

Ryszard Hajduk CSsR*

Faculty of Theology

Warmia and Mazury University in Olsztyn, Poland

OUR LADY OF APARECIDA – THE PATRON OF BRAZIL

Summary: The Shrine of Our Lady of Aparecida is located on the road between the two most important cities in south-eastern Brazil – São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro and is one of the largest of the Marian sanctuaries in the world. Every year, 12 million people come to this place to honour the Patron of Brazil. It presents a figure of the Black Madonna, which in October 1717, fishermen found in the Paraíba river. The dark colour of the Madonna's skin from Aparecida reminds their descendants of slaves imported to Brazil from Africa. The Brazilians make pilgrimages to their Mother to ask her for help and discover the power of God's love, which is reflected by the motherly love of Our Lady of Aparecida. Arriving at the sanctuary, the faithful find a sense of security, but also experience belonging to a living community of faith. From Mary – the first and perfect disciple of Jesus, they learn the authentic Christian life. In her presence, they strengthen their dignity as children of God and take an attitude of readiness to participate in the mission of transforming this world into the kingdom of God.

Keywords: evangelization, sanctuary, pilgrimage, Virgin Mary, popular piety.

The Marian sanctuary in Aparecida, entrusted to the custody of Redemptorist Missionaries in 1894, receives thousands of pilgrims daily. In this place the heart of Catholic Brazil beats and everything is prepared for the pilgrims who must be warmly welcomed to be able to receive the Gospel proclaimed to them.

The Basilica of Our Lady of Aparecida, the world's largest sanctuary dedicated to Mary, Mother of God, is located in the Paraíba river valley, on the route from Rio de Janeiro through Sao Paulo to Minas Gerais, between the two most important cities in south-eastern Brazil – São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. Through this valley, the Paraíba river flows, over which devotion was born connecting the whole country. Three popes visited this Brazilian national sanctuary: John Paul II in 1980; Benedict XVI in May 2007, when he inaugurated the fifth

* Address: Rev. prof. dr hab. Ryszard Hajduk; e-mail: ryszard.hajduk@uwm.edu.pl

General Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean Episcopate and Pope Francis on July 24, 2013 during the World Youth Day.

It is estimated that the Aparecida sanctuary is visited by about 12 million people every year, seeking a more dignified life, health and prosperity, and above all God's blessing, received through the intercession of Our Lady. Pilgrims are attracted by testimonies of supernatural visions and miracles. Often, pilgrimages to Aparecida are associated with the great effort and dedication through which the pilgrims show the veneration and filial love to Mary, who shows compassion and bends over the misery and needs of her children to help them achieve the fullness of human and spiritual development.

1. An unusual fishing, a figure of Madonna and a shrine in Aparecida

In October 1717, three fishermen – João Aloes, Domingos Garcia and Filipe Pedroso – boarded the boat to fish and deliver fish to the table of Count de Assumar, the governor of Sao Paulo.¹ Pulling the nets out to the water, they found in the river a statue of the Mother of God, which was then stored for six years in the home of one of them, Filipe Pedroso, who lived by the Sá flow. The fishermen first found the main body of the statue in it, and after releasing the net they found the head in the water. Continuing fishing, they fished out as much as never before. They were afraid that the boats would sink because of their multitude. Filipe Pedroso kept the statue for six years and then it was moved to Ponte Alta, where his family had their property. A few years later Filipe and the statue moved to Itaguaçu, where his son, Atanásio Pedroso, built an oratory in which people gathered for prayer.² Once, two wax candles suddenly went out. When someone wanted to light them again, flames appeared on them. It was the first miracle associated with the statue of Our Lady. Sometimes people repeatedly witnessed earthquakes, so that it seemed that the figure standing on the altar would fall over, but that did not happen. People saw such phenomena as flickering lights or voices coming out of the case in which the figure was stored.

