

Marian Devotion in Newfoundland

by
Rev. P. J. KENNEDY

The Island of Newfoundland, situated off the Eastern shores of Canada, maintained an autonomous Government as a British colony from its discovery by John Cabot, June 24, 1497, until it entered the Canadian Confederation as the tenth Province, March 31, 1949. The early English explorers were of the Catholic Faith. The prolific codfishery on the famous submarine Banks of Newfoundland brought navigators of many European nations to the Island and vestiges of their Catholic beliefs and religious customs are still found around the coasts of Newfoundland. The late Archbishop Michael Francis Howley, first Archbishop of St. John's, Nfld. (1904-1914) wrote many articles in the *Newfoundland Quarterly* on "Newfoundland Name Lore." Referring to the Bay of Conception or Conception Bay situated on the Eastern coast of Newfoundland, he writes:

This beautiful name was no doubt given by Cortereal, who followed Cabot in 1500, and claimed the newly discovered land for the crown of Portugal. The name is found on the earliest maps extant, as for instance that of Majello, 1527; Homem's map, 1558; Mason's, 1625; Jacobsez's, 1621, etc., etc. It alludes to the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. – Not defined until 1854 the doctrine was, however, always held as a pious belief by Catholics from time immemorial, and the early navigators and explorers had a great devotion to this Mystery.

Conception Bay in Newfoundland, named by the Portugese Gaspar de Cortereal around 1500 is an existing link with the great Portugese devotion to the Immaculate Virgin who is believed to have gained their independence for them on 14th of August, 1385. It was in the vicinity of that battlefield that the revelations of Fatima occurred in 1917. There is another large Bay on the Northern coast of Newfoundland called Notre Dame Bay containing an island designated on old maps as Notre Dame Island. One of the Southern bays is called St. Mary's Bay. All of these names testify to the devotion of the earliest explorers to the Blessed Mother of God and their desire to consecrate to her the new found lands of America.

FIRST ENGLISH CATHOLIC COLONY

The Easternmost section of Newfoundland is almost separated from the main body of the Island by the indentation of deep saltwater bays and is designated as the Avalon peninsula. At the little settlement of Ferryland in this

peninsula Sir George Calvert, afterwards Lord Baltimore, founded in 1622 the first English speaking colony where the exercise of the Catholic religion was openly practised in the new American continent. For the first time in the English speaking American world the Holy Mass was offered continuously at Ferryland, Newfoundland, just after the 23rd of July 1627 when Lord Baltimore arrived at Ferryland with two Seminary priests (probably of Douai) – Fathers Anthony Smith and Longville. Another priest, named Hackett came with Baltimore later in the same year in place of Father Longville who had returned with Baltimore to England. The name “Avalon” given to this section of Newfoundland by Calvert was the ancient name of Glastonbury, cradle of Catholicity in Western England before the day of St. Augustine, and the new colony was in the mind of the colonizer intended to be the first home of new religious Catholic freedom in the New World. Avalon has connection with Marian devotion because it was on the Island of Avalon (later called Glastonbury) in Western England that devotion to Mary was born in Britain. There is a tradition that St. Joseph of Arimathea in 63 A.D. came to Britain, sent by the Apostle St. Philip, introduced Christianity and erected at Avalon the first Christian church in honour of the Blessed Virgin Mary. At Avalon in Britain centred the legendary exploits of King Arthur and his Knights. The poet Tennyson in his “Idylls of the King” dramatizes in vivid form the adventures of the Knights as they search for the Holy Grail, the Chalice of the Last Supper which, brought to England by St. Joseph of Arimathea, had miraculously disappeared from that land because of infidelity. Lord Baltimore fleeing from the religious persecution of England to found a new Christian and Catholic colony in the Newfoundland Island of the New World remembered the story of the beginning of Christianity in Avalon in England. He called the new Newfoundland colony by the old name of Avalon because here he established freedom for the Catholic religion, unhindered Eucharistic worship and devotion to Our Lady. Christ and Mary were in Avalon given a new birth in this first Catholic English colony of the whole new Western hemisphere. Although no explicit mention of Marian devotion is made in the records of the Avalon colony, now called Ferryland, of Newfoundland, we may be sure that our Blessed Lady was enthroned in her rightful place of honour in this first centre of English Catholicity in the whole American world. Because of crop failures and trying climatic conditions and invasion by France the Avalon colony was abandoned by Baltimore and thence he went south to found in 1633 the colony of Maryland in the land that has become the United States of America. It is interesting to note that the first Catholic Hospital of Newfoundland, St. Clare’s Mercy Hospital of St. John’s, opened in 1927, by the religious Sisters of Mercy, was staffed by Sisters who were trained in Mercy Hospital, Baltimore, thus renewing a link of Marian Charity and Faith with the two colonies of Lord Baltimore. The coat of arms and the motto of the Calvert family are still displayed in the Ferryland church of Newfoundland: “*Fatti Maschi-Parole Femine*”: “Words for women – Deeds for men,” a fitting maxim for the rugged Atlantic fishermen of the rockbound Ferryland coast.

