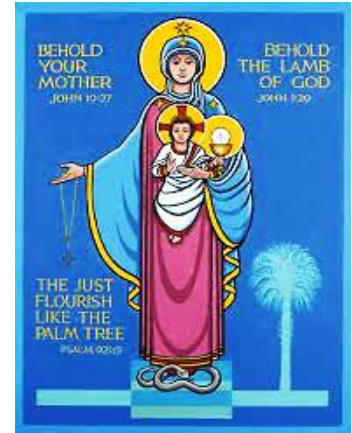


# Our Lady, Redemption and the Eucharist

## Cause of Our Hope and Our Joy

Having just finished Holy Week with the sacrifice of the Lamb of God, the institution of the Holy Eucharist and the role of Our Lady in Christ's work of Redemption as Mother of the Redeemer and Mother of the Church, it is important to understand the importance of the Eucharistic Rosary Congress.



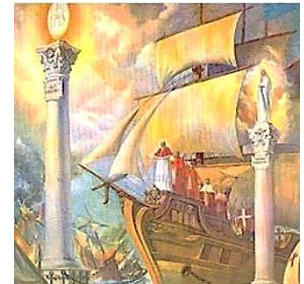
## What is a Eucharistic Rosary Congress?

In 1978, Pope John Paul II requested permission of the communist Polish government to visit his homeland to celebrate 1,000 years of Christianity in Poland. The government would only allow a limited itinerary, which was unacceptable to the Pope. On December 8, 1978, in a private revelation, Our Lady requested seven days and nights of continuous rosaries to be said from May 1-7 in 1979 at the Shrine of Our Lady of Czestochowa, praying that the papal pilgrimage would be possible. The seven-day all day and night Congress (referred to as the "Siege of Jericho" by the people, who believed they were tearing down the walls of satanic darkness), began as requested on May 1, 1979. On May 7<sup>th</sup>, the last day of the Rosary Congress, the government suddenly relented and the Pope made his papal visit. After that, whenever the Pope traveled outside of Rome, somewhere in Poland the seven-day Rosary Congress was offered for his intentions and his protection. These Rosary Congresses are seen as fulfillment of St. John Bosco's prophetic vision of the Church as a ship under attack on all sides, racing to safety between two huge pillars,



*Our Lady of Czestochowa-The Black Madonna*

one with the image of the Eucharist on top, and the other with a statue of Our Lady. Truly, the Eucharist and true devotion to Our Lady are the two Pillars of Victory for our Church in accordance with St. John Bosco's vision.



*St. John Bosco's vision of the Two Pillars of Victory for the Church*

## When Did the Eucharistic Rosary Congress Come to America?



*Statue by Robert Kieckhefer processed in the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception*

In 1988, the first Rosary Congress in America was held at the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C. Fr. Lionel Pare, former director of Apostolatus Uniti, National Rosary Congress, and Mr. John Downs, of Apostolatus Uniti in Catonsville, Maryland, commissioned a statue of Our Lady of America to be sculpted by Robert Kieckhefer of Silver Springs, Maryland. It was processed into the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception for the 1989 Rosary Congress, the first time a statue of Our Lady of America was processed in our Patronal Church. On October 12,

1990, Pope John Paul II raised the national shrine to the status of a minor basilica, the 36<sup>th</sup> such in the United States.

A new statue of Our Lady of America sculpted by Donna Mae Halsted for World Youth Day 1993 in Denver, Colorado, was taken by the Torchbearers of the Queen Youth Group from St. Dominic's in Colfax, California, to the June 19-26, 1994 Rosary Congress at the Basilica of the National Shrine in Washington, D.C. That same statue was processed again in the Basilica during the 2001 Week of Prayer and Fasting, as seen in the picture to the right. It is sixty-eight years since Our Lady asked for the enthrone-ment of her statue as Our Lady of America in our Patronal Church. **[It was 1956 when Our Lady first asked that her statue be enthroned in our Patronal Church, the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, after being carried in a solemn procession. She asked that we make her Shrine a place of special pilgrimage and she would make it a place of wonders and a protection for our Land.]**



*Statue at National Shrine in D.C.  
for Week of Prayer 2001*

**How long must Our Lady wait for us to obey her loving, maternal request that bears so much promise of grace and protection for America?**

Rosary Congresses have spread all over the world and in our country since that first one in Poland. Each month, from the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 7<sup>th</sup> day of the month, we are invited by John Leaps Evangelization to join in a Eucharistic Rosary Congress to honor Our Lady of America and her Divine Son by spending one hour before the Blessed Sacrament, praying, especially the rosary, for our needs, our Church, and for the conversion of America so it can lead the world in a spiritual renewal, out of darkness and into the Light of Christ. How dearly we long for Our Lady of America's continued favor! What follows is a testimony of Fr. Stanley Smolenski, spma, to Our Lady's powerful intercession as a cause for joy and hope, especially in the context of the Eucharist.

## **My Holy Land Experience of the Eucharist and Mary!**

The Real Presence of the Precious Blood of Our Lord was impressed on me during one of my pilgrimages to the Holy Land. Instead of the church, we were given a small cave in the Mount of Olives adjacent to Gethsemane. Very much in its primitive state of rough stone with a low ceiling, it had a seating capacity of about 50. The wooden table-like altar was raised by one level. As I was preparing the chalice on the altar, a sensation came over me at the realization that the Precious Blood which our Lord would begin shedding there for our redemption would be in that chalice. Suddenly, the hundreds of years between that original shedding and the consecration of the wine at my Mass evaporated. It was one and the same Blood! Time had disappeared as though it never existed. In some way, I "saw" that the Mass is truly the Sacrament of his historical Sacrifice.