The news of the extraordinary statue of Our Lady spread and the number of the faithful who wanted to pray to her increased. In connection with this, a chapel was built which people came to, hoping to witness miracles. Documents show that there were really unusual things happening in front of people.

¹ Cf. J.J. Brustoloni, *História de Nossa Senhora da Conceição Aparecida. A imagem, o santuário e as romarias*, Aparecida 2017, p. 31–32.

² Cf. T. Galvão Pasin, *Senhora Aparecida. Romeiros e Missionários Redentoristas na História da Padroeira do Brasil*, Aparecida 2015, p. 30–31.

Where could the statue have come from? In colonial times, sculptors played an important role in spreading the devotion to saints in Brazil. They were usually members of the Franciscan or Benedictine orders. These orders made a huge contribution to the development of art in colonial Brazil, as evidenced by the temples they built, preserved to this day. One of the artists, Benedictine Agostinho de Jesus, made so many paintings of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception that we can assume that the figure found in October 1717 in the waters of the Paraíba River was the work of his hands. It is enough to compare the statue of Aparecida with other figures of Our Lady, found in various seventeenth-century churches in Sao Paulo, to conclude that they have the same origin: brother Agostinho de Jesus. In the past century, apart from comparative studies, the statue was renovated, complementing it with hair, which was supposed to strengthen the connection between the head and the body. This was done during the first renovation works carried out in 1945. In 1978, it was necessary to reconstruct the statue due to the damage caused by intentionally knocking it to the floor by a mentally ill man. More detailed studies of the miraculous figure on the occasion of the 250th anniversary of her finding confirmed her origin.

The statue of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception of Aparecida is made of terracotta, is 36 cm high without a base and weighs 2.550 kilograms. Such figures had a white colour on the face and hands at first, the coat was dark blue with a red lining. Such colours were given to Marian statues by King João IV, who proclaimed the Virgin Mary immaculately conceived Patron of Portugal and overseas in 1646.³ It is not known how long the statue of Aparecida was immersed in the Paraíba River. It is not known how the statue was thrown in the river and why the torso and head were separated from each other. Perhaps the figure was stolen or destroyed during turmoil. It is probable that today's auburn colour is the result of placing a statue near candles in a fisherman's house or in the oratory or chapel in the port of Itaguaçu. Today, the statue of the Mother of God receives worship in a great basilica, whose construction was begun in 1946. Its consecration was performed by Pope John Paul II in 1980.⁴ The area of the temple covers almost 72,000 square meters. It includes the underground and a passage on the ground floor and the south stand, the main church, the chapel of the Resurrection and the baptistery, and the tower called Brasilia, which is 109 meters high. A statue of the Patron of Brazil was placed on the ground floor in the niche. The main church itself has an area of 25,000 square meters. 30,000 faithful gathered around the central altar can participate in the liturgical celebra-

³ Cf. G. Paiva, *Aparecida 300 anos*, Aparecida 2017, p. 86–87.

⁴ Cf. T. Galvão Pasin, *Senhora Aparecida*, p. 327–329.

tions simultaneously. There is space for 300,000 worshipers in the squares surrounding the basilica.⁵

Pilgrims can go to other sacred places which are next to the basilica: Morro do Cruzeiro, where thousands of believers can follow the Way of the Cross, a chapel in the port of Itaguaçu, where the statue of Our Lady of Aparecida was found in 1717 and the so-called the “old” basilica constructed in the 19th century – a religious monument that has recently been renovated with the surrounding architectural ensemble, as well as a 7,000 sq m Bethlehem crèche, depicting the most important scenes from Jesus’ childhood.

In the basement of the sanctuary, there is the so-called hall of miracles, in which about 20,000 votives were gathered – thanks for favours received by people through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Recently, a place commemorating the cult of the statue of the Mother of God was opened, as well as a museum of wax figures depicting church and state dignitaries who made pilgrimages to the sanctuary of the Patron of Brazil.

