

**MIRACULOUS IMAGES
OF OUR LADY**



Our Lady of Confidence
A 17th-century Italian portrait by Carlo Maratta.

MIRACULOUS IMAGES OF OUR LADY

100 Famous Catholic Statues and Portraits

By

Joan Carroll Cruz

I am the mother of fair love, and of fear, and of knowledge, and of holy hope. In me is all grace of the way and of the truth, in me is all hope of life and of virtue. Come over to me, all ye that desire me, and be filled with my fruits. For my spirit is sweet above honey, and my inheritance above honey and the honeycomb. My memory is unto everlasting generations.

—Ecclesiasticus 24:24–28

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*There is not a church without an altar in her honor,
not a country nor a canton where there are not some
miraculous images where all sorts of evils are cured and
all sorts of good gifts obtained.*

—St. Louis Marie De Montfort
True Devotion to Mary

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INTRODUCTION

Catholics do not adore statues or other representations of Our Lord, His Mother or the Saints, nor do we pray to these images. In early childhood, we are taught from our Catechism that “we do not pray to the crucifix or to the images of Christ and of the Saints, but to the persons of whom they remind us.” Because they represent holy persons, images are treated with becoming reverence, even as the picture of one’s mother would be.

This subject was clarified by the Council of Trent during its 25th session in December 1563:

Moreover, [the faithful must be instructed] that the images of Christ, of the Virgin Mother of God, and of the other Saints are to be placed and retained especially in the churches, and that due honor and veneration is to be given them . . . because the honor which is shown them is referred to the prototypes which they represent, so that by means of the images which we kiss and before which we uncover the head and prostrate ourselves, we adore Christ and venerate the Saints whose likeness they bear. That is what was defined by the decrees of the Councils, especially of the Second Council of Nicaea (787 A.D.) against the opponents of images.

From the earliest days of the Church, images were painted on the walls of the catacombs as religious expressions of the faithful, as acts of veneration and as aids in visualizing Our Lord, His miracles and His Holy Mother. We are told by St. John of the Cross in Book III, Chapter 35 of *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*: “The Church established the use of statues (and images) for two principal reasons: the reverence given to the Saints through them and

the motivation of the will and the awakening of devotion to the Saints by their means. Insofar as they serve this purpose their use is profitable and necessary.” The Saint also tells us, “Since images serve as a motivating means toward invisible things, we should strive that the motivation, affection, and joy of will derived from them be directed toward the living object they represent.”

Without question, the most popular image of a Saint found in churches throughout the world is that of the Queen of Saints, the Blessed Virgin Mary. One would be hard pressed to find a church, chapel or oratory that does not contain an image of the Mother of God.

Of these images of our Holy Mother, some have been identified as being miraculous. It is not that the statue or painting is miraculous of itself, but it does seem that Our Lady favors certain of her replicas and often honors the requests of those persons who visit them to express their needs and their love for her.

The purpose of this work is to identify 100 of these favored images and to chart their histories and the reasons for their designation as miraculous objects. It must be understood that the Blessed Virgin does not perform the miracles by herself. It is ultimately our Heavenly Father who performs the miracles according to His holy will at the request of Our Lady. For this reason, the Virgin Mary is known as the Mediatrix of All Graces who pleads our cause before God’s holy throne.

For an image to be included in this collection, the painting or statue must fit into one or more of the following categories:

- It must have had a miraculous origin, such as the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe.
- It must be composed of an unusual substance, such as the portrait of Absam, Austria.
- It must have bled, wept, exuded manna, or changed location, such as the portrait of Our Lady of Good Counsel.
- Something unusual must have happened to it, such as that which affected the statue of Our Lady of the Thunderbolt.
- It must have a reputation for miraculous cures and favors.

Many of the 100 images included in this volume fall into two or more of these categories.

It must be noted that all the images mentioned in this volume were thoroughly studied by Church authorities before ecclesiastical permission was granted for the images to be enshrined and honored in their respective churches or shrines.

