

World & Nation

Pope closes Marian year, calls it 'pilgrimage of faith'

By Greg Erlanson

Vatican City (NC) — Pope John Paul II brought the Church's 14-month Marian year to a close August 15, describing the period as a "pilgrimage of faith" on the eve of Christianity's third millennium.

Celebrated in a crowded St. Peter's Basilica, the internationally televised Mass reflected the influence of the Eastern-rite Catholic churches on the Marian year's ceremonies, with contributions from Coptic monks and Albanian Catholics in folk costumes.

The two-and-a-half-hour ceremony marking the feast of the Assumption brought to a close the special period of prayer and celebrations of the Madonna and her significance for the Church.

The Marian year began June 7, 1987, during a Pentecost ceremony in St. Peter's Square. Its celebration has included several Eastern-rite religious ceremonies over which the pope has presided.

The final such ceremony was the "Rite of Incense," a Coptic ceremony celebrated in St. Mary Major Basilica August 14, the eve of the year's closure.

Despite the traditional flight of Romans from the city during the middle of August, both ceremonies were crowded. Tour buses from around Europe clogged the main road leading up to St. Peter's, and inside the basilica it was standing room only for the closing ceremony.

The entire Mass was filmed by Italian state television and broadcast live to eight European countries via Eurovision. It was beamed to 16 other countries via satellite, including the Philippines, South Korea, Kenya, Uganda, Chile, Haiti and Mexico. It was not broadcast to the United States.

During his homily, the pope said the Marian year was a pilgrimage of faith on the eve of the third millennium after Christ.

"We have begun to walk with you; we, a generation which bears a certain resemblance to that first Advent, when on the horizon of human longing for the coming of the Messiah, a mysterious light was enkindled," he said.

Speaking beside an icon of Mary and Child that also adorned the altar during the year's opening ceremony, the pope called on Mary to "be always with your children! Help the individual, the people, the nations, to rise

up."

"This cry of the Marian year" resounds throughout the earth, the pope added. The present age, "while priding itself on progress which has never before been seen, feels, nevertheless, in a particularly acute way the threats that menace the whole great human family."

While most of the Mass prayers were in Latin, the ceremony reflected the Marian year's emphasis on the Eastern rites' veneration of Mary.

It began with a Byzantine hymn of Marian praise, sung by Greek monks, and a brief Albanian hymn.

During the responsorial song, the basilica echoed with the chants of Ethiopian monks dressed in black and white robes and accompanied by cymbals and the dirge-like beat of a drum.

The Gospel was sung in Coptic and Arabic by an Egyptian choir, and the Communion song was sung by Chaldean monks.

In addition, the Marian icon was adorned with garlands of flowers brought to the altar at the Offertory by 20 young women in Albanian folk costumes.

Prayers were said in all the major European languages, as well as Tagalog, Russian and Swahili.

At the end of the Mass, the pope went to a side chapel that houses the "Pieta," Michelangelo's famous sculpture of Mary and her dead son.

Going behind the bulletproof glass erected to protect the statue, the pope recited the Angelus.

Afterward the pope appeared on the balcony of the basilica, where he encouraged participants in a French national pilgrimage to the Marian sanctuary of Lourdes to proclaim Jesus "Son of Mary and 'the light' of humanity."

In an evening ceremony August 14 at St. Mary Major, the pope presided over a Coptic "Prayer of Incense." The ceremony was celebrated by Coptic Patriarch Stephanos II Ghattas and four Coptic bishops.

The Copts are survivors of a once-flourishing Egyptian Catholic Church that was largely suppressed during the rise of Islam. Church tradition says it was founded by St. Mark the Evangelist.

The "Prayer of Incense" is part of the



THE ASSUMPTION OF MARY — This depiction of the assumption was painted by Italian artist Federico Barocci (1528-1612). The Assumption of Our Lady, August 15, is the oldest feast dedicated to Mary.

daily office of the Coptic Church.

During the ceremony, the pope said he wished that the "ancient and most precious prayer of the Eastern churches" be invoked during the Marian year.

On the eve of the Marian year's completion, he said, "I wanted the glorious voice of the Christian East to resound once again."

By participating in this prayer, the pope said he "wanted to be a sign of that marvelous exchange by which your spiritual riches, dear sons and daughters of the Christian East, benefit the universal Church."

The two-hour evening ceremony was celebrated in Arabic, Coptic and Greek.

With the pope were Cardinals D. Simon Lourdasamy, prefect of the Congregation for Eastern-rite Churches, and Luigi Dadaglio, president of the Marian year committee.

Other Eastern-rite ceremonies presided over by the pope during the Marian year included Greek-Byzantine vespers Sept. 7, 1987; the inauguration of the new Armenian-rite liturgy Nov. 21, and the recitation of the Akathist, an ancient Byzantine Marian hymn, March 25.

Texas parishioners report messages, healings from Mary

Lubbock, Texas (NC) — Three members of St. John Neumann Parish in Lubbock claim to be receiving messages from Mary each Monday evening as they pray the rosary.

Monsignor Joseph W. James, pastor of St. John Neumann's, expected his parishioners' claims to draw 20,000 people to join the August 15 recitation of the rosary and celebration of the Mass to close the Marian year.

Because the feast of Mary's assumption into heaven — the official end of the Marian year proclaimed by Pope John Paul II — fell on a Monday, the parish prepared for a large crowd at the 6:15 p.m. service.