The national sanctuary in Aparecida has the largest parking lot in Latin America, which can accommodate over 6,000 vehicles on the area of 285,000 square meters and a helicopter landing pad. The sanctuary complex also houses the Romeiro shopping center with 380 stores, including a large food market. There are 874 toilets at the disposal of pilgrims, 55 of them have been adapted to the needs of the disabled.

The entire area of the Aparecida sanctuary has 2,000 employees, as well as hundreds of volunteers who take care of pilgrims daily coming to *Nossa Senhora Aparecida* and help in the implementation of social projects that benefit the local community. In accordance with the decision of the National Conference of Bishops of Brazil (CNBB), the patronal feast of Our Lady of Aparecida is celebrated on October 12th due to the date of discovery of America (October 12th, 1492), celebration of Children’s Day and anniversary of fishery of the statue from the Paraíba do Sul river in 1717. Since 1980 this day is a public holiday.

2. The Black Lady of Aparecida in the life of the Brazilian people

The cult of the Virgin Mary of Aparecida spread very quickly all over Brazil and the Black Lady became the Patron of the whole country. Mary appears to her worshipers above all as a mother. In this approach to Mary, all basic human life experiences are hidden, such as birth and education, care, protection and

⁵ Cf. J. Sampaio, *Aparecida en números*, in: *Academia Marial de Aparecida, 300 anos de fé e devoção*, Aparecida 2017, p. 163–164.

maternal care. Worshipers of the Mother of God are convinced that they can find compassion and support with her.

The statue of Our Lady of Aparecida belongs to the Marian images called Black Madonnas. Such pictures or statues of the Mother of God can be found in many European regions. In Western countries alone there are about 400 of them, including Częstochowa and Alltötting. In Einsiedeln (Switzerland) the abbey was built to dedicate it to the Black Madonna. The dark colour of her face is – according to popular opinion – the effect of smoke coming from candles and lamps burning in front of the altar. In turn, in France you can find numerous paintings called *Vierges Noires* (Black Virgins).⁶

There are several hypotheses explaining the origin and significance of the Black Madonnas. According to some opinions, many figures and paintings of this type have been made in the culture of people with dark faces (Middle East) or they reflect the natural tan of the Palestinians which Mary came from. In Brazil, the dark skin of Madonna of Aparecida resembles the descendants of slaves brought from Africa, and reminds them of the sufferings and humiliations endured by their ancestors. The black Madonna of Aparecida is a close friend to them – a relative who has been exalted by God and is able to understand their poverty, pain and suffering.

The statue of Our Lady of Aparecida was pulled out from water, it means from the environment in which life begins. She is a good mother who gives life and nourishes people with physical and spiritual food. In her it is possible to discover the full magnanimity in the service of those who want to be born again and find the fullness of life, redemption and resurrection. She guarantees people survival when they experience hunger, cold and unhappiness. Therefore, they cling to the Mother, satisfying the existential and emotional needs of the poor and the oppressed.

Mary, called Aparecida, “appears”, as the name suggests, in a difficult social situation, in times of slavery and serious social differences, marginalizing workers and fishermen, whose duty was to provide food to their masters. It is the moment of Mary’s intervention when the fishermen exhausted after many hours of fruitless work were close to losing hope of satisfying the needs of their ruler. In the time of human helplessness and despair, the Holy Virgin comes to help in need.⁷

The figure of the Mother of God is “caught” by three men, whom she then helps in obtaining an abundant catch. This is a clear reference to the content of

⁶ Cf. D.G. Ramos, *A Grande Mãe brasileira*, in: Academia Marial de Aparecida, *300 anos de fé e devoção*, p. 122–123.

⁷ Cf. A. Brighenti, *Aspectos teológicos-pastorais da devoção mariana*, in: Academia Marial de Aparecida, *300 anos de fé e devoção*, p. 205.

the Gospel, where Christ intends to make Peter and Andrew “fishers of men”, and a wonderfully large number of fishes (Lk 5, 10) is a paradigm for Peter’s missionary activity. As in the life of the apostles, a miracle happened on the Paraíba River – an unexplained and sudden change, so that the people discover the meaning of their efforts.