ASSUMPTIONISTS HELP NEWFOUNDLAND FISHERMEN

The dauntless fishermen who brave the mountainous billows of the North Atlantic “Banks of Newfoundland” have another more modern point of association with devotion to the Blessed Virgin. The Augustinian Fathers of the Assumption or Assumptionists were founded at the College of the Assumption, Nîmes, France about 1843. Their achievements have been prodigious. They have conducted seminaries, promoted the great Catholic papers of France, *La Croix*, and *Le Pèlerin* with as high a circulation as 5,000,000 weekly, maintained the great publishing venture *La Bonne Presse*, and pioneered in the Oriental Rite Missions of the Balkans and Turkey, and even holding the fort in red Moscow of today. The European fishermen who sail the Banks have found in the Assumptionists their best and most self-sacrificing friends. As many as 12,000 or 15,000 every year leave the coasts of France, Belgium, and other European countries to go to the Banks of Newfoundland for codfish. More than fifty years ago the Protestants of these countries began to maintain a flotilla of hospital ships, with which they went to the help of these fishermen. Whilst ministering to their material needs there was danger that the Catholic Faith might be impugned. The Assumptionists here found a field for their activity and zeal. They organized the most prominent Catholic sailors into a committee and enabled them to equip two Catholic hospital ships which might give succour to unfortunate fishermen in time of distress. The vessels were twice wrecked, but were replaced and bearing their Assumptionist chaplains, sailor priests, under the bright Star of the Assumption, they have again made the love and help of Mary, the Star of the Sea, shine triumphantly over the floes and billows of the tumultuous Northern ocean.

OUR LADY OF THE ANGELS AT PLACENTIA

The great Marian zeal of other French missionaries was also extended to the Island of Newfoundland in another direction in earlier days. During the French-English conflicts for possession of Canada, Newfoundland was alternately under English or French dominion. The French founded settlements on its coast, notably at Placentia, on the South coast of the Island. Here in 1689 a Franciscan convent was founded from Notre Dame des Anges in Quebec by Bishop St. Vallier. It was a centre of Catholicity and Marian devotion until in 1713 when by the Treaty of Utrecht the whole Island, with the exception of the smaller Islands of St. Pierre and Miquelon, was ceded to Great Britain. At the latter two French Islands the Fathers of the Holy Ghost (allied with the Fathers of the Immaculate Heart of Mary) continue their apostolic labour.

