

THE VOCATION OF THE KINGSTREE SHRINE

The Vatican issued a document in preparation for the Jubilee Year 2000 on *The Shrine – Memory, Presence and Prophecy of the Living God* which defines the purpose and contributions of shrines to the faith of the Church. Each shrine has its own charism, message and particular grace which should be presented to the pilgrims.

The opening section states “Every shrine can be seen as the bearer of a specific message, since it vividly makes present today the foundational event of the past which still speaks to the heart of pilgrims. Marian shrines in particular provide an authentic school of faith based on Mary’s example and motherly intercession.” The foundational event of the shrine reveals the uniqueness of each shrine.

The icon of Our Lady of South Carolina – Our Lady of Joyful Hope, which is now venerated at her Shrine in Kingstree, SC, was blessed on the occasion of the original Diocesan Rosary Celebration in 2003. It was our participation in the universal Year of the Rosary proclaimed by Pope John Paul II. Since this relates to the foundational event of our Shrine to Mary, its analysis will indicate the special gift of grace available there through her intercession.

By issuing the Apostolic Letter *Rosarium Virginis Mariae – On the Most Holy Rosary –* and proclaiming in it a Year of the Rosary, Pope John Paul II called the Church to the Rosary as the “school of Mary” (#14). In that Year of the Rosary he issued another call, this one to the Eucharist in his encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia – On the Eucharist in Its Relationship to the Church –* in which he unites Mary to this sacramental mystery in chapter six “At the School of Mary, ‘Woman of the Eucharist’”.

An explicit link is made with his Eucharistic teaching and that on the Rosary by his reference to the new mysteries he introduced universally in his encyclical *On the Most Holy Rosary*: “Above all, let us listen to Mary Most Holy, in whom the mystery of the Eucharist appears, more than in anyone else, as a *mystery of light*” (#62). An implicit link can be found in the same section, this one in reference to the Kingstree Shrine, “In the humble signs of bread and wine, changed into his body and blood, Christ... enables us to become, for everyone, witnesses of hope.” Thus we see that in the School of Mary, centered on the Eucharist through the Rosary, we become witnesses of hope to those around us.

This describes the purpose and goal of the Kingstree Shrine. The urgency for the need of hope in our times was issued by Pope Benedict XVI in his encyclical *Spe Salvi – Saved in Hope –* which is a call to the Church to a special vocation to hope. The final section of this encyclical (#49) is dedicated to Mary, Star of Hope, in which the Pope prays that Mary as Mother of Hope teach us to believe, to hope and to love with her. He also implores her to “show us the way to

[Christ's] kingdom!", which is a Eucharistic kingdom, according to the encyclical *On the Eucharist in Its Relationship to the Church*, where the Church is described as "the People of the New Covenant" (#21). She prepares us for all this through the Rosary, a litany of the mighty works of God accomplished in the life, death and resurrection of her Son, celebrated liturgically in the Eucharist.

The Shrine of Our Lady of South Carolina – Our Lady of Joyful Hope – is a diocesan response to this triple call by our recent Popes to the universal Church. They encourage us to be formed in the School of Mary, presented as Woman of the Eucharist and invoked as Mother of Hope. This call and our response is a joyful and hopeful opportunity and challenge for us all.

FR. STAN SMOLENSKI, spma
Director