

The Marian Pilgrimage: Day Thirteen: Tuesday 19 May 2020

The Shrine of Our Lady of Montserrat, near Barcelona, Spain

Before leaving the Capital of Catalonia, Barcelona for Montserrat we include a visit to La Sagrada Familia {The Holy Family} Basilica. The origins of the Basilica date back to 1866, when Josep Maria Bocabellai Verdaguer founded the Asociación Espiritual de Devotos de San José (Spiritual Association of Devotees of St. Joseph). It was this association that promoted the construction of an expiatory church dedicated to the Holy Family.

The project was initially commissioned to the architect Francisco de Paula del Villar y Lozano and the first stone was placed under his direction on March 19, 1882. But shortly after this, Francisco de Paula del Villar resigned due to disagreements with the developers. The commission then passed to a thirty-one year old architect, Antoni Gaudí. He had no experience in major works and decided to completely re-think the project.

After the Association received an important anonymous donation, the Catalan genius decided to make a new and larger work. He rejected the former neo-Gothic project, of which only the crypt had been built, and proposed an exuberant and innovative temple with a Latin cross plan, eighteen towers of great height, and full of religious symbolism shown especially throughout its sculptural decoration.

Gaudí dedicated forty-three years of his life to La Sagrada Familia but, after his early death in 1926, only one of the towers had been built. Aware that the temple's work could take even centuries to complete, Gaudí defined the entire project on plans and made three scale plaster models, so that they would be used as such in the construction of the entire building.

Although the plans, sketches and models were damaged badly during the Spanish Civil War, some of them could be recovered. Due to the amount of the material that was conserved, the on-going construction has remained faithful, respecting the design created by Gaudí.

Today the Basilica is still under construction and it is hoped that the works can be completed in 2026, to coincide with the Centenary of the death of Antoni Gaudí.



The Holy Family represents the symbols of the Christian faith through a combination of artistic disciplines. Its majestic beauty and the richness of its decorative, architectural and symbolic touches are such that you could spend a whole day contemplating it and discovering its incredible history.

The exterior has three facades. The Nativity (Street Marina), richly decorated and full of life, represents the birth of Jesus. The Passion (Sardenya Street), more austere, reflects the suffering of Christ during the crucifixion. And the façade of La Gloria (Street Mallorca) which represents Death, the Last Judgment, Glory and Hell. All of them incorporate sculptural ensembles in which the main passages of

his life are recreated: the kiss of Judas, the last supper, The Judgment of Jesus, the Ecce Homo, etc.

The interior of the Basilica takes us to a fantasy world in which the columns recreate the shapes of nature, imitating a huge and colourful forest of stone. Once the works are completed, the Basilica will be crowned by eighteen towers (only eight are completed) with different heights depending on the religious hierarchy they represent: Twelve will be dedicated to the Apostles, Four to the Evangelists and one to the Virgin Mary. The last tower, dedicated to Jesus Christ, will caress the sky of Barcelona at 172'5 meters to make La Sagrada Familia the tallest building in Barcelona.



Montserrat Abbey and Our Lady: The Black Madonna



Santa Maria de Montserrat is an abbey of the Order of Saint Benedict located on the mountain of Montserrat in Monistrol de Montserrat, Catalonia, Spain.

The History of the Abbey at Montserrat.

It is not known exactly when Monks first came to Montserrat and began to build a Monastery. However, it is believed that in the ninth century four of the Chapels were built on Montserrat Mountain (St Mary's, St. Iscle's, St.Peter's and St. Martin's). It is believed that these were inhabited by hermit Monks who lived a solitary life of prayer. Today only one of these Chapels is still standing - St. Iscle. If you would like to visit St. Iscle Chapel, it is located in the Monastery garden.

In 1025 the Abbot of Ripoli and Bishop of Vic, Oliba, officially founded the Monastery of Montserrat. During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, a Romanesque church was built in Montserrat containing a carving of the image of the Mother of God. Over this period pilgrims began to come to Montserrat.

Throughout the following centuries Montserrat's importance grew: in 1223 there is the first account of a boys' choir at Montserrat in 1409 the Monastery became an independent abbey. In 1490 a printing press was installed at the abbey. In 1493 the Monastery's word was spread even further when one of the hermits from Montserrat - Bernal Boil - went on a voyage to America with Christopher Columbus. One of the islands in the Antilles was named after Montserrat, and this began the spread of the worship of the Mother of God of Montserrat in the Americas.

In the 19th century Montserrat hit some troubling times. In 1811 - 1812 Montserrat was destroyed by Napoleon's army. Then in 1835, the Land Acts meant that the Monastery lost all of its property and only one Monk remained at the Monastery. However, in 1844 the Monks returned to Montserrat, and in 1858 the reconstruction of Montserrat began.