The word “miracle” comes from the Latin verb *mirari* (admire). It refers to what causes great wonder and admiration, but also to events considered as extraordinary, which science can not explain. A request for a miracle is accompanied by waiting for a solution of serious problems, although many times it is necessary to give a lot to find it, praying, making promises and sacrifices. Such a attitude of the faithful is inspired by the Madonna of Aparecida and the story of her finding.

In the sanctuary, before the holy picture, the pilgrims can experience the compassion that comes out of God’s source of life. So, the Christian gets the strength to overcome the typical tendencies for today’s world in which money and influence matter. The sanctuary at Aparecida allows people to return to their spiritual roots and rediscover the power of God’s love which is reflected by the motherly love of the Holy Virgin. It is the love of God that gives the ultimate meaning to human life and does not allow man to lose hope in moments of confusion and powerlessness.

3. Theological message of the figure from Aparecida

The statue of the Mother of God itself transmits a message that penetrates human hearts. It is associated with individual elements of the image. First, the Lady of Aparecida reminds us that she is the immaculate conceived Mother of Christ. As free of sin, she appears to the world as the hope of humanity. Her immaculate conception means that Mary was chosen from the beginning of her existence so that she – filled with God’s grace – could undertake her mission in the work of redeeming the world. She is the first of those whom God chose that have full participation in the grace of Christ.⁸

Our Lady of Aparecida is the Mother in whom God reveals His power and love to all believers. Mary freely makes a gift of her love and engages all her life in the work of redemption, proclaiming with joy that the Christian truth of salvation “has as its heart and its whole content the person of Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, the one Savior of the world.”⁹ She is the Mother of all who

⁸ Cf. C.I. González, *Mariologia. Maria, Madre e Discepola*, Casale Monferrato 1988, p. 48.

⁹ John Paul II, *Apostolic Letter “Rosarium Virginis Mariae”*, Rome 2002, n. 20.

received the Gospel of salvation with faith and were born of water and the Holy Spirit.¹⁰

The black colour of the statue is an invitation to brotherhood, directed to the entire Brazilian nation which was formed by a mixture of different races. Finding the body and the head cut off from it symbolizes the reintegration of man through the redemption of Christ, whose prototype Mary is, preserved from sin.¹¹

Extracting the figure from the Paraíba River resembles the sacrament of baptism which is celebrated through immersing a man in a stream of baptismal water. Through baptismal water people are born to God through the action of the Holy Spirit. So baptism builds the Church of Christ – the sign of the presence of the Savior in the world.

A wonderful catch is a call and encouragement to work that brings fruit when a man trusts God. Labour alone may be futile if God's help is lacking. Without God, we cannot do anything and only obedience to Him makes human effort rewarding and people can use the obtained goods together.

The miracle of candles, which unexpectedly began to burn, symbolizes the renewal of God's life in the heart of the believer. God sends people light to lead them out of the darkness. This light helps them to walk the path what leads to the fullness of life. In 1850, a slave named Zacarías, wearing a heavy chain, was passing by the statue of Our Lady. He asked his owner to give him a moment to pray before her. When he received his master's consent, he knelt down and prayed fervently. Suddenly, the chains fell from his hands. This miracle tells the devotees of the Lady of Aparecida that God gives every man freedom and no one can be refused, because everyone is the child of God.¹²

The wonderful release of a slave is also an appeal to people to respect the dignity of every human being, especially the poor, who are open to God's action in their lives. They are very thirsty for the good news and the kingdom of heaven belongs to them according God's promise (cf. Mt 5,3). Therefore, all are called to conversion, which is expressed in the ministry for the good of insignificant and poor people.

