

Tridentine Community News

June 23, 2024 – Fifth Sunday After Pentecost

Today's column has been guest written by long-time member and altar server of Windsor's St. Benedict Tridentine Community, Matthew Charbonneau.

Pilgrimage in Quebec: Marie Reine du Canada

Embarking on a pilgrimage is an age-old Christian custom which continues in our own time. The Christendom of yesteryear had numerous well-trod routes, and many readers are no doubt familiar with the Old World staples El Camino de Santiago and Paris-Chartres. While the New World lacks such famous routes walked by successive generations of pilgrims, there is an increasing number of pilgrimage opportunities in North America which offer the TLM, several of which were highlighted in the Sept. 24, 2023 edition of this column. This guest writer and my then-fiancée had the privilege of joining yet another such pilgrimage in the Summer of 2019.

Marie Reine du Canada is a pilgrimage in Quebec which takes place every Labour Day weekend. It is organised by lay volunteers from the FSSP's St. Clement Parish in Ottawa and chaplained by FSSP priests. Mass is offered each day in one of the churches en route, and confession is available via pilgrim-priests. In three days pilgrims cover 100 kms, akin to the Paris-Chartres pilgrimage, which is an inspiration and model for *Marie Reine*.

On Friday night pilgrims gather at St. Joseph Church in Lanoraie, a town northeast of Montreal, where there is a briefing, tents are pitched, pilgrims join their respective chapters (walking groups), and vehicles are shuttled to the end. My own experience at this juncture was a tad stressful. We arrived after dark, just in time for me to take our car with the last group driving to the end. The Quebecois driver I followed had a lead foot and I had to drive in a manner I usually try to avoid, especially at night on unfamiliar roads. Providentially, when I and my white knuckles boarded the shuttle bus back to St. Joseph, unbeknownst to me, I sat next to an old friend from St. Benedict who'd moved to Ottawa years earlier.



Bearing an array of crosses, statues, flags and banners, pilgrims stepping off from St Joseph de Lanoraie present a visually striking image. Snaking

through picturesque rural landscapes and idyllic small towns, at times pilgrims are merely steps from the shore of the mighty St. Lawrence River, the gateway to New France navigated by some of the earliest Catholic missionaries to this land. A stone marker where Sts. Isaac Jogues and René Goupil, two of the North American Martyrs, were captured before their martyrdom is one of the memorable landmarks along the journey.

The three days of walking follow a similar pattern. Early in the morning with the rising sun, pilgrims, asleep in their tents, are slowly awoken by an inspiring reveille; the music of *Conan the Barbarian*, slowly increasing in volume and intensity. Perhaps not

strictly necessary on the first day, the motivating music certainly helped on the subsequent mornings when I woke up rather sore and stiff from the marching of the day 'ere. Camp is broken, and the tents etc. are transported by the St. Joseph Chapter, a team of volunteers who handle the background logistics. Rain or shine, walking starts early. The days are punctuated by prayer and song in Latin, French, and English. Folk songs well suited to ambling are included in the pilgrim's song book and prove to be a light-hearted morale boost. The meals are appropriately spartan; soup, bread, PB & J are the fare, with a modest sip of red wine at night to soothe sore muscles. When the day's leg is complete tents are pitched, compline is chanted communally, and pilgrims settle down for much needed rest.



The pilgrimage concludes with Solemn High Mass in the small yet ornate chapel at the shrine of Notre Dame du Cap in Trois Rivières, Quebec, the site of several miracles and the home of the only Madonna in Canada crowned at the direction of the pope. From there pilgrims return home. Thankfully for our small group from Windsor-Detroit, the friend whom I met on the shuttle bus offered to let us stay at his place in Ottawa for a night of rest and homemade soup before the long drive back home.

Twenty years ago a group of seven zealous volunteers tested a potential pilgrimage route to determine the feasibility of *Marie Reine*. Now, *Marie Reine* attracts scores of pilgrims annually to undertake a physically arduous journey, in addition to many volunteers working behind the scenes. Considering *Marie Reine* is a parish-level initiative, its growth and longevity is no small accomplishment.

In these times when we are occasionally reminded of, and perhaps discouraged by, Catholic events and initiatives of yesteryear which seem to dwarf what our Church can muster these days, it is worthwhile to appreciate that there are new and growing initiatives in the Church. *Maire Reine* is a prime example; it is not a small remnant of a formerly glorious past, the black and white photographs of which make one marvel as well as ponder 'what have we lost?' Rather, it's been built from the ground up in the 21st century, while drawing inspiration from and rooted in an ancient practice. For two decades *Marie Reine* has been both a strong public witness to our Catholic faith and an opportunity for hundreds of pilgrims to strengthen their convictions. Walking the *Marie Reine* pilgrimage was a spiritually fortifying experience, and I'm thankful to have been able to do it. To the organisers, volunteers, and pilgrims of *Marie Reine*, ad multos annos.

Marie Reine du Canada, priez pour nous.

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