The Texas Guard was on hand for crowd control, and hotel rooms in the town of 185,000 were at a premium, said Mary F. Rhoades, a parish volunteer.

Deacon Leroy Behnke, a pastoral associate at the parish, said the unusual events began during a weekend retreat at the parish in February. For three years, Monsignor James and six parishioners had gathered on Mondays at the church, which is built underground, to pray five decades of the rosary.

"During the weekend the people were in the chapel praying," Deacon Behnke said. "Some began to just experience the presence of the Blessed Mother and they just fell to their knees. Then they reported independently of one another that they could smell roses, and there weren't any roses."

Mary Constance, a member of the parish, told the pastor and other parishioners who prayed the rosary together on Monday evenings that she was awakened the night of March 1 hearing what she believed to be a message from Mary. She said she heard the voice again two weeks later, and she wrote down the message.

Two other regulars at the Monday rosary, Mike Slate, a retired Air Force officer, and Theresa Werner, a homemaker and mother, reported receiving messages a short time later.

"I can assure you that they are not crazy and I assure you that they are not liars," said

Deacon Behnke, who has known the three for five years.

Deacon Behnke added that messages so far are true to Scripture and traditional Church teaching. "It's kind of like Mom talking to the kids, saying, 'Come home. Straighten out your lives,'" he said.

The first message, received by Constance, said: "Know my children, my beloved, that I am asking of my son a new and overwhelming and life-changing spirit to come and set you free. Do not reject what I am invoking on you ... My son is ready and waiting for your prayers and your heart."

All of the messages have been compiled because "the Blessed Mother told us to print 50,000 copies and give them out free on the feast of the Assumption," August 15, Monsignor James said.

Rhoades said the messages come during the recitation of the joyful mysteries of the rosary and the three parishioners read the messages after recitation of the glorious mysteries.

The pastor said that in the spring, Mary told the messengers that the service should begin with a Mass and that worshippers should pray the entire 15 decades of the rosary, including joyful, sorrowful and glorious mysteries which are based on events in the lives of Jesus and Mary.

"Since the Blessed Mother started showing up, the numbers (attending) have grown astronomically," Monsignor James said. By May the services were attracting 80 people each week, and after the events received media coverage in July, more than 1,500 people have attended. Video screens and a public address system have been set up on the patio of the church which seats 850.

Since Mary reportedly began speaking to the three parishioners, Monsignor James also reported that "there have been spectacular physical and spiritual healings."

"One guy had a triple (coronary) bypass a year ago and it got clogged up again," the Monsignor told National Catholic News Service in Washington during a telephone interview.

The man came to the Monday evening service and asked the "messengers" to pray for him, Monsignor James said. When he got to the hospital for surgery the next day, the doctors could find nothing wrong, and "they told him to go home."

The events began after Monsignor James returned from a three-month study sabbatical, which included two trips to Medjugorje, Yugoslavia, the site of alleged Marian apparitions since 1981.

At Medjugorje in November, 1987, he said, "I fasted on bread and water for 10 days and was completely healed of my hypoglycemia." He spent another month there just before returning to Lubbock in January.

Part of his second trip, Monsignor James said, was spent with parishioners on a pilgrimage. The three Lubbock messengers were not with the group and have never been to the Yugoslavian village.

Although Monsignor James doesn't receive messages "the way they do," he claims to have an "inner sense" that the messages are accurate and that Mary has been influencing preparations for the August 15 services closing the Marian year proclaimed by Pope John Paul II.

One of the June 27 messages said: "My dear children, the celebration of my assumption into heaven is approaching quickly. My children, I give you a special invitation to be here; and I ask you to give an invitation to others to join you. For if you come in faith,

if you come with a pure heart and pure soul, if you come with love, my children, I will bless you.

"I will give you many blessings and graces that day," the message continued. "I want you all to be whole, my children."

Bishop Michael J. Sheehan of Lubbock issued a statement July 25 on the alleged messages. He said he takes "a cautious attitude about the rosary messages" and "I neither encourage people to participate in the events nor do I discourage them."

His statement said the Church tradition "is never to presume supernatural causes for things that can have natural explanations."

The Church is always cautious in judging such events, he said. "The messages and the events of the past few months will be subjected to careful study and prayer before a final evaluation is made."

Bishop Sheehan also said that in an age of materialism and religious indifference, "many people seek special signs from God."

"God can work in extraordinary ways, but the usual way God works is through normal everyday events," the bishop wrote. "The ordinary day-to-day love God has for us and his nurturing of us in the Eucharist is far more dramatic than extraordinary signs or miracles."

Contributing to this story were Joe Michael Feist in Dallas, Martha Brinkmann in San Antonio and Cindy Wooden in Washington.

Book offers USCC reviews of 20 years of films on video

New York (NC) — "The Family Guide to Movies and Video" has been compiled by reviewers of the U.S. Catholic Conference, and provides brief reviews and ratings on thousands of contemporary films on television and videocassette.

The 331-page book contains "descriptions and evaluations of virtually all motion pictures in national release to American theaters" between 1966 and 1987, according to USCC staff member and media reviewer

Henry Herx. Several classic older films are also included.

The book was edited by Herx and former USCC staff member Tony Zaza. It provides both USCC film classifications and Motion Picture Association of America ratings.

Published by Crossroad, the book costs \$24.95 in hardcover and \$12.95 in paperback. It may be obtained by writing: Crossroad, 370 Lexington Ave., New York, N.Y. 10017.