

POPE FRANCIS VISITS MARY'S SHRINE

A Picture Perfect Day

Pope Francis arrived at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception on September 23, 2015, a picture perfect day with sunshine, blue skies, and a crowd of 25,000 faithful to greet him. As the Holy Father approached Mary's Shrine in the Popemobile, the bells of the Knights Carillon rang jubilantly and thousands on the front steps of the Basilica welcomed him. Before entering the National Shrine, Pope Francis drove not once, but twice through the crowd on the Basilica's East Side where the Canonization Mass of Junípero Serra would later be held. The detour back through the crowd was not according to plan, and the unscheduled second pass-through was a surprise to security. However, given the Holy Father's penchant for spontaneity and his love of people, perhaps it shouldn't have been such a surprise after all.

In Mary's House

Monsignor Walter R. Rossi, Rector of the Basilica, warmly welcomed Pope Francis to Mary's Shrine and escorted him inside. In the Basilica's Great Upper Church, thousands of seminarians and novices awaited the Holy Father's arrival. At first sight of him,



Pope Francis arrives at Mary's Shrine.

L'Espresso Romano

they erupted in unbridled exuberance. Simultaneously, the Choir of the Basilica sang "*Christus Vincit*," with a musical setting composed expressly for his entrance. The perfectly timed piece ended as Pope Francis ascended the stairs to the sanctuary. From there, the Holy Father blessed all gathered in the Great Upper Church.

Pope Francis then visited the Blessed Sacrament Chapel where he spent several moments in silent prayer with the Lord. Afterward, he traversed the Chancel to the Immaculate Conception Mosaic, the namesake piece of the National Shrine and gift of Popes Benedict XV and Pius XI. There he placed flowers before the Blessed Mother, prayed and gazed upon her as a loving son. He then proceeded to the sacristy.



Pope Francis prays before the Blessed Mother.

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Blessing of the Trinity Dome Mosaic

Once inside the sacristy, prior to vesting, Pope Francis blessed the first segment of mosaic art that will adorn the Basilica's Great Dome, the Trinity Dome. This segment contains the beginning "I believe in one God" and the end "Amen" of the Nicene Creed, the complete text of which will encircle the lower band of the dome. The dome mosaic will depict the Most Holy Trinity with Our Lady under her title of



Monsignor Rossi welcomes Pope Francis.

Matthew Barrick



Pope Francis blesses the first segment of the Trinity Dome Mosaic.

the Immaculate Conception. With the Holy Father's blessing, fundraising and fabrication of the Trinity Dome Mosaic is underway. Completion of the Trinity Dome will bring to conclusion the construction of the Basilica's Great Upper Church which began in 1955 and will prepare the way for celebration of the 100th Anniversary of the laying of the National Shrine's foundation stone in 2020.

The Outdoor Sanctuary

After vesting, Pope Francis was led in procession from the Great Upper Church out to the Basilica's East Portico which had been transformed into a beautiful sanctuary for the Canonization Mass of Junípero Serra. A congregation of 25,000 faithful from across the United States, to include a contingent of Native Americans from California, filled the East side of the Basilica and the adjacent grounds of The Catholic University of America. Nearly 300 bishops and 1000 priests also gathered to concelebrate the Mass.



Pope Francis celebrates the Canonization Mass in the Outdoor Sanctuary on the Basilica's East Portico.

The Canonization of Junípero Serra

The large open air Mass began with the first-ever canonization to take place on American soil. Cardinal Donald W. Wuerl, Archbishop of Washington and Chairman of the National Shrine's Board of Trustees, accompanied by the postulator and vice postulators of the cause, beseeched the Holy Father to "enroll Blessed Junípero Serra among the Saints."

Pope Francis obliged by declaring, "For the honor of the Blessed Trinity, the exaltation



Relics of Saint Junípero Serra are placed in the reliquary.

of the Catholic faith and the increase of the Christian life, by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Apostles of Peter and Paul, and our own, after due deliberation and frequent prayer for divine assistance, and having sought the counsel of many of our brother Bishops, we declare and define Blessed Junípero Serra to be a Saint and we enroll him among the Saints, decreeing that he is to be venerated as such by the whole Church."

Relics of Saint Junípero Serra were placed in a reliquary in the sanctuary and a tapestry of the new saint was displayed on the outer wall of the East Apse of the Basilica for all to see. The image of Saint Junípero Serra was carefully interpreted from a stained glass window that exists within the sacristy of the Basilica's Great Upper Church. In it, the saint is shown holding Mission San Carlos Borromeo de Carmelo, one of the 11 missions he founded in California, also his final resting place.



Tapestry of Saint Junípero Serra.

The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass

Mass continued following the Canonization Rite with the Liturgy of the Word. While most of the Mass was celebrated in Spanish, the First Reading was read in Chochenyo, a language of Native Americans spoken during the time of Saint Junípero's missionary work in the territory that is now the state of California; the Second

Reading was read in English; and the petitions were read in various languages representative of the diverse composition of the people of the United States of America.

Delivering his homily in Spanish, Pope Francis urged the faithful to “Go out and tell the good news to everyone.” He said, “We are indebted to a tradition, a chain of witnesses who have made it possible for the good news of the Gospel to be, in every generation, both ‘good’ and ‘news’. Today we remember one of those witnesses who testified to the joy of the Gospel in these lands, Father Junípero Serra. He was the embodiment of ‘a Church that goes forth’, a Church which sets out to bring everywhere the reconciling tenderness of God.”

Matthew Barrick



Pope Francis delivers the homily.

Pope Francis explained, “Father Serra had a motto which inspired his life and work, not just a saying, but above all a reality which shaped the way he lived: ‘*siempre adelante!*’ Keep moving forward!” Exhorting the faithful to be like Saint Junípero Serra in spreading the good news, the Holy Father exclaimed, “Forward! Let’s keep moving forward!”

Following his rousing homily, Pope Francis reverently celebrated the Liturgy of the Eucharist, the source and summit of the Christian life and the height of his visit to the

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Pope Francis elevates the Sacred Host.

National Shrine. After Communion, he prayed, “May the mysteries we have received, O Lord, prepare us for the eternal joys that, as a faithful steward, Saint Junípero Serra came to deserve.”

Final Blessing and Farewell

The Holy Father concluded the Mass with a Pontifical Blessing over the people. With the choir and congregation boldly singing the recessional hymn “Holy God We Praise Thy Name,” Pope Francis revered the altar, departed the sanctuary, and returned to the sacristy of the Great Upper Church where he would prepare to take leave of the National Shrine.



Kevin LaMarque/Reuters

The Final Blessing.

Exiting the Basilica through the West front entrance, Pope Francis smiled and waved at the still enthusiastic and adoring crowd. From the back of his little black Fiat, the Holy Father bid the faithful a fond farewell as the sun set over Mary’s Shrine on what was truly an historic and blessed day. ☘



Matthew Barrick

Pope Francis waves as he departs.

Additional details, photos and texts of Pope Francis’ historic visit to Mary’s Shrine may be found in the commemorative book, “Pope Francis: An Apostolic Visit to America’s Catholic Church” published by the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception. This 100-page limited edition book is available through the National Shrine Shops, onsite and online. For more information, please see page 14 in this issue of Mary’s Shrine or visit nationalshrineshops.com.