I cannot speak of the Holy Land without mentioning the benevolent experience of our Blessed Mother. I was very much attached to Our Lady of Sorrows as portrayed in her Quito, Ecuador image. Her bereaved eyes penetrated my heart. My first pilgrimage to the Holy Land was not a pleasant one. Taken during the Christmas vacation, the weather was unusually cold and rainy every day. In fact, it snowed on New Year's day.

When we were leaving the chapel after commemorating the institution of the Eucharist with Mass, the snowflakes were so large that they made me think of Manna falling from heaven. I promised myself another pilgrimage during the summer. What I wanted to do especially was to celebrate Mass at the Thirteenth Station of the Cross on Calvary where the Sorrowful Mother is commemorated. But I did not know that altars had to be reserved days in advance at the Franciscan Center in Jerusalem. To do this, I had to choose between missing Bethlehem or that Mass. I chose not to miss Bethlehem but that Mass because we were already scheduled for a Mass at the Eleventh Station, the Nailing of Jesus to the Cross.

I prepared by making the entire Stations of the Cross on the Via Dolorosa. When I arrived at the Holy Sepulcher, our group was already assembled at the Holy Tomb of the Resurrection. This put me at the periphery of the group. Suddenly, I noticed the Catholic Arab guard coming through our group towards me. He then startled me by asking if I would want to celebrate Mass at the Thirteenth Station while the group was at the Eleventh Station. Flabbergasted, I stuttered "Yes!" and followed him to the sacristy. When he informed the sacristan of my being at the Thirteenth Station, the Brother informed him that it was reserved by one of their friars. After being informed who it was, the guard returned saying that the priest relinquished his time for me. And so, what I had set my heart on was providentially granted by the Sorrowful Mother. Since only she knew of my longing, she must have arranged all this so that I would not be disappointed! - I have been ever grateful and have celebrated the votive Mass of the Commendation of Mary at the Cross with special fervor.

## **Our Lady of Joyful Hope, South Carolina's Unique Madonna!**

**Following is Father's explanation of the singular icon of Our Lady of Joyful Hope, which was blessed by Bishop Robert J. Baker in 2005 and enshrined in the renovated mission Church in Kingstree, South Carolina, a reflection most appropriate to this time of Eucharistic renewal.**

Icons are full of symbols encoding an inspired message that is foundational to a school of spirituality, which is why icons are considered to be "written" and not painted—we "read" an icon. Because symbols are derived from civic and religious sources, this icon has a double appellation: that of place, South Carolina, and that of grace, joyful hope. The state motto is "**While I breathe, I hope.**" *Dum spiro spero*, and the Advent Liturgy of the Hours includes the response, "**As we wait in joyful hope.**"

At the center of the icon is the Christ Child presented by his mother. Holding a host above a chalice, he is in a white garment with many folds. These folds represent both the swaddling clothes of Bethlehem and the shroud of Calvary. His entire life, celebrated in the liturgical year, is thus signified by this simple means. His royalty is recalled by the deep red band on the garment.

The iconographic style is ancient Antiochian in which Mary is portrayed as a young woman in Middle Eastern attire. Her rose robe and blue mantle should remind us of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Empress of the Americas. She stands crushing a serpent, symbolic of the Immaculate Conception, Patroness of the United States. On the right side of her is a Palmetto tree, symbol of South Carolina. The icon, then, has an international,

national, and local identity. **[As does the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception which has over 80 chapels representing titles from other nations.]**

As Christ gives us the Eucharist—His Real Presence, sacrifice, and communion—so Mary presents us with the rosary, a means of appreciating this sacrament of life, light, and love. The three stars, one on her forehead and one on each shoulder, are the iconographic symbol of her perpetual virginity before, during and after childbirth.

Because South Carolina is in the Bible Belt, there are three scripture quotes spotlighting the evangelical focus of the Child, the Mother, and the Church: **“Behold the Lamb of God”** (Jn 19:29) proclaims his mission; **“Behold your Mother”** (Jn 19:27) reminds us of our God-given relationship to her; and **“The Just flourish like the Palm Tree”** (PS 92:12) spurs us on to holiness in life.

The star above her head has a triple significance: the providential star of the Epiphany that inspired hope in the Magi (Mt 2); the star of evangelization in the modern world, *Evangelii nuntiandi*; and our star of hope according to Pope Benedict XVI in his encyclical *Spe Salvi* (Saved in Hope). The hymn to Our Lady of Joyful Hope expresses that she **“Be the star that guides us through the dark night into day.”**



An attraction to a particular name of Mary can strengthen and personalize devotion to her. In addition, it can initiate a desire to participate in the mission particular to that title. According to St. John Paul II, it would call for earnest involvement in the New Evangelization, especially in its Eucharistic and Marian dimension—so fitting during our National Eucharistic Revival.

**Fr. Stanley Smolenski spma - Director - Shrine of Our Lady of South Carolina – Our Lady of Joyful Hope – Kingstree, SC**

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