The blue cloak and crown symbolizes the royal authority of Mary, asking for God's graces and protecting the Brazilian nation, of which she is Queen, Mother and Patron. The followers of Christ, who were immersed into His death and resurrection by baptism, can live in the hope that their destiny is to be with Mary in heaven. The mother of Lord Jesus, clothed by God in the Queen's di-

¹⁰ Cf. A. Kraxner, *En la escuela espiritual de María*, in: N. Londoño, *Ser Redentorista hoy. Testimonios sobre el Carisma*, Roma 1996, p. 243.

¹¹ Cf. J.J. Brustoloni, *História de Nossa Senhora da Conceição Aparecida*, p. 385.

¹² Cf. L. Boff, *María, hija predilecta del Padre. Madre Aparecida del pueblo de Brasil*, in: J.M. Morilla, F. Suárez, A. Giralda, *Raíces marianas en Latinoamérica*, Bogotá 2012, p. 116.

gnity, reminds the faithful that they can not only concentrate on building happiness on earth. For they are called to seek what is above, where Christ sits at the right hand of the Father (cf. Col 3,1-2).

Mary with Aparecida has her hands clasped on her breast and a compassionate look. All this indicates the merciful intercession of Mary, the Mother of God, for those who suffer. Mary prays for those who entrust themselves to her protection. She does not leave anyone who asks her for intercession without help before Jesus Christ. This compassionate gaze of the Mother of Mercy attracts crowds of pilgrims to the sanctuary of Aparecida. Again and again people experience her goodness, looking at the dark face of the Patron of Brazil who gives them a hearty smile. In this way, she encourages everyone to trust completely in God and to follow Jesus faithfully on the path of the Gospel.

4. Sanctuary as a place for shaping the Christian attitude

The Shrine of Our Lady in Aparecida is the second – after Guadalupe in Mexico – place in the world according the number of pilgrims visiting the sanctuary. The crowds of people coming to Aparecida show that the need for pilgrimage is very lively in modern times. The basic motive is the desire to strengthen their faith. This does not mean, however, that there are not people among the pilgrims, for whom the experience of community and fraternal solidarity is also very important.¹³

Pilgrimage is a religious practice that has a social character. Going onto the road, man abandons his environment and his constant position in it. The social status of the pilgrims does not play any role in pilgrimage, and the principles of fraternity and universal values matter.¹⁴ Pilgrimage makes a person anonymous. It creates an attitude of readiness to accept a new identity when he behaves in a different way and treats people in another way. Pilgrimage allows man to get a distance from what is known in daily life. The pilgrim is open to creating new relationships with others. Reaching the goal of the road, in the shadow of the sanctuary, he does not only find orientation and a sense of security, but also experiences belonging to a living community of faith.¹⁵

Pilgrimages to Aparecida often begin with making a promise to go on the road. There is a desire to ask Mary for help or thank for her intercession by God.

¹³ Cf. J. Vidal, *Le pèlerinage dans la tradition chrétienne*, “Concilium” vol. 266, 1996, p. 66.

¹⁴ Cf. R. Schützeichel, *Über das Pilgern. Soziologische Analysen einer Handlungskonfiguration*, in: P. Heiser, Ch. Kurrat, *Pilgern gestern und heute. Soziologische Beiträge zur religiösen Praxis auf dem Jakobsweg*, Berlin 2012, p. 32.

¹⁵ Cf. EG, n. 124; A. Murad, *A devoção a Maria. Uma ancoragem possível*, in: Academia Marial de Aparecida, *300 anos de fé e devoção*, p. 186.

To fulfill the commitment, the family organizes an expedition to Aparecida with neighbors and parishioners. If walking the pilgrimage is too long and cumbersome, a bus is rented, which can also be used by those who often cannot afford to pay for a trip. Family pilgrimages are also very popular. They help to strengthen relationships with loved ones and strengthen the faith that helps to overcome life's hardships.

