

Shine of Our Lady of the Snows Plans 80th Healing and Hope Novena

by Sydney Sinks, News Reporter
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BELLEVILLE - The National Shrine of Our Lady of the Snows is preparing for its 80th Annual Healing and Hope Novena happening July 28 through August 5. A lot of people agree that healing and hope are exactly what they're looking for right now.

“The shrine has an overarching sort of mission statement: It’s a place of healing and hope. Those are two things that people constantly need,” said Reverend Father Salvador Gonzalez, OMI. “While it is a Catholic Mass and it is a Catholic prayer, it’s open to

everyone. Everyone's welcome to come, especially if they're dealing with one of these issues that we are praying for that night."

Gonzalez, known affectionately as Father Sal to his congregation, explained that the novena is nine nights of prayer. Each night has an intention, and the prayers will be led by local preachers and accompanied by area choirs.

After the Mass, they honor a tradition from the first novena: an outdoor candlelight procession. Everyone who wants to join will light a candle and sing hymns. Gonzalez points out that this is similar to how people comfort one another during a tragedy, using candles to light the way through hardship.

"They always leave prayers, they leave candles, because light gives us hope," Gonzalez said. "It's very beautiful. It's filled with hope and light."

That has been the novena's intention from the very beginning. This year will mark the 80th anniversary of the novena and the shrine. During World War II, Father Paul Schulte moved to Belleville near St. Henry's Seminary, where he was immediately put under house arrest because he was German. But this didn't stop him from spreading his faith.

Schulte began the Novena to Our Lady of the Snows to raise awareness of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI), a congregation that was working in the Arctic Circle. Gonzalez said they are still the only presence of the Catholic Church in the Arctic Circle today.

Schulte helped set up a shrine in the seminary's chapel where people could come together for the novena. However, the gathering quickly outgrew the small space. The shrine expanded to accommodate it, eventually becoming the National Shrine of Our Lady of the Snows that we know today.

At the novena's peak in the 70s and 80s, the shrine saw up to 20,000 people throughout the week. They receive less travelers today, but streaming capabilities have made it possible for thousands of people to tune in every night from all over the world.

"It's a great opportunity to welcome pilgrims," Gonzalez said. "We have people following us from all over the U.S. and all over the world. So maybe our pilgrims aren't here physically, but we have a whole lot more pilgrims joining us through the internet."

Gonzalez hopes that people will join the novena and benefit from the prayers. They pray for a different group of people every day. July 28 begins with prayers "For the Salvation of Souls," and the following days will include prayers "For Those Who Struggle with

Hopelessness (Healing Anointing of the Sick),” “For Those Who Have Lost Their Faith,” “For Those Affected by Violence,” “For Healing of Physical Infirmities,” “For Those Called to Marriage/For Struggling Marriages,” “For Those Called to Priesthood /Religious Life,” “For Our Universal Vocation to Joy” and “In Gratitude for Mary’s Intercession for Our Needs.”

While the novena acknowledges several hardships, Gonzalez explained that it also expresses hope.

“Even though we acknowledge that we may be going through this, Christ is our hope,” Gonzalez said. “Christ is the one that we come to. Hence, the overarching theme of the novena this year is ‘Mary the Dawn, Christ the Perfect Day,’ meaning He’s always going to be the one who starts again. He’s always going to be the one that brings us this new day, our new hope, and with Him, every day is perfect. So it does include a lot of hope, healing and hope at the same time.”

Gonzalez reiterated that everyone is welcome to visit the shrine and join the novena. To learn more about the National Shrine of Our Lady of the Snows, click [here](#). More information about each night of the novena can be found [here](#).