TWO IMPOSING MARIAN MEMORIALS

Among the many ecclesiastical memorials of Marian Devotion in Newfoundland, two are outstanding, viz. the Cathedrals of St. John's and

Harbour Grace. Both have the Immaculate Virgin as their Patroness. There are two suffragan dioceses that of Harbour Grace and St. George's with the Archdiocese of St. John's in the Island of Newfoundland. The Cathedral of St. John's was erected by the Franciscan Bishop Fleming and was consecrated in 1855 by Bishop Mullock, O.S.F. The cornerstone of St. John's Cathedral records that it was erected in honour of the Immaculate Virgin, of St. John the Baptist and St. Francis of Assisi. As the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception was defined on December 8, 1854, it seems that the Cathedral of St. John's has the distinction of being one of the first Cathedral churches to be dedicated to the Immaculate Virgin after the definition. In the three days following the Consecration, September 9, 1854, a Pontifical Triduum in honour of the newly defined Dogma of the Immaculate Conception inaugurated the services in the vast edifice; on these occasions the Archbishop of New York, the Bishops of Arichat, of New Brunswick and of Toronto pontificated and preached.

The Cathedral of Harbour Grace is situated on the shores of Conception Bay and fittingly the sole titular of the Diocese of Harbour Grace and of the Cathedral is the Immaculate Conception. The first Cathedral was erected shortly after that of St. John's.

A NEW MARIAN SHRINE

Another important memorial of Our Lady came into being in the Diocese of Harbour Grace in the year 1953. Through economic circumstances, the growth of the pulp and paper industry and increase of population the town of Grand Falls in the centre of the Island of Newfoundland has become the most important centre of the Diocese of Harbour Grace. The diocesan authorities of Harbour Grace through the Most Rev. John Michael O'Neill, D.D., Bishop of Harbour Grace, with the concurrence of the Most Rev. Archbishop Antoniutti, then Apostolic Delegate to Canada, decided to request the Holy See that the parish church of Notre Dame of Grand Falls, erected by the devoted labour of the late Pastor Right Rev. Monsignor William Finn, should be constituted as the Cathedral of the Diocese of Harbour Grace. The Holy See complied with this desire by declaring that whilst Harbour Grace would retain the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, the church at Grand Falls would become a co-Cathedral under the title of Notre Dame. The name of Notre Dame co-Cathedral is not only appropriate as retaining the parochial title but Grand Falls is located in the vicinity of the Bay of Notre Dame, the name given to the largest and greatest inland Atlantic water body by the discoverers of Newfoundland four centuries ago.

The imposing and historic ceremony of the erection of the new co-Cathedral of Notre Dame of the Diocese of Harbour Grace took place on the Feast of the Assumption, August 15, 1953. The Most Reverend J. M. O'Neill, D.D., Bishop of Harbour Grace, presided at the ceremony. The decree of erection was executed by His Grace the Most Rev. Patrick James Skinner, C.J.M., Archbishop of St. John's and Metropolitan of the ecclesiastical Province

of Newfoundland, who had received delegation from the Sacred Consistorial Congregation through the Apostolic Delegate. The preacher on the occasion was the Most Rev. Michael O'Reilly, Bishop of St. George's, the Western Diocese of the Island of Newfoundland. The Bishop of Harbour Grace has announced that in the autumn of 1954, an Island-wide pilgrimage will be organized to the new co-Cathedral of Notre Dame, in commemoration of the erection of this new Shrine of devotion to Our Lady and in observance of the Marian year of 1954 proclaimed in honour of the centenary of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception.

MARIAN CONGREGATIONS IN NEWFOUNDLAND

Within the confines of the three Dioceses of Newfoundland five religious Congregations labour with the diocesan clergy for the upbuilding of the Church. First to come to the Island of Newfoundland was the Congregation of the Presentation Sisters, founded in Cork, Ireland, in 1775 by Honoria Nagle ("Nano Nagle"), called in religion Mother Mary of St. John of God. The Presentation Sisters came to Newfoundland in 1833; they maintain two large schools in St. John's and about twenty-one other convents and schools in the Island. These Presentation communities form an amalgamated union under a Mother-General resident at the Mother House, Cathedral Square, St. John's, Newfoundland.

