

# 'Our Lady of Prompt Succor' title dates from 1810

By Beth Donze  
Clarion Herald

Catholics in the Archdiocese of New Orleans make the request every Sunday at the end of Our Family Prayer: "Our Lady of Prompt Succor, hasten to help us."

This particular Marian title holds a special meaning at Ursuline Academy, whose founding community of sisters established the first all-girls' school in North America in 1727.

The Ursuline Sisters began referring to the Blessed Mother as "Our Lady of Prompt Succor" in 1810, in gratitude for her speedy – "prompt" – assistance.

## Sisters needed in N.O.

Here is the story.

While holding a small statue of the Blessed Mother, a group of French Ursuline sisters, led by Mother St. Michel Gensoul, prayed for Pope Pius VII's consent to join the community of Ursuline sisters in New Orleans, whose numbers were dwindling at that time.

It would take nothing less than a miracle to receive an affirmative response.

First of all, the pope was not recognized in France in the period following the



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**This statue of Our Lady of Prompt Succor, located high above the altar of the Votive Shrine of Our Lady of Prompt Succor in New Orleans, was commissioned by the Ursuline Sisters in gratitude for Mary's prayerful intercession.**

French Revolution and, as such, held little sway; also, Mother Gensoul was very much needed in her home country because of the popular school she operated in Montpellier, France.

While praying to Our Lady, Mother Gensoul promised that if she received a prompt and

favorable response from the pope, she and the Ursuline Sisters would have Mary honored under the title of "Our Lady of Prompt Succor."

Moreover, the sisters promised to commission a beautiful statue of the Blessed Mother in thanksgiving, portraying Mary as

the protective mother holding the baby Jesus.

Just one month after delivering their request to the pope, the sisters received their miracle: permission to sail to New Orleans.

## Most gracious advocate

In addition to getting the pope's prompt consent to send additional sisters to New Orleans in 1810, Our Lady of Prompt Succor's intercession is recognized as having assisted New Orleans at two other pivotal times in the city's history:

- In 1812, after the Ursuline Sisters asked for Our Lady of Prompt Succor's help in protecting the city from an approaching fire, the wind changed direction, sparing New Orleans.

- Our Lady of Prompt Succor's intercession was credited again in 1815, when the Ursuline Sisters prayed that the outnumbered American troops would be victorious against

the British in the Battle of New Orleans. They were.

## Jan. 8 Mass celebrated

In thanksgiving for this miraculous victory, the Ursuline Sisters and the archbishop of New Orleans honor Our Lady of Prompt Succor, the patroness of New Orleans and the state of Louisiana, with an annual Mass on the battle's victory date of Jan. 8. The Mass, which was requested by then-Gen. Andrew Jackson, has been celebrated without fail since 1815.

The Ursuline Sisters also carried out the other part of their promise – having a statue made in thanksgiving for the pope's consent to send sisters to New Orleans in 1810. That statue, which is housed inside Ursuline's National Votive Shrine of Our Lady of Prompt Succor, is covered in 24-carat gold leaf.

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## Dey all axed for you ... in Bethlehem



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The religious seeps into the secular – and vice-versa – in New Orleans more than it does in any other city in the United States. Illustrating this symbiotic relationship is the Louisiana-themed crèche above, created by artist Lorraine Gendron. The Nativity scene features a fisherman as St. Joseph, left, and Zulu, a Mardi Gras Indian and Rex as the Three Kings.

Archbishop Joseph E. Kurtz, D.D. and the clergy, religious and lay faithful of the Archdiocese of Louisville send congratulations and prayerful best wishes to the Archdiocese of New Orleans as it observes the City of New Orleans Tricentennial "River of Faith: 300 Years as a New Orleans Catholic Community."