The sanctuaries that house these miraculous images were especially selected by Our Lady. In keeping with her humble life at Nazareth, Our Lady chose places that were beautiful in their quiet simplicity. In almost every instance, the corner chosen was retiring and withdrawn from the world. A few of these shrines have maintained their reverent isolation, but in many instances a chapel located outside a village eventually became embraced by the houses and businesses of an expanding population. For this reason, some shrines are now surrounded by great cities. To accommodate the growing numbers of Our Lady's devotees, many of the simple chapels that were first erected to house her images developed into churches and finally into magnificent basilicas.

As Henry Martin Gillett noted in his *Famous Shrines of Our Lady*, "Once Our Lady has been given a shrine, it may be said that the site belongs to her for all time. For one reason or another her subjects may forget their allegiance and even blot out every trace of the original sanctuary; but the site remains hers. And sooner or later she comes back to her own. Sometimes people are moved to restore the old. At other times her more faithful children, quite ignorant of past history, are inspired to establish a 'new shrine' quite near the old foundations." The reader will find that such has happened repeatedly, due to marvelous and unusual promptings.

Although many of the miraculous images of Our Lady are exquisitely beautiful, the reader will discover that some of them are regarded as miraculous even though they are of poor workmanship. Many have been damaged by time, while some are downright unflattering representations of our beautiful Madonna. St. John of the Cross, in Book III, Chapter 36 of his *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, explains, "Experience even teaches that if God grants some favors and works miracles, He does so through some statues that are not very well carved or carefully painted, or that are poor representations, so that the faithful will not attribute any

of these wonders to the statue or painting.” St. John of the Cross has dedicated Chapters 35, 36 and 37 of his *Ascent of Mount Carmel* to the subject of miraculous images, the benefits to be derived through their veneration and valuable precautions to be observed. The reader is encouraged to study these chapters, which are written by a Doctor of the Church who is also acknowledged as a master of the spiritual life.

The author feels bound to address the claim made by many writers that certain portraits of Our Lady were painted, and that some statues were sculpted, by St. Luke the Evangelist. This claim is made in spite of the fact that the styles and techniques of these paintings and statues are vastly different. Moreover, the churches that enshrine these images have on record either the approximate dates or the actual dates of their origins—dates that do not correspond to the lifetime of St. Luke. One writer recorded that the claim originated somewhere around the sixth century, another that it was from the ninth century. It has also been noted that there are no works of art supposedly executed by St. Luke that sustain historical scrutiny in his favor.

Mrs. Anna Murphy Jameson, in her *Legends of the Madonna*, records that:

the legend which represents St. Luke the Evangelist as a painter appears to be of Eastern origin and quite unknown in Western Europe before the first Crusade. It crept in then, and was accepted with many other oriental superstitions and traditions. It may have originated in the real existence of a Greek painter named Luca—a saint also, for the Greeks have a whole calendar of canonized artists . . . and this Greek San Luca may have been a painter of those Madonnas imported from the ateliers of Mount Athos into the West by merchants and pilgrims; and the West, which knew but one St. Luke, may have easily confounded the painter and the evangelist.

Finally, Alfred Plummer tells us, “It is certain St. Luke was an artist, at least to the extent that his graphic descriptions of the Annunciation, Visitation, Nativity, shepherds, Presentation, the Shepherd and lost sheep, etc., have become the inspiration and

favorite themes of Christian painters.” The only portraits discovered by this author that *might* have been painted by St. Luke—if indeed he was artistic—are the images of Our Lady of Mellieha on the island of Malta and that which is revered in St. Mary Major Basilica in Rome.

According to St. Alphonsus de Liguori, “The divine Mother has shown by prodigies how pleasing to her are the visits paid to her images. But if we are unable to visit her miraculous images which are far from home, we should visit her shrines which are readily available.” The Saint continues: “If we also desire the happiness of receiving the visits of this Queen of Heaven, we should often visit her by going before her image, or praying to her in churches dedicated to her honor.” This is a lovely suggestion that we might well take to heart and put into practice. Until we are able to make such visits in person, may this book serve to take us in spirit and in our hearts to Our Lady’s shrines around the world.

DECLARATION OF OBEDIENCE

In obedience to the decrees of several Roman pontiffs, in particular those of Pope Urban VIII, I declare that I in no way intend to prejudge the Holy Mother of the Church in the matter of miracles. Final authority in such matters rests with the Church, to whose judgment I willingly submit.