The same Franciscan Bishop Michael Anthony Fleming, O.S.F., who introduced the Presentation Nuns also procured the Sisters of Mercy for the Newfoundland mission. The first band of Sisters arrived in St. John's, June 10th, Feast of the Sacred Heart, of the year 1842. They are of the Congregation of Sisters of Mercy founded by Mother Catherine McCaulay, in Dublin, Feast of Our Lady of Mercy, September 24, 1827. They have two colleges for girls in St. John's and a total of fifteen other scholastic establishments in the Island of Newfoundland. At St. Michael's Convent and Belvedere Orphanage in St. John's the Sisters of Mercy care for two hundred female children from all sections and Dioceses of Newfoundland. The Sisters of Mercy are also constituted in an amalgamated union with a Mother-General residing at the Mother House, Military Road, St. John's.

Outstanding and most modern of the institutions of the Sisters of Mercy is Newfoundland's only Catholic Hospital, St. Clare's Mercy Hospital of LeMarchant Road, St. John's. This modern hospital, equipped with all scientific facilities for the treatment of the sick, was founded by the late Archbishop Most Rev. Edward Patrick Roche, who after the long episcopate of thirty-five years died on 23rd September, 1950. St. Clare's was first opened as a Girls' Home by Archbishop Howley in 1912. Sister M. Clare of the Presentation Order had first conceived this institution. Money was sorely needed and a Mr. Funchion sent from Klondyke a Rosary of "golden nuggets" at an unexpected moment. The Supreme Council of the Knights of Columbus purchased the Rosary as a Golden Jubilee gift for Cardinal Gibbons of Baltimore, and the Home was founded, under direction of the Sisters of Mercy. It was converted into a nursing

institution in 1922 by Archbishop Roche and the new St. Clare's Mercy Hospital was opened in 1939. Archbishop Roche also presented his Golden Jubilee offering from the Archdiocese, \$80,000 for the new addition to St. Clare's. Abounding success blesses the great work of Mercy. It began with sacrifice for one of the first Mercy Sisters, Sister Mary Joseph Nugent, died in St. John's of plague whilst nursing the fever-stricken Irish immigrants of 1848.

CHRISTIAN BROTHERS HAVE MARY PATRONESS

All Catholic schools for boys in the city of St. John's are conducted by the Christian Brothers of Ireland. This Congregation was founded by Ignatius Rice, merchant of Waterford on the model and according to the constitution granted by Rome to the Presentation Sisters mentioned above. The Brothers took first vows in the chapel of the Presentation Nuns, Waterford, on the 15th of August, Feast of the Assumption, 1808. Subsequently the constitutions were brought into some uniformity with the French Institute of Christian Brothers and the Roman Brief of Confirmation was issued on September 5, 1820. The Irish Christian Brothers came to St. John's at the invitation of Bishop Thomas Joseph Power in 1875. They conduct St Bonaventure's College, St. Patrick's and Holy Cross Schools and Mount Cashel Orphanage. The Patronal Feast of the Congregation is that of Our Lady of Perpetual Help and liturgical authorization of the Feast of June 27th has been granted for every house of the Institute.

REDEMPTORIST FATHERS AND OUR LADY

Latest of the religious Congregations of men to be established in the Island of Newfoundland is that of the Redemptorist Fathers of the Canadian English Province with headquarters at Toronto. The zealous missionaries of St. Alphonsus foundation opened their first Newfoundland institution in the Westernmost diocese of the Island, that of St. George's, on taking pastoral care of the industrial parish of Corner Brook in 1930. When in 1946 His Excellency Bishop O'Reilly of St. George's transferred his Cathedral site to Corner Brook the Redemptorist foundation was moved to St. George's. In 1953 this house was closed. In 1947 the Redemptorist Fathers opened another house at Whitbourne in the Diocese of Harbour Grace on the invitation of His Excellency Most Rev. J. M. O'Neill, D.D. The Redemptorist Fathers are zealously propagating Marian devotion in the course of the missions which they conduct in Newfoundland and their favourite devotion to Our Mother of Perpetual Help has been instituted in their own foundations and in other centres of the Island.

