

Dedication of the Shrine of Our Lady of La Leche
At Mission Nombre de Dios
Homily by Bishop Felipe J. Estévez
October 11, 2015

Christmas Day stands out among all days . . . it is a day of unanimous celebration, a day of worship for even those who never come to church feel an urge to join in this day. It is a day for the family gathering. A day of beautiful melodies and sweet memories – the day when Christ was born.

When we look at Our Lady shown as the nursing mother, when we look at the Divine child humbly being nurtured by a virgin mother – it is Christmas in our hearts! The Word of God is made flesh in all simplicity and it makes our hearts full of amazement and praise.

Today we are here as witnesses of the dedication of a chapel set aside for pilgrims to come and hear the good news that God is love; the good news that God became a child in Mary’s womb to be our savior, Jesus. Jesus who in the words of Paul is born of a woman to ransom us all and make us adopted children of the eternal Father; enabling us to worship the Father in spirit and truth.

A well in Samaria was a lonely place. A woman came to that place searching for water and found someone who led her to a living encounter – this encounter helped her know her true self as He penetrated her heart and he led her from one layer to a deeper layer, to a truth leading to a deeper truth discovering the living waters of salvation and surrendering in faith to worship the Father in spirit and truth by a true conversion of heart, becoming a disciple and immediately a missionary in Sychar.

That well of Samaria is the symbol of this Marian Shrine of St. Augustine honoring Our Lady of La Leche, Nuestra Señora de La Leche y del Buen Parto. This unusual name and remarkable history of perhaps 428 years on this First Coast of Florida, the place we’re dedicating today is for the encounter of people with the living Christ, with his Word, with the faith community. Our Lady will remind them “to do what Jesus tells you to do” and she will bring to God’s heart, their joys, and sorrows, their hopes and desires interceding on their behalf. A Marian Shrine leads people like Mother Church does: to join the Kingdom of Jesus Christ in order to worship the Father in spirit and truth.

The dedication of this promising first Marian Shrine is done with an immense Eucharistic joy:

- First of all, I feel gratitude toward to the first Christians in Florida, the Native Americans, the Timucua’s who loved her with passionate filial love to the point that the first Shrine

was called the “Chapel of the Indians.” In fact, they were the first to have a devotion to Our Lady of La Leche.

- Gratitude to Bishop Augustin Verot who began his ministry by caring first of all for the Shrine of Our Lady of La Leche by providing a worthy place for her devotion.
- Gratitude to Archbishop Hurley and all the parishes who 50 years ago built this present building as a memorial for world peace: *Jamais plus la guerre* – never war again would cry Pope Paul VI at the United Nations giving voice to what motivated Archbishop Hurley to dedicate this building for the prayer for peace and that is why the chapel of Our Lady of Fatima is here to invite us to pray for this most important petition. Glory to God in the heavens, peace to people of good will!
- Gratitude to the our very generous benefactors who encouraged this Bishop and made it possible to provide full pastoral care of a Shrine in a renewed and beautiful new building.
- Gratitude to the religious community of the Immaculate Conception for providing our present Chaplains for the full pastoral ministry of the Shrine.
- Gratitude to all “the enablers:” architects, builders, liturgical consultants, who completed it on time so that on this day, October 11, 2015, the local feast day of Our Lady of La Leche...a dedication could take place.

Mission Nombre de Dios is the place where the rustic altar evokes the First Mass of the first city and the Cross stands out as our glory and victory. The historic shrine and the new shrine lead us to complete the story of salvation, the child Jesus being nursed by Mary – a magnificent mystery of beautiful tenderness: indeed God is Love!