

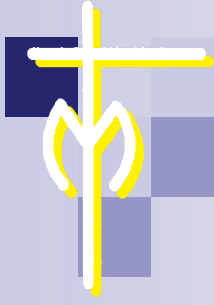


Marianist World Day of Prayer



MESSAGE TO THE MARIANIST FAMILY

***Presentation of the
Shrine of Our Lady of Apraecida
Site of our Pilgrimage for the
Marianist World Day of Prayer
October 12, 2008***



The Marianist Family of Brazil has the pleasure of presenting the Patron of Brazil, Our Lady of Aparecida and her sanctuary, for the Marianist World Day of Prayer in 2008.

1. History

The basilica of Our Lady of Aparecida, also known as the national shrine of Aparecida, is located in the city of Aparecida, in the State of São Paulo, 170 km (105 miles) from the city of São Paulo on the highway that leads to Rio de Janeiro.

The history of Our Lady of the Conception Aparecida began in 1717 when news arrived that the governor of the region was going to pass by the town of Guaratinguetá.

Domingos Martins, João Alves, and Felipe Pedroso were sent to fish with their simple canoes in the river near Paraíba, to prepare the food for the governor. They fished for several hours without catching anything. They prayed and then returned to try again. The net of João Alves had no fish, but rather a small statue of Our Lady. And at that moment the nets of the three humble fishermen were filled with fish.

The image of the Virgin remained in the house of Felipe Pedroso for 15 years, where the local people gathered to pray. The devotion grew and people received many blessings.

The fame of the extraordinary powers of Our Lady, already known as "Aparecida" because she had appeared in the water, extended into the neighboring regions. The family of Felipe constructed an oratory, which remained small. In 1734 a chapel at the top of the hill of the Coqueiros was constructed, thanks to the initiative of the parish priest of Guaratinguetá, from which originated the city of Aparecida. The number of pilgrims and devotees continued to grow and in 1834 a larger church was constructed, today known as the Old basilica.

Devotion to Our Lady of Aparecida continued growing more and more, along with processions and pilgrimages. Finally in 1929 Aparecida was proclaimed, by Pope Pius XI, Queen and Patron of Brazil.

The present basilica, called the new basilica, began to be constructed in 1955 and was consecrated during the first visit of John Paul II to Brazil in 1980.

Constructed in the form of a Greek cross, the naves are 40 m (131 ft) high, the cupola is 70 m (230 ft) high and 78 m (256 ft) in diameter, the tower is 100 m (328 ft) high. The basilica can hold 45,000 people.

2. The Statue

The statue was found in the waters of the Paraíba river in the second half of October 1717, it is made of terra-cotta and is only 40 cm (1.3 ft) high. Originally it would have been colored, as was the custom then, but the pigment would have been lost on account of the time that it was submerged in the water and the mud of the river.

The color of cinnamon or dark brown which obscures its true color is due to the smoke of the candles and lamps of the devotees. This same brown or black color has made Our Lady of Aparecida a symbol near and dear, in a country with great racial and cultural diversity.



Since 1904 the image has worn the crown and the typical blue mantle that give it its current appearance and that is recognizable by all of Brazil. The image of Our Lady of Aparecida has become a national symbol present in the homes and hearts of the Brazilian people.

3. The Miracles

The Fishing Miracle

The city council of Guaratinguetá wanted the governor to try the fish from the Paraíba river, although it was not a good time to fish. But the fishermen sorted it out as best they could, and the governor would eat fish without further discussion. The three poor fishing men João, Domingos, and Felipe fished with their nets throughout the night but caught nothing. João noticed that his net was suddenly heavy. Would it be some fish? No, it was the body of a statue, but without the head. He kept it and continued trying to fish. Suddenly again in the net of João there appeared the head



of a blackened statue. João joined the two pieces together with care, and they fitted perfectly. How prodigious! They made the sign of the cross, and carefully wrapped the statue in a cloth and continued fishing. And now their nets were filled with so many fish that they almost burst and the fragile canoes almost sank.

The Miracle of the Candles

Felipe Pedroso took the image to his house, and made a small altar out of wood where he placed the statue. On Saturdays the neighbors gathered to say the rosary in front of the statue. On certain occasions the candles on the altar went out without any natural reason; no wind was blowing, and everything was calm. A woman rose to light the candles but the candles lit on their own without anybody doing anything.

