

HISTORY & SYMBOLISM
OUR LADY OF SOUTH CAROLINA
OUR LADY OF JOYFUL HOPE

by Rev. Stanley Smolenski

HISTORY: When it was announced at the beginning of 2003 that there would be a Diocesan Celebration of the Year of the Rosary in October of that year, Bishop Robert Baker was asked by Fr. Stan Smolenski if the diocese could be entrusted/consecrated to Our Lady and if an icon of Our Lady of South Carolina could be commissioned for that occasion. The Bishop gave his permission. Fr. Smolenski sent a sketch to Fr. Larry Lossing of the diocese of Orlando, FL, an expert heraldry and church art. His experience includes art work for the film industry in Hollywood as well. Fr. Lossing donated the icon which he brought to the celebration in Lexington, SC on 5 October 2003. The icon was kept at the St. Katherine Drexel Volunteer Residence on Wentworth St. in Charleston until it acquired its shrine in Kingstree. The leader of the first pilgrims expressed the sentiments of many of them so well: “I cannot go to Lourdes, Fatima or Medjugorje, but I can come to Our Lady of South Carolina, Our Lady of Joyful Hope.

TITLE: The motto of South Carolina is “Dum Spiro, Spero” – “While I breathe, I hope.” The state seal personified “Spes” – Hope. Romans 12.12 spiritualizes the theme of hope: “Rejoice in Hope.” That is Bishop Robert J. Baker’s Episcopal motto. Thus, this icon has a title of place (Our Lady of South Carolina) and a title of grace (Our Lady of Joyful Hope), just as Our Lady at Lourdes identified herself as the Immaculate Conception, and at Fatima as Our Lady of the Rosary, and in the USA as Our Lady of America – the Immaculate Virgin.

ICON: While Western European religious art became more natural, the Eastern church art remained iconographic. That means that each item in the picture is symbolic. The icon is considered “written”, that is, it contains a spiritual message to be meditated on.

SCRIPTURE: “Behold the Lamb of God” (John 1.29) – “Behold Your Mother” (John 19.27) – “The Just Flourish like the Palm Tree” (Psalm 92.13). These quotes emphasize 3 themes: Jesus, Mary and the Christian. This indicates that such veneration is scripturally based.

JESUS: In the center is the Child Jesus. His white robe summarizes his life on earth. It recalls his swaddling clothes at birth and his shroud at death. His right hand is held up in blessing, to show his divinity. His left hand holds the Eucharist, which is the sacramental summation of his life’s mission and which implies the Church.

MARY: As Mother of God, she holds the Christ Child, presenting him to mankind. Her mantle is in the traditional blue. Her robe is rose, in honor of Guadalupe, to recall the title that Pope Pius XII gave her as “Empress of the Americas”. The serpent under her feet recalls the mystery of the Immaculate Conception, Patroness of the United States. On her mantle are three stars: on her forehead and on each shoulder. This represents her perpetual virginity – before, during and after her divine maternity. Her straight-lined robe recalls her title of “Tower of David” – symbolizing the impregnable fortress of King David, where all the armaments against the enemy were available. As Mother of the Church, she holds the rosary to emphasize her maternal role in the

Mystical Body of Christ. In Deuteronomy 4.9, the people were taught by Moses: “Only take heed and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things which your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart, all the days of your life; make them known to your children and your children’s children.” The prophet Jeremiah (12.11) declared that Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonians precisely “because there is none that considereth in the heart.” On the other hand, Luke 2.19 tells us that “Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart.” Through the rosary, Mary encourages her children to do the same, especially in preparation for the Eucharist because, when instituting the Eucharist, Jesus stated: “Do this in memory of me” (Luke 22.19). Through her rosary, Mary assists us in keeping that memory of her Son fervent in our minds and hearts. The eight pointed star above her head reminds us that when the Magi “saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy” (Matthew 2.10). This mystery of the Epiphany, symbolized by the star, centers on the evangelization of the gentiles. In his document “On the Evangelization of the Modern World”, Pope Paul VI proclaimed Mary as the Star of Evangelization.

PALM TREE: Since this icon is in reference to the State of South Carolina, whose flag features the palmetto, a palm tree gives that identification. The psalm ver 92.3 “The just flourish like the palm tree” reminds us of our call to holiness with our duty to evangelize our culture and society. The palm tree is planted in the new creation renewed by Christ and his Church.

SERPENT: The serpent recalls the vigilance needed, lest we allow ourselves the loss of our eternal inheritance. The discoloration below the serpent represents the kingdom of Satan, the “Prince of this world” (John 12.31), whose evil disfigures God’s image in mankind, and which is the source of conflict between good and evil, virtue and vice, truth and falsehood.