

# St. Anthony of Padua R.C. Church

160 Court Street, Buffalo, New York 14202

**TRADITIONALLY SPEAKING** by S. Casarotto 4/19/09

## *Our Lady of LaLeche*

Although many centuries old, this devotion is little known in the USA. In fact, Puritanical America is ill at ease even to mention Our Lady of LaLeche (literally, Our Lady of the Milk or Madonna del Latte, in Italian). Yet, what is more natural than a mother nursing her baby? Milk is the first and necessary food of the baby, also providing also antibodies for his immune system.

Isaiah 66, 11 speaks about the heavenly Jerusalem, symbol of the Church, as a healthy mother breastfeeding and caring for all her children. The Church uses this image in the liturgy of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Easter: "Like new born babies seek the spiritual milk..." (1 Pt. 2, 2).

According to one tradition, the devotion to Our Lady of LaLeche began around A.D. 4 in a Bethlehem cave, where the Holy Family reportedly took refuge during Herod's slaughter of the innocents before fleeing to Egypt. It's said that as Mary was nursing the Christ child, drops of her milk spilled to the ground and turned the dark stones to milky white.

Known today as the Milk Grotto and tended by the Franciscans, Christian and Muslim women alike - like generations of maternal ancestors before them - flock to his cave, seeking Our Lady's intercession for infertility issues, problem pregnancies, and babies born with medical conditions or disabilities.

Let us remember that pious legends are not a sign of the credulity of simple or ignorant people. Rather, they are a proof that "to them is revealed the Kingdom of heaven" because they have the intuition of the faith.

Nobody knows exactly how the piety spread from the Holy Land to Europe. But it had obviously reached Spain before the early 1600s. Spanish settlers brought a statue of Our Lady of LaLeche to St. Augustine, FL and established the country's first Marian shrine on the very site where the first parish Mass was celebrated on Mary's birthday in 1565. The statue was highly venerated, as a symbol of Mary's maternal solicitude, by the Spaniards as well as Indian converts.

**BLESSED OILS** - Olive oil has always been a precious commodity. In ancient Greece, cutting down an olive tree was punishable with death. Olive oil was used for centuries not only as a condiment, but also to preserve meat and fish. It was a symbol of prosperity and it was also used for the anointing of kings and prophets. During the Chrism Mass of Holy Week, the Bishop blesses the oils for all the parishes in the diocese for the coming year. These oils are used in the administration of the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, Ordination of deacons, priests and bi-shops, and Anointing of the Sick.