—Joan Carroll Cruz

**MIRACULOUS IMAGES
OF OUR LADY**

OUR LADY OF LUJAN

(Our Lady of Consolation)

Lujan, Buenos Aires, Argentina, 1630

Following the discoveries of Magellan, Cortez and others, South America in the 16th century provided a vast new land where the Faith could take root and devotion to Our Lady could thrive. The land was soon graced with many shrines, but that of Our Lady of Lujan is perhaps the most famous and the most historic in all of South America. It is said to bear every mark of a true, chosen sanctuary of Our Lady.

The history of the shrine begins in 1630, with a farmer who immigrated to Argentina from Portugal. Coming from a place where the Faith flourished, he was saddened at the lack of religious influence in his adopted district, and in particular, his village of Sumampa. He decided to help the situation by building a chapel on his land. Writing to a friend in Brazil, he asked the friend to send him a small statue of Our Lady for the chapel. The friend, unsure of how the farmer wanted Our Lady to be depicted, sent two statues—one of the Madonna with Child and the other a representation of the Immaculate Conception.

Having at first been transported by sea, the images were then placed on a cart for the journey inland. Because of hostile natives in the region, a number of carts and a pack of horses banded together in a caravan. When darkness overtook the travelers after leaving Buenos Aires, they camped at the isolated ranch of Don Rosendo de Oramus. Early the next morning, the wagons and animals were readied for the rest of their journey. One by one the

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carts began to move, all except the one that carried the images of Our Lady. Progress was stalled when the driver was unable to coax the animals forward. The other drivers in the caravan came to help—but all efforts were unsuccessful. Finally, it was decided that the animals might have been influenced supernaturally. And so it seemed, since the animals willingly moved when the statue of the Immaculate Conception was removed from the cart.

The statue of the Madonna and Child continued its journey and arrived safely in Sumampa, where it is still venerated under the title of Our Lady of Consolation.

As for the statue of the Immaculate Conception that was taken off the cart, it was solemnly carried to the ranch and enthroned in a room of its own. This room soon became a popular shrine and remained so for the next 40 years.

A small, eight-year-old black slave from Angola in Africa now appears in the history of Our Lady of Lujan. Manuel had been traveling with the caravan and became intrigued by the incident of the stubborn animals. When the statue of Our Lady was removed from the cart, he begged to remain as a little servant of the Mother of God. Don Rosendo made arrangements with the boy's owner and brought Manuel to the ranch, where he worked as a sacristan and edified everyone by his charity and piety. As he grew, he devoted himself to the care of the sick and afflicted. Many of the villagers gave him alms, which he saved for Our Lady's "purse."

When Don Rosendo de Oramus died in 1670, a pious lady, Dona Ana de Mattos, obtained permission to move the shrine to a chapel on her own property some 15 miles away on the other side of the River Lujan. The ranch of Don Rosendo, it was decided, was too remote, and it was in constant danger from Indian attack. Even so, Manuel was left behind to care for the property.

When the statue of the Immaculate Conception arrived on the property of Dona Ana it was taken to the chapel and reverently enshrined. Following prayers of welcome to the Mother of God, the shrine was securely locked for the night. The next morning it was discovered that the image had disappeared. Looking about, the men finally found the statue at the ranch, on its former pedestal. Once more it was carried to the chapel of Dona Ana.

This time, in addition to the locked doors, a guard was placed

to keep watch. But again, the statue vanished and was found at its former location.

Manuel was at first suspected of having removed his beloved statue, but the charge was dismissed when it was proved that it was impossible for him to have been involved. Dona Ana then turned for advice to the bishop and the governor of the Province, both of whom made an official inquiry. Afterward it was decided that the shrine should be removed to the property of Dona Ana, since the ranch posed a real danger to pilgrims because of savage Indians who roamed the area.

To ensure that the statue would remain in Dona Ana's chapel, the bishop and the governor carried the statue to the chapel in solemn procession. Taking part was Manuel, who would thereafter remain with his beloved statue as its caretaker. Now that the Blessed Mother had her favored sacristan with her, the statue of the Immaculate Conception seemed content to remain at its new location.

