



The Battle of New Orleans: The power of prayer

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Contributing writer

In 2015, New Orleans commemorated the 200th anniversary of the Battle of New Orleans. While much of the United States overlooked the significance of the battle and its place in history, the Archdiocese of New Orleans curated an exhibit highlighting the power of prayer and the protection of Our Lady of Prompt Succor.

While the men of New Orleans were armed to join the small number of American troops under Gen. Andrew Jackson to guard and protect the mouth of the Mississippi River, the Ursuline nuns, along with the apostolic administrator, Father Louis Guillaume DuBourg, and pious women and children prayed for victory.

Today, we highlight the relationship between the church and state during the months of December 1814 and January 1815.

Archival material from 1814

There are letters from men and women – Joseph O’Conway, a U.S. Naval surgeon; Gen. Jackson; Father DuBourg and the Ursulines – that enable us to tell the story from their experiences and in their words. They are part of the many who lived, worked, fought and prayed during the Battle of New Orleans.

This is their story.

O’Conway, born and baptized in New Orleans, was raised in Philadelphia but returned to New Orleans as a surgeon in the United States Navy. He wrote frequently to his father,

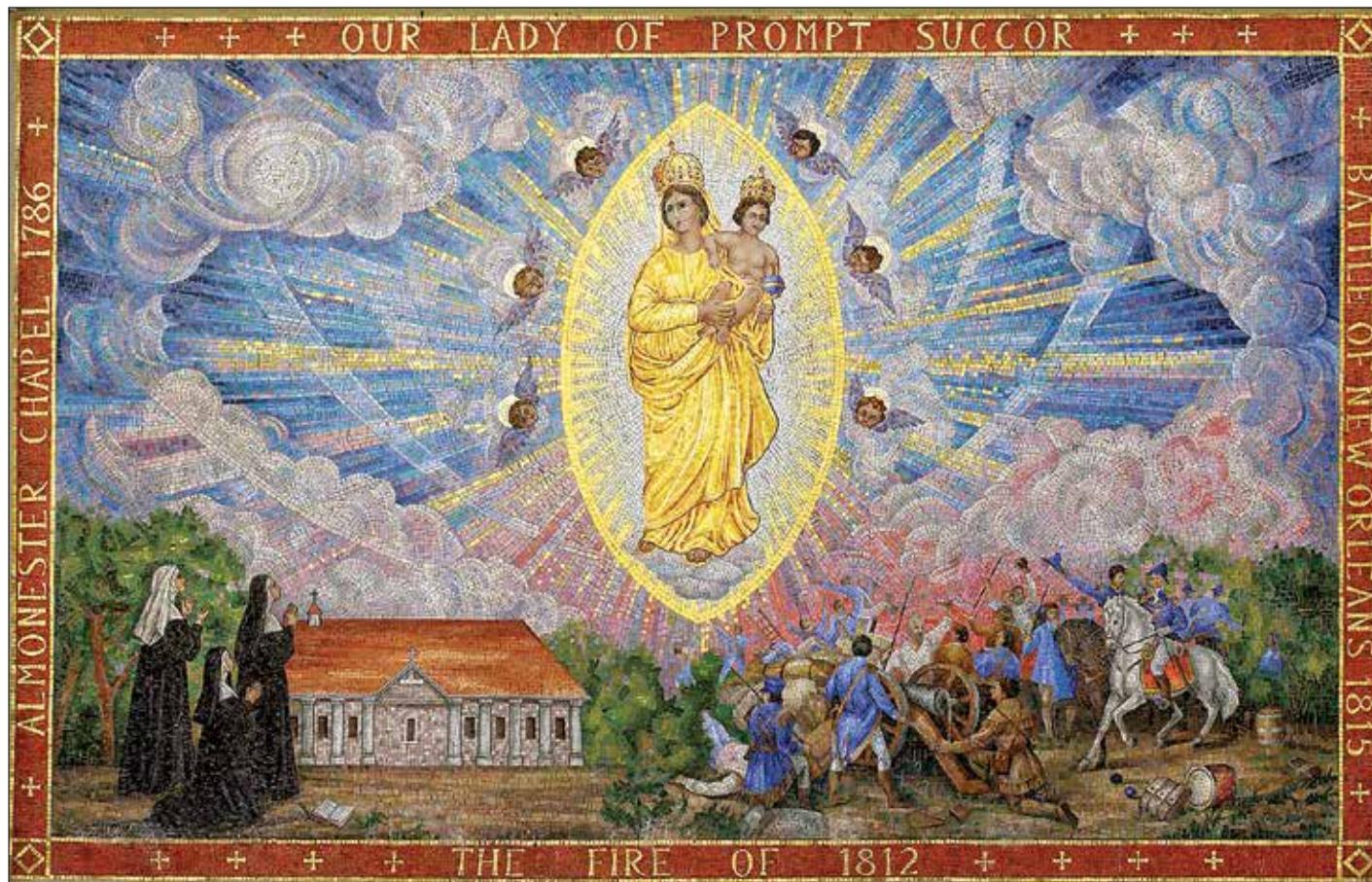


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A mural on the back wall of the Old Ursuline Convent depicts the Ursuline Sisters in prayer during the Battle of New Orleans. A stained-glass window in St. Mary Church on Chartres Street also bears the image of Gen. Andrew Jackson, honoring him in his successful efforts to repel the British attack in 1815.

describing the heroic efforts of the people and Gen. Jackson:

“My dear Father, “The British entered the lakes, on the 13th of December, took all our flotilla of five gunboats, after three had withstood forty odd of their barges, mounted with long sixes, for one hour and fifty minutes. Our brave tars did not surrender, till their guns could no longer be managed, from the number of the wounded and slain being so great...”

On Dec. 16, 1814, as panic spread throughout

the city, Gen. Jackson proclaimed martial law. Father DuBourg, apostolic administrator for the Diocese of Louisiana, responded by composing a mandate for public prayers. The mandate was read at both morning and evening services on Sunday, Dec. 18, 1814.

Gen. Jackson was so pleased by the mandate that he requested Adjutant Gen. Thomas L. Butler, aide-de-camp, to respond on his behalf, imploring Father DuBourg to have the mandate printed and circulated.

On Dec. 19, the three

days of prayer commenced. Four days later, the British were discovered on Villere plantation, just below New Orleans. This event was so noteworthy, Père Antoine de Sedella recorded it in the margins of the sacramental registers of St. Louis Cathedral.

As part of the religious community’s daily life, the Ursuline nuns recorded in their annals the historic events of the day. These annals are a concise form of historical representation, written chronologically, year by year. One of the

notable events began on page 138, under the title, “Attaque des Anglais.” The “Attack of the English” was a three-page entry that described the events surrounding the Battle of New Orleans.

In the Ursuline annals, the sisters recorded the following:

“The community together with all of the city was in grand consternation over the subject of the attack of the English and while all of the inhabitants went to the battlefield, all of the pious women

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