

## **Feast of Our Lady of La Leche**

**Intro.** We admire people in our history who have extraordinary courage, inventiveness or faith. Some are written of in history books while others are written in hearts. Explorers and missionaries who sailed to all parts of the world are remembered. Also inventors who harnessed electricity and discovered the vaccine against polio. Future lists will certainly include the scientists who find a vaccine for the coronavirus. Soon, we pray.

**I.** People of great faith are also models for us to follow. While there are plenty of “big name” saints like Peter and Paul, Joan and the Theresa-s, many lesser known people were and are great examples of faith, who go about their lives more quietly. They are our neighbors, fellow church members, even family members and sometimes our youngest

members who have insights that knock our socks off. We have pictures of people in our homes, our wallets and our digital devices so we don't forget them. From the beginning of our church, it has been a tradition to remember the people who gave their lives to keep the faith growing. They are celebrated in our prayers at Mass, most prominently in the first Eucharistic prayer with two long lists. They are also mentioned in the church calendar of saints. In churches of the western world, we remember them with statues and pictures. The eastern churches have pictures called icons. Many countries have a devotion to Mary related to an appearance, like Fatima, Lourdes or Guadalupe. Today we celebrate a new, local diocesan feast, Our Lady of La Leche. This is the first time it has fallen on Sunday. Like most devotions to the saints, it came in the hearts of

people. Spanish explorers who landed in St. Augustine in 1565 brought it with them. My family went often to St. Augustine because it was historic, close by and, in those years mostly free. We visited the shrine of Our Lady of La Leche in the old chapel and walked around the place where the first Mass was said. It is a diocesan tradition that priests celebrate Mass at the outdoor altar which commemorates the first Mass. The day after my ordination, I and several of my classmates did so; thinking of the history, it was a powerful experience. Today archeologists continue to search the shrine property for remnants of ancient buildings.

**Concl.** Before he ever imagined coming as bishop, Bishop Estévez was interested in the history of St. Augustine. From his research, he began to develop a vision for the oldest shrine of Mary in the United

States. Prior to the virus it was to be dedicated this year. Instead it will on this date in 2021. Between now and then, visit the shrine, the old chapel, a museum and the refurbished chapel. Contemplate the men and women buried in the old cemetery. Walk out to the large cross that is visible for miles, even at sea. The Sisters of St. Joseph of St. Augustine wear a similar cross as a connection with their ministry in our diocese. As our travels are rather curtailed, visit the outdoor Shrine in our own backyard and reflect on Mary and the many women and men who have passed on their faith to us. Our Lady of La Leche, pray for us. Amen.

Fr. Michael Pendergraft

October 11, 2020