The largest Marian sanctuary of Brazil is a place of nurturing popular piety, which is a valuable way of evangelization. Traditional prayers and customs are not so much an expression of the natural need for religiosity, but a manifestation of the spiritual life that man lives through the action of the Holy Spirit in his heart.¹⁶ The faithful, who ask Mary with great confidence for help, teaches other pilgrims to trust in the goodness of God. Prayers, rosaries and novenas can be treated as “the expression of the spontaneous missionary activity of the People of God”¹⁷ which is the collective subject of evangelization.

A sanctuary that attracts many Catholics, especially the poor and the needy, contributes to the preferential option for the poor, what is typical for the Church in South America. This is a fully evangelical option,¹⁸ based on standing for the oppressed and living on the margins of social life. This option has a call for an attitude of solidarity with the poor, which consists in openness to the needs of the poor and sharing of goods with the needy.¹⁹

In Aparecida, Our Lady takes care of the poor in danger of exploitation and persecution.²⁰ It is she who, as the perfect disciple of her Son, takes the example of Jesus who, being poor, became a servant of the poor and needy. In the presence of Mary, the poor are rediscovering their dignity as children of God who defends and embraces them with loving care. In the sanctuary, the poor see that they are the first recipients of the Good News of salvation in Christ who came to earth to proclaim freedom and peace to the miserable, deprived of full access to economic goods and pushed to the margins of social life, imprisoned, sick and oppressed.²¹

Arriving at the sanctuary of Aparecida, the poor identify with Mary, the humble handmaid of God who has experienced an extraordinary exaltation. Mary as the exceptional Lady – because of her resemblance to the people – assures believers that it is possible to overcome misery, pain and suffering.

¹⁶ Cf. EG, n. 125; V.H.S. Lapenta, *A pastoral do santuário. Um balanço histórico*, in: Academia Marial de Aparecida, *300 anos de fé e devoção*, p. 254–255.

¹⁷ EG, n. 122.

¹⁸ Cf. S. Galilea, *El fervor de la evangelización*, Santafé de Bogotá 1998, p. 38.

¹⁹ Cf. CELAM, *Mensaje a los Pueblos de América Latina*, Puebla 1979, n. 733–734.

²⁰ Cf. J.J. Brustoloni, *História de Nossa Senhora da Conceição Aparecida*, p. 386.

²¹ Cf. R. Hajduk, *Udział ubogich w ewangelizacji na przykładzie działalności kościelnych wspólnot podstawowych*, “Studia Nauk Teologicznych PAN” vol. 8, 2013, p. 65.

In her they also find a pattern of living and acting in accordance with the truth of Christ.²²

Experiencing in a sanctuary the transforming power of the Gospel, the poor take an attitude of readiness to participate in the mission of transforming this world into the kingdom of God. They become aware of their calling to be actively involved in the Church's salvific mission. Their task is also to share with others the richness of their faith that the Lord has given them. In Aparecida, the poor are convinced that they are not only called to conversion. Their vocation is, in accordance with the teaching of the Gospel, to adopt attitudes such as solidarity, humility and generous service. Then, they are for others a sign indicating God who cares for the poorest and gives them strength so that even in borderline situations they can love each other, live in unity despite of the differences and share the experience of brotherhood with the whole world.²³

In Aparecida, Mary guides pilgrims to the experience of redemption, which means to be free from all that prevents people from reaching the fullness of life.²⁴ The mother of Jesus Christ has a share in the work of redemption which Jesus Christ accomplished. God's will was that Mary played an important role in his saving plan. In obedience to faith, Mary opens her heart to the word of God and agrees to conceive in her womb the Son of God who will become the Savior of the world. She is the first of those whom God chose to have a full participation in the grace of Christ.²⁵

Our Lady in Aparecida teaches believers the faith which consists in unlimited trust in God and readiness to fulfill His will. Because of her dark complexion, she reminds a slave who, by dedication to the Creator, finds full freedom and true happiness. It helps the black Brazilians to accept their painful history and shows them how to establish such a relationship with God, in which they voluntarily place themselves under his rule and find meaning and joy of life, experiencing God's love.