This was a supernatural event and from that moment the statue stopped belonging to the family of Felipe, and began belonging to all of us, the devotees of Aparecida.

4. The Pilgrims

There are thousands of pilgrims who travel to Aparecida: eight million per year, more than 230,000 on October 12, the feast of Our Lady of Aparecida.

The devotees who arrive at Aparecida bring with them anxieties and hopes, requests and promises; hopes for cures, employment, better conditions of life, and desires for peace. With their hands, which are praying the rosary, they offer candles, photographs, flowers, and hats or sandals from their journey. On their knees they kneel or crawl in an attitude of total submission, tired and with aching feet. They offer and consecrate their hearts. And their spirits are surprised by the sense and presence of the sacred. This is the pilgrim of Our Lady of Aparecida, with a sincere spirit and a sincere faith; the power of the humble.

They arrive at Aparecida by bus, car, motorcycle, on foot, or on a bicycle or a horse. Rich or poor, cultured or illiterate, they represent the fullness of the rich Brazilian social and cultural diversity. It makes one shudder to see those that travel many days in precarious conditions to fulfill the dream of their lives to visit "Mãe Aparecida". One of the most peculiar pilgrimages is that of the motorcycles, which manages to gather more than 100,000 of the most diverse types of followers.

5. Intentions Suggested by the Marianist Family of Brazil for the World Day of Prayer

We, the Marianist Family of Brazil, inspired by the document of Aparecida of the Fifth Conference of Latin American and Caribbean Bishops propose the following intentions for our day of prayer:

- To live our Christianity with the joy and conviction of the first missionary disciples of Christ
- To form communities of faith, which, like Mary, are able to stir up a more Marian Church
- To advance the participation and the role of women as key figures in the Church
- To renew our zeal and preferential option for the poor and outcast
- To accompany youths in their formation and mission
- To value and respect indigent peoples and those of African descent
- To care for our mother earth, preserving ecosystems in fidelity to God's project

6. Aparecida, Latin America, and the World

In May 2007 the Fifth General Conference of Latin American and Caribbean Bishops took place in Aparecida, inaugurated with the presence of Pope Benedict XVI. It followed the previous conferences of Rio (1955), Medellín (1968), Puebla (1978) and Santo Domingo (1992).

The document of Aparecida proposes a way for us to follow: disciples and missionaries of Jesus Christ, so that in Him all peoples have life. Also it proposes a continental mission and it confirms the typical characteristics of the Church in Latin America: option for the poor; small Christian communities; liberation as the way towards the Kingdom; the method of see, judge, and act; participation in social and structural changes; remembrance of the martyrs of freedom; and the Bible as the source of life.

Prayer

The Marianist Family of Brazil invites the world-wide Marianist Family to express our faith and hope in the words of the final message of Aparecida, together with all those who pray, trusting in Mary, Mother of God and our Mother, first disciple and missionary in the service of life, love, and peace, our families, our communities, and our cities.

Our Marianist Family, being part of the Church on five continents, HOPES:

- To be a living, faithful, and credible Church, nourished by the Word of God and the Eucharist
- To live our Christianity with the joy and conviction of the first missionary disciples of Christ
- To form living communities which nourish faith and inspire missionary action
- To value diverse ecclesial organizations in the spirit of communion
- To promote mature and co-responsible laity with the mission of announcing and making visible the Reign of God
- To advance the active participation of women in society and in the Church
- To maintain with renewed effort our preferential and evangelical option for the poor
- To accompany youths in their formation and search for identity, vocation and mission, renewing our support for them
- To work with all people of good will to build the Kingdom of God
- To boldly fortify pastoral concern for families and life
- To value and respect indigent peoples and those of African descent
- To advance the ecumenical and interreligious dialogue "so that all are one"
- To make this continent a model of reconciliation, justice, and peace
- To care for creation, the home of all, in fidelity to God's project
- To collaborate in the integration of the peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean

That this continent of hope thus become a continent of love, life, and peace! Amen.

Note: At the following link, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/jornadadeoracaomarianista2008>, you can see and copy photos, music, and expressions of Marianist life in Brazil.

The official site of Aparecida: <http://www.santuaronacional.com>