

The Story of the Statue

Our Lady of the Cape *Queen of the Most Holy Rosary* ***“From Canada to Pontiac”***

In 1535, on October 7 (the date of the future Feast of the Holy Rosary), French explorer Jacques Cartier planted a cross on one of the islands of the St. Maurice River, that separates the present Canadian cities of Trois-Rivieres (“Three Rivers”) and Cap-de-la-Madeleine.¹ The Jesuits named the place “Cape-de-la-Madeleine” in remembrance of its first owner, Master Jacques de la Ferte, a priest of St. Marie Madeleine of Chateaudun, in France, who received a plot called the Cape of Trois-Rivieres.

Meanwhile in Europe, the Ottoman Turkish Muslim forces were threatening an invasion. In defense, in 1571 Pope St. Pius V organized the Holy League, a coalition of southern European Catholic maritime states. He also called on all Europe to fervently pray the Rosary for victory while he himself led a Rosary procession in Rome. At the Battle of Lepanto, off the coast of present-day Greece, in a stunning defeat, Catholic forces prevailed. Pius V instituted the feast of “Our Lady of Victory” to commemorate this victory, which he attributed to the Blessed Virgin Mary. In 1573, Pope Gregory XIII changed the title to “Feast of the Holy Rosary,” to be celebrated on the first Sunday of October. In 1913 Pope Pius X changed the date to 7 October, and in 1960 Pope St. John XXIII changed the title to “Feast of Our Lady of the Rosary.” All this is relevant for what follows.

Back in Canada, in 1661 a new parish was established in Trois-Rivieres called St. Mary Magdalene, which inaugurated the devotion to Our Lady. By 1687 Cap-de-la-Madeleine was created a parish by Blessed Francois de Laval, the 1st bishop of Quebec City. Since the establishment of the parish’s Confraternity of the Rosary, deep Marian devotion has existed in Cap-de-la-Madeleine.

The “birth certificate” of Canada’s Shrine of the Queen of the Most Holy Rosary came in 1714, signed on May 13 (the future date of the first apparition of Our Lady of Fatima), by the second bishop of Quebec City, Bishop Jean-Baptiste de St. Vallier. In 1720 he helped the pastor, Fr. Vachon, replace the wooden parish church with a stone church which today stands as the oldest church in Canada. With the death of Fr. Vachon in 1729, a decline in devotion set in that lasted well over a century. Indeed, due to the lack of zeal of subsequent pastors, by 1800 or so the recitation of the Rosary was abandoned, parishioners did not go to Mass on Sundays, and the morals of the population declined, as history has shown in every country.

A watershed moment in Catholic history was the year 1854 when Pope Pius IX proclaimed the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. God Who is all-holy needed a mother who had never been subject to the power of Satan—or sin—and therefore would be immaculate. Many graces resulted from this dogmatic pronouncement.

¹ In 2002 Cap-de-la-Madeleine was amalgamated into the City of Trois-Reivieres.

Almost immediate among its results, and no doubt inspired by Heaven's Queen, in that same year, was a gift made by a pious parishioner, Zepirin Dorval, from Cap-de-la-Madeleine to present to his church a statue of the Madonna for the altar of the Confraternity of the Most Holy Rosary.

There was nothing extraordinary about the particular statue Mr. Dorval donated; in its appearance there was nothing to distinguish it from any of the other statues made from the same mould at the Carli-Petrucci workshop in Montreal. It was a Madonna with lowered eyes and delicate features, a Madonna modeled after the Immaculate Virgin of the Miraculous Medal as revealed to Catherine Laboure in France some 24 years before in 1830.

The statue, which came to be known as "Our Lady of the Cape," presents Mary pregnant (and thus not holding the child Jesus), her gentle eyes and face gazing upon those before her with arms outstretched to them, standing on a half-globe covered with stars as her foot/heel crush the head of the serpent. It is a representation of Our Blessed Mother as the Immaculate Conception (Gn. 3:15), inviting her prayer of intercession, and perhaps in a particular way, inviting the invocation associated with the Miraculous Medal, "*O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us for who have recourse to Thee.*"

With the donation of this Madonna, the national shrine of Canada developed with the title Notre Dame du Cap, "Our Lady of the Cape." The "cape" of Our Lady of the Cape, therefore, does not refer to the mantle or robe she wears. It refers to *Cap-de-la-Madeleine*—the geographical district in Trois-Rivières, Quebec, Canada where the original, miraculous statue is enshrined in Canada's National Shrine to Mary, The Shrine of Our Lady of the Cape.