Again, in the Twentieth century, the Monks experienced turbulent times during the Spanish Civil War (1936 - 1939). During this period the Monks were forced to leave the Monastery. Over the period of the war, twenty-three Monks were killed. Fortunately, the autonomous government of Catalonia managed to save Montserrat and free it from looting and destruction. After the war, the Monks returned and continued with the reconstruction of the Monastery.

In 1947 there was the Celebration of the Enthronement of the Image of the Mother of God (The Black Madonna). Since this time, the Monastery has gone from strength to strength. The new museum has been added. In 1982 Pope John Paul II visited Montserrat. The Basilica has been restored, and the entire complex has been built to cater for the large number of pilgrims who come to Montserrat each year.

The Life of the Monks in the Monastery

There are about one hundred monks who are based at Montserrat Monastery. They follow the Order of St. Benedict and are linked to two other Monasteries - El Miracle and St Micheal of Cuixa. Their life is devoted to prayer and work. They are keen to welcome people from all walks of life to the Monastery.

The Monks listen to the voice of God through both the Holy Scriptures, the Tradition and developments in the Church, and also what is happening in the world.

The Monks are involved in many areas of work. Some are involved in the internal organisation of the Monastery, while others are researchers or teachers in different academic disciplines including history, theology, scriptural studies, liturgy and music. Other Monks work in the Shrine itself - they welcome religious groups to the Monastery, make speeches and generally ensure the upkeep of the Monastery. Other Monks are involved in work with the famous Montserrat

L'Escolania Choir. They teach the boys in the Choir School, write music, do musical research, and produce recordings.

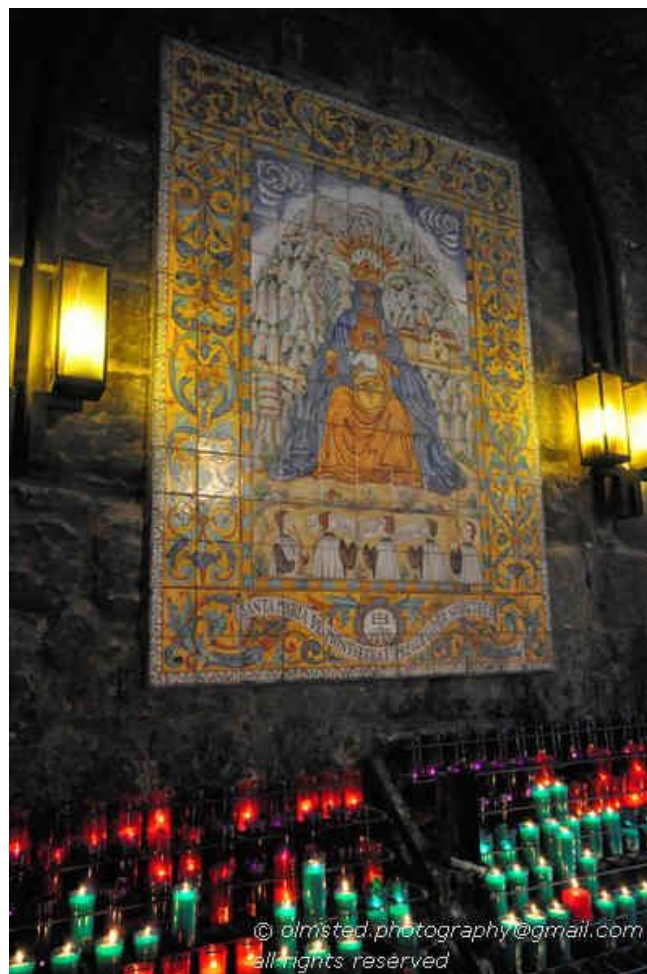
The Monks live in a building that sits to the left of the Montserrat Basilica. It can be accessed from the Atrium of the Basilica, but it is not open to the public.



The Abbey is notable for enshrining the Virgin of Montserrat, The Black Madonna, is sometimes referred to as 'La Moreneta'- a local nickname, 'the Little Black Lady'. The statue sits behind a sheet of glass. However, one of her hands is holding a sphere, symbolising the universe, is not behind the glass. It is a tradition for pilgrims to kiss or touch the Virgin's hand while opening out the other hand to Jesus.