In the meeting with the Black Madonna of Aparecida, pilgrims convince themselves that God's redemption cannot be reduced only to the social dimension. It is above all an experience of union with God who is love and cares for his children. Mary has a share in transmitting God's love to all those who are

²² Cf. D.G. Ramos, *A Grande Mãe brasileira*, p. 123.

²³ Cf. CELAM, *Mensaje a los Pueblos de América Latina*, n. 1141–1142; CELAM, *Nueva Evangelización, Promoción Humana, Cultura Cristiana. Jesucristo, Ayer Hoy y Siempre*, Santo Domingo 1992, n. 122–125; R. Aubry, *La misión siguiendo a Jesús por los caminos de América Latina*, Buenos Aires 1990, p. 98.

²⁴ Cf. H. Schermann, *Oddać życie dla obfitego odkupienia*, in: R. Hajduk, M. Kotyński, *Ogarnięci tajemnicą Chrystusowego Odkupienia. W poszukiwaniu inspiracji pastoralnych w „ośrodku wszechświata i historii”*, Kraków 2006, p. 193–194.

²⁵ Cf. C.I. González, *Mariologia*, p. 48.

under her protection. The Mother of the Lord and the mother of all believers embraces the followers of Christ so that, as God’s beloved children, they may entrust themselves to his fatherly protection.²⁶

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The Shrine of Our Lady in Aparecida attracts her worshipers and leads them to her Son, Jesus. She shows them the purpose of earthly life, which is the fullness of happiness in union with the Savior. It can be achieved through faith and service, performed in the presence of the Son of God. By honouring Mary, pilgrims learn from her to praise God for Jesus, for the great works that take place in human reality through the power of the Holy Spirit working in the world.

The Madonna with the dark face, like many Brazilians, is one of them. The distance that creates her holiness and the uniqueness of her election and vocation is shortened thanks to her similarity to the people of whom she is patron. It strengthens her authority as the mother and teacher of those who, like her, are called to be the builders of the temporal and transitory state, and at the same time to strive for the heavenly and eternal kingdom. Under her motherly protection, they have the task of being “the disciple who works for that justice which sets free the oppressed and for that charity which assists the needy; but above all, the disciple who is the active witness of that love which builds up Christ in people’s hearts.”²⁷

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²⁶ Cf. H.J.M. Nouwen, *Jesus and Mary. Finding Our Sacred Center*, Cincinnati 1993, p. 13.

²⁷ Paul VI, *Apostolic exhortation “Marialis cultus”*. *Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary*, Rome 1974, n. 37.

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Matka Boża z Aparecida – Patronka Brazylii

Streszczenie: Sanktuarium Matki Bożej w Aparecida znajduje się na drodze między dwoma najważniejszymi miastami w południowo-wschodniej Brazylii – São Paulo i Rio de Janeiro – i należy do największych na świecie. Każdego roku przybywa do niego 12 milionów ludzi, aby oddać cześć Patronce Brazylii. Przedstawia ją figura Czarnej Madonny, którą w październiku 1717 r. kilku rybaków znalazło w rzece Paraíba. Ciemny kolor skóry Madonny z Aparecida przypomina mieszkających w tym kraju potomków niewolników sprowadzanych z Afryki. Pielgrzymują oni do swojej Matki, aby prosić Ją o pomoc i odkrywać moc Bożej miłości, której odbłaskiem jest matczyna miłość Bogurodzicy. Przybywając do sanktuarium w Aparecida, wierni odnajdują poczucie bezpieczeństwa, ale także doświadczają przynależności do żywej wspólnoty wiary. Od Maryi uczą się autentycznego życia chrześcijańskiego, w Jej obecności umacniają swoją godność dzieci Bożych i przyjmują postawę gotowości do udziału w misji przemiany tego świata w królestwo Boże.

Słowa kluczowe: ewangelizacja, sanktuarium, pielgrzymka, Najświętsza Maryja Panna, pobożność ludowa.