A MARIAN ARCHBISHOP

The Archbishop of St. John's, Metropolitan of Newfoundland, Most Reverend Patrick James Skinner, C.J.M., D.D., nominated in January 1951 is a member of the Congregation of the Holy Hearts of Jesus and Mary, known as the

Eudist Fathers from their founder, St. John Eudes. "Doctor, Father and Apostle of the devotion to the Holy Hearts of Jesus and Mary." At the time of his appointment in 1950 the new Archbishop was Rector of the Holy Heart Seminary of Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada. In collaboration with another Eudist Father, Rev. Wilfred Myatt, C.J.M., the Archbishop as Rector was editor of the new English edition of the works of St. John Eudes which are in consequence finding a steadily increasing circulation in English-speaking centres of America and Europe. Archbishop Skinner is the first Eudist Archbishop of North America. The crest of the Holy Hearts of Jesus and Mary are emblazoned on the Mitre, Crozier and episcopal insignia of the new Metropolitan.

NEW MARIAN PROJECTS

The Archbishop has inaugurated a new Social Welfare Plan which is now in course of organization. It is proposed to have an institution for delinquent girls established in St. John's probably under the direction of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd who have like the Eudist Fathers the Most Pure Heart of Mary as the principal patron of their Institute. The Little Sisters of the Poor have paid preliminary visits to St. John's with the intention of surveying the possibility of opening a Home for the aged in the city. Should the Little Sisters be unable to make this foundation, the Home for the Aged may be established by the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy of St. John's. The erection of a new parish in the environs of St. John's may take the form of another Marian project. In the large and populous parish of Bell Island, Conception Bay, Newfoundland, centre of the iron ore mining industry an imposing new church dedicated to the Immaculate Conception is being now erected by the Pastor, Right Rev. Monsignor G. F. Bartlett. Its lights will long shine out over the broad stretches of the North Atlantic as a lasting testimony of devotion to the Immaculate Mother of God. In the city of St. John's also a new church is being erected in honour of St. Joseph, Spouse of Our Lady, by the Pastor of St. Joseph's Parish, Right Rev. Monsignor E. P. Maher. Several large schools and extensions to existing institutions have been erected recently. All will be centres of Catholic and Marian instruction for new generations of the faithful.

Already in existence is the Hostel for working girls conducted by the well-known Sisters of Service who took up residence in St. John's in their first foundation in September 1953. Their labours will also extend to visiting the sick and poor in homes and under their fostering care the Marian ideals of womanhood and the Charity of the Immaculate Heart of Mary will be fostered in new circles in Newfoundland.

The Marian Year of 1954 dedicated to the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady is being observed with great devotion all over the ecclesiastical Province of Newfoundland. In the Archdiocese of St. John's impressive devotions for three days marked the opening of the Marian Year in December 1953. Marian projects are being prepared in all the schools and Colleges and impressive devotions will signalize the great Feasts of Our Lady throughout the year. The

month of May will be especially devoted to promoting the devotion among the children and October to a Crusade in renewing the devotion to the Family Rosary. Marian Pastoral Letters of His Grace Archbishop Skinner and the Bishops of Newfoundland explained the dogma of the Immaculate Conception and outlined a Marian program.