In the mid-1800's, the Holy Spirit blessed Cap-de-la-Madeleine with a fervent new priest, Luc Desilets. He helped rekindle the languid faith of his parishioners, who had been without a priest for 100 years. One evening, after hearing confessions, he stopped into the empty church to pray. It was the eve of the Ascension in 1867 and he saw a pig with a Rosary between its teeth. The thought came to him unbidden: "The Rosary falls from men's hands to be picked up by the swine." So he decided to propagate the Rosary, and dedicated himself to Our Lady of the Rosary. Gradually enthusiasm awakened; and the drowsy faith shook off its lethargy.

With growing attendance, a new (third) church was needed and this was officially approved in 1878. Building stone for the new church was only found on the opposite shore of the St. Lawrence River, however. Due to the unseasonably warm winter, getting the stone across proved problematic. In that same year Fr. Desilets' made a vow to the Virgin Mary: "If you grant us solid ice on the river by the Feast of St. Joseph, we will not destroy your small church [of 1720], and we will dedicate it to your Holy Rosary." (It was then still dedicated to Mary Magdalene.) Praying to St. Joseph for help, the "Miracle of the Ice Bridge" allowed parishioners to transport enough stone from March 19 (St. Joseph) to March 25 (the Annunciation) to build a new church before warm weather set in again. This miracle and the "Miracle of the Eyes" only 10 years later in 1888, gave renown to the statue of Our Lady of the Cape as being miraculous.

By 1904 the prestige of this famous Madonna had become so great that His Holiness Pope Pius X authorized Bishop F.X. Cloutier of Three Rivers to preside in his name at the Solemn Coronation of Our Lady of the Cape—the 50th anniversary the Immaculate Conception dogma. Since that day this statue of the Immaculate Virgin no longer resembles its former counterparts, thanks to the golden crown which encircles her brow as Queen of the Most Holy Rosary—it has become the Madonna of the Canadian people.

On June 17, 1947, Fr. Bernard Mary Jarzembowski, then pastor of St. Joseph Parish in Pontiac, attended the awe-inspiring “To Jesus Through Mary” Marian Congress in Ottawa, Canada. It is from this date that he assigns the establishment of the Shrine of the Immaculate Heart of Mary in Pontiac, Michigan. In Ottawa, in the Chapel of Peace, there stood a replica of the statue of Our Lady of the Cape. On June 18 and 19 Father spent most of the hours in the chapel, several times venerating the statue and praying. He was so deeply moved that, according to his words, he was weeping and practically melting away with emotion all the while he was there. During this mystical experience, Fr. Jarzembowski received a commission from Our Lady “to come back to St. Joseph and begin a shrine where people can come to learn about Mary and develop a relationship with her that will be a treasure for their whole lives.”

He returned home, but the statue was constantly on his mind. After a few days he decided to obtain a full replica of the statue for the new church. He wrote to Father Marchland, superior of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, caretakers of Canada’s National Shrine, asking if he would favor him with a replica of the miraculous statue. Father answered graciously and had the P. Carli-Petrucci artists of Montreal sculpt a replica. In 1948 that statue was complete. It is believed to be one of only twelve in North America like it. The statue arrived at St. Joseph’s and was placed on the side altar and called the Immaculate Heart of Mary for the recent Consecration of the World to the Immaculate Heart by His Holiness Pope Pius XII in 1942. A Golden Heart was attached to the statue, symbolizing that the burning heart of Mary is one of burning love beating in union with the heart of her Son, and partaking in His suffering. This statue and Shrine of the Immaculate Heart of Mary were solemnly blessed on June 20, 1948 by the Most Rev. Bishop Stephen S. Woznicki, Auxiliary Bishop of Detroit.

From 1948 until the closing of St. Joseph Parish in 2013, thousands of pilgrims and visitors came from all across the United States to venerate this statue, entrusting their needs to Blessed Mother’s Immaculate Heart here. Following its acquisition of St. Joseph Chapel and grounds in 2015, Terra Sancta Ministries, through a donor’s generosity, engaged a classically-trained Catholic artist to restore the statue. This statue of Our Lady of the Cape and the statue of the Sorrowful & Immaculate Heart of Mary in the Grotto-Chapel, comprise the primary original elements of the Shrine of the Immaculate Heart of Mary here on the St. Joseph campus.

Mary’s mission of mercy continues today in Pontiac, Michigan, as much as it had at her shrine at Cap-de-la-Madeleine, Canada. “O Queen of the Most Holy Rosary, turn once again your miraculous eyes of mercy toward us, eyes that convert and save.” May all who venerate this statue experience our sweet Blessed Mother’s love and intercession, and through her, come to more deeply know, love, and follow her Son, Jesus.