

## Our Lady of La Leche

**Intro.** Bishop Estèvez has been working for several years to raise Our Lady of La Leche to a diocesan feast day. For many years, this image of Mary could be seen in the old shrine church in St. Augustine, on the grounds of the great cross. Normally it is celebrated on October 11, but there is a much larger celebration at the cathedral Sunday to elevate this shrine to national status. “In the early 1600s, Spanish settlers brought with them to the New World a special devotion to Our Lady of La Leche y Buen Parto (safe birth). Four hundred years later, the National Shrine of Our Lady of La Leche has kept this devotion alive through countless people of faith. And the Holy Father himself has recognized the importance and sanctity of this devotion by granting a Canonical Coronation for Our Lady of La Leche on

October 10. This is a once in a lifetime and incredible blessing for the Diocese of St. Augustine and the oldest Marian shrine in the United States. A canonical crowning is a formal act of the pope to crown an image of Christ, the Blessed Virgin Mary or St. Joseph, in the name of the Holy Father. The crowning acknowledges that the specific image, while having local significance, also has universal importance for the Catholic Church as it pertains to the Salvation Christ won for us by the Paschal Mystery of his Death and Resurrection. The practice began in 17<sup>th</sup> century but became increasingly popular in the late 1800s. Many people are familiar with a May crowning as many parishes and schools annually have one as a sign their devotion to Mary. A Canonical Coronation is different in that this will

only happen once to this specific image of Our Lady of La Leche.” [Diocese of St. Augustine webpage]

**I.** This brief passage from Luke’s gospel comes out of nowhere. There is nothing that went before it or comes after it that tells us what sparked the statement. The Lord paused to respond and moved on. The woman, having made her observation, disappeared back into the crowd. The compliment to Mary comes from someone who must have known the joy of childbirth, pride in her own children and the difficulty raising them. Only another woman and a mother would think to praise the mother who gave life to such a prophet as the Lord.

**Concl.** The Lord did not respond directly to the woman’s praise. He could have acknowledged the compliment and said, “Yes, she is a wonderful

mother.” His focus was on God and obedience to his word. This does not mean he denied the important role Mary played in his life or the plan of salvation, but he was on mission and looking ahead to completing his earthly work that began with his birth to Mary and Joseph. The image of Mary giving life to the child Jesus mirrors the image of his death and resurrection that continues to give life to us, particularly through God’s word and sacraments. This is the food that nourishes us now. Today we celebrate the recognition of Our Lady of La Leche in St. Augustine as a national shrine and Mary’s role in our faith and our diocese.

Fr. Michael Pendergraft

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