The Black Madonna was believed to have been carved in Jerusalem at the beginning of the Christian era, sometimes it is associated with St Luke. It is believed that this carving was discovered by shepherds in 880 A.D., although some historians believe that it was actually carved later, in the twelfth Century. It is one of the most famous Black Madonna statues in the world, and in 1844 Pope Leo XIII declared the Virgin of Montserrat 'The Patroness of Catalonia'. Black Madonnas are to be found all over the world. One of the most common questions about the Black Madonna is 'why she is black'? Contrary to popular belief it is not the portrayal of a Black African as a Madonna. The black colour does not come from dark coloured wood or from earlier covering by paint. It is known from historical descriptions of the Madonna that she has simply darkened over time. [Candle-smoke and incense perhaps?]

The Ave Maria Path (Cami de l'Ave Maria) at Montserra



On leaving the area where you have seen the Black Madonna you will exit via the Cami de l'Ave Maria. This area is a moving place where you will be given the opportunity to pay homage to the statue that you have just seen. Each candle that you will see has been lit as a prayer to the Virgin Mary. An entire wall of candles is evidence of all of the people have come to ask their prayers to the Virgin Mary.

St Ignatius Loyola

St. Ignatius travelled to Montserrat after his initial conversion. Wounded by a cannon ball during the Battle of Pamplona and while recovering at his brother's house he discovered the presence of the Risen Lord in his life. He noticed this presence through reading. When he read novels about chivalry and romance, he reflected on how these entertained him while he was reading but afterwards left him empty. When he read the lives of the saints, he discovered that his heart burned within and stirred with desires to imitate their zeal for the Lord.

Recognizing the opposition of these two movements of the spirit helped him see Christ as the one who could help him live life to the full. Indeed, we only discover the gift of who we really are through an

authentic gift of ourselves to others, and Christ alone makes giving ourselves in this way a real possibility. Ignatius wanted this possibility in his life and so he resolved to follow Christ. With this resolution, he went to Montserrat and spent two days making a confession of all his sins. After his confession, he spent the night in prayer - as a knight in arms - before Our Lady of Montserrat. At the end of his prayer, he left his sword with our Lady and decided to spend the rest of his life as a pilgrim doing penance. This would eventually lead him



to Manresa. Here he spent a year in solitude - fasting, praying and doing penance. He battled severe bouts with depression and all kinds of spiritual trials. In the end, he had a deep encounter with the Holy Trinity, gained wisdom of heart and wrote down his insights in what we now know as the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius.

Returning to Barcelona we visit The Cathedral



The Cathedral of the Holy Cross and Saint Eulalia -Barcelona Cathedral,

The Gothic cathedral, and seat of the Archbishop of Barcelona, was constructed from the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries, with the principal work done in the fourteenth century. The cloister, which encloses the Well of the Geese (Font de les Oques) was completed in 1448. In the late nineteenth century, the neo-Gothic façade was constructed over the nondescript exterior that was common to Catalan churches. The roof is notable for its gargoyles, featuring a wide range of animals, both domestic and mythical.

View of the cathedral interior



The Cathedral is dedicated to Eulalia of Barcelona, co-patron saint of Barcelona, a young virgin who, according to Catholic tradition, suffered martyrdom during Roman times in the city. One story says that she was exposed naked in the public square and a miraculous snowfall in mid-spring covered her nudity. The enraged Romans put her into a barrel with knives stuck into it and rolled it down a street (according to tradition, the one now called *Baixada de Santa Eulàlia*). The body of Saint Eulalia is entombed in the Cathedral's crypt.

The choir stalls retain the coats-of-arms of the Knights of the Order of the Golden Fleece. In his first trip into Spain, Charles, the future Holy Roman Emperor, selected Barcelona as the site of a chapter of his Order. The king had arrived for his investiture as Count of Barcelona, and the city, as a Mediterranean port, offered the closest communication with other far flung Habsburg dominions, while the large proportions of the cathedral would accommodate the required grand ceremonies. In 1518 the sanctuary was prepared for the first sitting of the chapter in 1519.

The side Chapel of the Holy Sacrament and of the Holy Christ of Lepanto contains a cross said to date from the time of the Battle of Lepanto (1571).

The Cathedral has a secluded Gothic cloister where thirteen white geese are kept, the number explained by the assertion that Eulalia was thirteen years old when she was martyred.]



There is evidence from the sixteenth century that acolytes would place a dancing egg on the fountain of the Cathedral's cloister. To accomplish this, the egg would have been emptied, with wax used to fill the hole and add some weight. When placed over a water jet from a fountain, the egg starts turning without falling, and thus "dances." Generally, fountains with a dancing egg are also decorated with seasonal flowers and fresh fruits, like cherries, which cover the bowl of the fountain, as well as weaver's broom and carnations.

Happy Easter!

