for a day was later deported to Germany where he was beheaded in Berlin in August 1943. John Paul II was to proclaim him Blessed.

### **Marianist Pilgrims on October 15, 2006**

The members of the Marianist Family and their friends throughout the world will be represented at Verdelaï by the pilgrims – Marianist or not – coming from Bordeaux, Agen, Feugarolles, Mussidan, Périgueux, and elsewhere. They will celebrate Sunday Mass with the Christians of the surrounding deaneries gathered that day at Verdelaï.

1. To Our Lady of Consolation, we will confide all those people, particularly those of our Family, who **suffer** most, physically or psychologically. We will pray for all those young people who are blocked in their growth into a full life by various **handicaps** or **accidents**.
2. To Mary, Mother of the Church, we will confide our large family, committed with her to making the Catholic Church a **Marian Church**.
3. To the Queen of the Apostles we will insistently confide this intention for which Jesus himself asked us to pray: for workers for the harvest, **vocations** for the different branches of the Marianist Family, in particular for the continent of **Europe** where Father Chaminade planted the seed, but which today lacks the hands to water and cultivate it.
4. In this year of great changes in the **leadership** of the Society of Mary we will pray for all those in positions of responsibility for our spiritual Family.
5. Walking in the footsteps of Chaminade the pilgrim, we will thank the Lord through Mary for all the **obstacles** we have overcome in our growth – personal, in community, in our Marianist Family, in the Church... and for those who work to clear those obstacles in our continuing journey into the future.
6. We will give special prominence in our thoughts and our prayer for our sisters and brothers of **Korea** who represented us in 2005 at their Marian shrine. To them we join all the members and all the groups of the Marianist Family in **Asia**.
7. To Our Lady who has remained faithful to Verdélais in spite of the wars and misfortunes which have touched this place in the course of the centuries we will confide the growth and prosperity of the Marianist units of **Africa, America, Oceania**... above all those which suffer in these days from situations of violence, poverty, persecution...
8. To Mary, Queen of Apostles we will confide all our new foundations: that together, in the Marianist Family we might know how to listen to the call “ad gentes” and find new ways of responding to it.

### **Prayer to Our Lady of Verdélais**

O Mary, Mother of Jesus, I have come today to visit you in your house at Verdélais, knowing that you receive there with all your love those who confide in you their desires and their concerns.

For almost a thousand years you have cured the most serious illnesses, made peace within divided families, reconciled enemies, enlightened those looking for light, listened to Christians desirous of living closer to you and your Son. In this shrine you have earned the title of Consolation of those crushed by daily life, because of the depth of your maternal love.

Today I have come to visit you with great joy and confidence, to make known to you all my intentions. From now on we will both carry them in our hearts. I am certain that you will give me the better part, either you will fulfill my secret desires or you will give me the strength to live out my daily reality in love.

But I pray also, O Lady of Verdélais, that you think of all my sisters and brothers and give them as well, happiness and peace. I also ask you to make of us builders of unity and to allow the world to achieve a civilization of love, which will prepare us for eternal life. Amen