The popularity of the shrine soon required larger accommodations. The foundation stone for the new church was laid in 1677 by Fra Gabriel, a Carmelite friar. It was during that year that the first recorded miracle occurred. The miracle was in favor of Fr. Pedro de Montalbo. Other miracles are known to have occurred before this date, but unfortunately, these were not carefully recorded.

In 1710, another recorded miracle took place. This was the cure of a malignant throat tumor suffered by Fr. Bernabe de Gutierrez. Oil from the lamp of Our Lady's shrine helped to effect the miraculous results.

We are told that Our Lady revealed to the humble Manuel the date of his death and assured him of his eternal salvation. Manuel died a holy death on the date Heaven had revealed. The faithful sacristan, who had attended Our Lady during almost all of his life, was not to be separated from her in death. He was buried in a tomb at the foot of the altar whereon his beloved statue was enshrined.

A still larger church was required for the ever-increasing number of pilgrims. A church started in 1730 was soon abandoned in favor of one built in 1763, the year Our Lady of Lujan was declared patroness of Buenos Aires. For the next 100 years, several

orders of priests labored at the shrine and succeeded in gaining a worldwide reputation for the shrine of Our Lady in Lujan.

One of the strange occurrences that helped to spread the miraculous aspects of Our Lady of Lujan took place on August 28, 1780. On that date news arrived at the shrine that a large group of Indians were slaughtering all the people in their path as they advanced ever closer to Lujan. The news threw the people into a panic, and they fled to the shrine to pray for the protection of Our Lady. While they prayed, a mysteriously dense fog gathered quickly throughout the town, thoroughly hiding it from the advancing enemy so that they lost their way and traveled elsewhere. All the faithful agreed that they had been saved by virtue of the miraculous Lady of Lujan.

When parts of Argentina were afflicted with the much-dreaded cholera epidemic, Archbishop Aueiros vowed to make a pilgrimage to Lujan if his archdiocese were spared. While many cities suffered grievously, Buenos Aires—both city and province, including Lujan—was singularly and blessedly spared, as all acknowledged.

Because of the reputation of the shrine, Pope Leo XIII decided in 1886 to honor the miraculous statue with a papal coronation. On September 30 of that year he blessed the crown, which was made of pure gold set with 365 diamonds, rubies, emeralds and sapphires, 132 pearls and a number of enamels depicting the emblems of the archbishop and the Argentine Republic. The papal coronation of Our Lady of Lujan took place on May 8, 1887. The celebrant chosen by the pope for this event was Archbishop Aueiros, who made a pilgrimage at that time in thanksgiving to Our Lady for sparing his archdiocese from the scourge of cholera.

Other popes who have honored the shrine are Clement XI, Clement XIV, Pius VI, Pius IX and Leo XIII. Fr. John Mastai Ferretti visited the shrine in 1824. He later became Pope Pius IX. It is interesting to note that it was this pope who, on December 8, 1854, defined the dogma of the Immaculate Conception.

The Lazarist fathers who had custody of the shrine at this time envisioned a grand basilica for Our Lady, a building that would merit the distinction of being a national monument. In 1904, when the monument was almost completed, the miracu-

lous image of Our Lady of Lujan was triumphantly transferred to the basilica, where she was enshrined in the center of a camarin behind the high altar.

The Blessed Virgin stands atop a jeweled crescent moon in an attitude of prayer, with her hands joined at her breast. A mere 23 inches high, the statue has a pleasant, oval face. Her eyes are clear blue. A halo of 12 stars encircles her head, and behind this extend 15 large rays made of solid gold. The Virgin's robe and mantle are delicately embroidered with golden thread and enriched with sprays of gems. Made of baked clay, it is surprising that a statue of such delicate material could have survived so many transfers during its more than 350 years of existence. We can only credit Manuel's loving care of the statue and the cautious handling of it by those who followed him.

The shrine at Lujan is literally covered with votive offerings in the form of silver hearts, as well as miniature renditions of arms, legs and body parts, all attesting to the miracles of healing granted by Our Lady.

Many are the pilgrims from throughout Argentina who visit the shrine of their Madonna. Many, too, are the pilgrims from throughout the world who, while visiting Buenos Aires, journey 40 miles to the west to visit this world-renowned, miraculous image of Our Lady of Lujan.