MARIAN SOCIETIES

The Sodalities of the Blessed Virgin Mary are flourishing in all sections of Newfoundland and World Sodality Day is observed each year. Many other societies exist for the promotion of the Marian Devotion. The Confraternity of the Rosary is growing in numbers; that of the Cathedral of St. John's numbers more than 10,000 members and continues to increase. A large picture of Our Lady of Guadalupe, "Queen of all the Americas" was received in St. John's from the famous Shrine of Guadalupe, Mexico, in 1949. With the permission of Archbishop Roche the image was installed in the Cathedral of St. John, May 7th of that year and the gentle Madonna of the South who brought nine millions of the Mexican Indian population into the faith of Christ in the short space of ten years deigns now to bow down with gentle, maternal care over her poor children of a far-off, colder, northern land. In 1949 also the Archconfraternity of Our Lady of Montligeon for Forsaken Souls in Purgatory was introduced into Newfoundland and at the Cathedral of St. John's more than 5,000 members have been received. This Archconfraternity of Our Lady numbers more than 20,000,000 in all countries of the world. The small fees are used for the procuring of Masses for the Holy Souls in the fruits of which the living contributors have a participation. The Holy Father, Pope Pius XII continues to be "Protector" of this Archconfraternity and he has twice sent a special blessing for the extension of the work in the Archdiocese of St. John's.

FAMILY ROSARY CRUSADE

Newfoundland witnessed in August and September of 1952 what was probably the first great organized crusade of Catholic Action in its history when by direction of the Archbishop and Bishops of the three dioceses the Family Rosary Crusade under the direction of Father Patrick Peyton, C.S.C., was inaugurated. The Crusade of which the full story has been published in special editions of the *Monitor* was an Island-wide triumphant success for Marian devotion. Nearly 100% of the Catholic families of Newfoundland have pledged the daily Family Rosary, thus bringing the loving, powerful influence of God's holy Mother into every hearth and home.

PRECIOUS RELIC OF OUR LADY

In the Annals of Our Lady of the Cape, issue of January of 1954, there appeared an interesting article by Lillian Edmondson giving information of the

discovery in a town in Syria in 1953 of an ancient relic of Our Blessed Lady. An ancient document unearthed by the custodians of the church of Horns, ancient Emessa, in April 1953 stated that the famous relic of the Blessed Virgin's Sash or Girdle had been placed in a reliquary and secreted under the main altar of the church during an invasion of the city by the Moslem Arabs in the seventh century. Investigations were carefully made under the skilled guidance of archeologists and to the joy of the searchers the relic was discovered. Concealed beneath the marble slabs of the altar, exactly as the document had stated, lay the glass reliquary box containing the embroidered linen Sash, dark with age, carefully folded and lying on a linen pad. The glass reliquary disintegrated on exposure to the air but the precious relic of the Sash remained intact. It is being carefully guarded under the custody of the Patriarch of Syria.

It is not unlikely that from this Sash or Girdle of Our Lady have come other relics of Our Lady found in a few localities in the world. One of the negative presumptive proofs of the bodily ASSUMPTION of Our Lady is that not even the most ancient documents of Christian tradition ever make any mention of the corporal remains of Our Lady having been ever found on earth. First-class relics of the Blessed Mother, such as portions of bone, flesh, hair, etc., would be impossible to obtain but secondary relics such as garments, utensils, jewels, etc. are known to exist.

At present in the city of St. John's, Newfoundland, in the residence of His Grace Archbishop Skinner, C.J.M., there is an authenticated relic of the Sash or Girdle of Our Blessed Lady, the property of Rev. C. S. Eagan, member of the Archbishop's household. This relic was obtained by the Presentation Sisters of Newfoundland from a convent of the Presentation Sisters in Kilkenny, Ireland, and came to Newfoundland many years ago. Its source was from Rome and the accompanying document of authentication is the official guarantee of its reliability. In place of the old certificate of authenticity a new document was copied and issued of the date 27, January 1952, in which permission is granted for the exposing of this precious relic of Our Lady to the veneration of the faithful. The reliquary in St. John's enclosing the fragment of the Cincture or Girdle of Our Lady also contains three other particles of sacred relics. Minute fragments of the bone of St. Didacus, a Franciscan Saint renowned for sanctity and miracles in Rome and Spain about 1480, and of St. Roch who died in 1327 in France and is invoked as the protector against contagious disease, are placed in this Marian relic whilst it also contains a small particle of the Cloak or Mantle of St. Joseph, Spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary, her guardian and protector in the sorrows and vicissitudes of life.