

The True Story of Our Lady of America

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Part I –

God's Preparation for Mary's Visit

What is *God's plan and preparation* for the role of Our Lady of America in the redemption of mankind and the renewing of the face of the earth in these troubled times?

The story of Our Lady of America truly began on May 10, 1846 when one Archbishop and 22 US Bishops met in Baltimore, MD, the first Catholic diocese in the US, for the 6th Provincial Council of Baltimore. On that date they petitioned Rome to have the Blessed Virgin, under the title of the Immaculate Conception, named as Patroness of these United States, 28 at the time. In 1847 that petition was granted by Blessed Pius IX, and Mary, under the title of her Immaculate Conception, became Patroness of the United States of America.

It was not until eight years later, on December 8, 1854, that Blessed Pius IX would define the dogma of the Immaculate Conception in his Apostolic Constitution, *Ineffabilis Deus*. Less than four years later, on the feast of the Annunciation, March 25, 1858, Our Lady would confirm that dogma by identifying herself to Bernadette Soubirous in Lourdes, France, as “I am the Immaculate Conception,” that singular privilege that flows from her Divine Maternity announced by the Angel Gabriel.

Moved by the great devotion to Mary of Bishop John Carroll, the first Catholic bishop of these United



Saint Pius X

States who had placed this young Nation under Mary's protection, Bishop Thomas J. Shahan, rector of Washington, DC's Catholic University of America, presented his hope for a national shrine to Mary to Saint Pius X in 1913. The Pope was so enthusiastic about the shrine that he made a personal contribution of \$400. Later in 1913 the University actually donated the land so the effort toward construction of the shrine could begin.



Bishop Thomas J. Shahan

Father Bernard McKenna of Philadelphia assisted Bishop Shahan and was made the first director of the National Shrine in 1915. Archbishop Giovanni Vincenzo Bonzano, the Apostolic Delegate, blessed the site on May 16, 1920, honoring the first American prelate Archbishop John Carroll, who is the Father of the American Hierarchy, by wearing his vestments and using the "Carroll Altar" for the celebration. On September 23 of that year, James Cardinal Gibbons of the archdiocese of Baltimore laid the cornerstone. The lower crypt church was completed in 1926 but the Great Depression and World War II halted work on the Upper Church until 1953. The Marian Year of 1954 ushered in a huge campaign for donations from America's Catholics. Washington's Archbishop Patrick O'Boyle, assisted by Archbishop John Noll of Fort Wayne, IN, brought the Upper Church to completion and *America's Patronal Church, a magnificent hymn to Mary in stone*, was dedicated on November 20, 1959.

The body of Bishop Thomas J. Shahan is entombed in that great Upper Church to revere him as the Founder of this National Shrine of America's Catholics. In 1990 Pope John Paul II raised the Shrine to the level of a minor Basilica.

This beautiful Act of Consecration to Our Blessed Mother, written by Bishop John Carroll for the consecration of America to the Immaculate Conception, was used by Francis Cardinal Spellman, Archbishop of New York and chairman of the Shrine's Board of Trustees, following the Solemn Pontifical Mass he offered for the dedication ceremony of the Shrine. It is such an appropriate prayer for our times and touches on the message of Our Lady of America, with its emphasis on the Blessed Trinity and the Christian Family, even though Cardinal Spellman would have had no knowledge of the message of Our Lady of America at that time.

Act of Consecration to Our Blessed Mother

Most Holy Trinity: Our Father in Heaven, who chose Mary as the fairest of your daughters; Holy Spirit, who chose Mary as your spouse; God the Son, who chose Mary as your Mother; in union with Mary, we adore your majesty and acknowledge your supreme, eternal dominion and authority.

Most Holy Trinity, we put the United States of America into the hands of Mary Immaculate in order that she may present the country to you. Through her we wish to thank you for the great resources of this land and for the freedom which has been its heritage. Through the intercession of Mary, have mercy on the Catholic Church in America. Grant us peace. Have mercy on our President and on all the officers of our government. Grant us a fruitful economy born of justice and charity. Have mercy on capital and industry and labor. Protect the family life of the nation. Guard the innocence of our children. Grant the precious gift of many religious vocations. Through the intercession of our Mother, have mercy on the sick, the poor, the tempted, sinners – on all who are in need.

Mary, Immaculate Virgin, our Mother, Patroness of our land, we praise you and honor you and give ourselves to you. Protect us from every harm. Pray for us, that acting always according to your will and the Will of your Divine Son, we may live and die pleasing to God.