

# Marian shrines in Lithuania

A pilgrimage route named after St. John Paul II encompasses the most significant Lithuanian sacred locations, a number of them being places of Marian devotion. For centuries visited by pilgrims and preserved by parishioners, shrines of Pivašiūnai Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Basilica in Krekenava, Žemaičių Kalvarija Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary Church and other Marian sanctuaries are decorated with magnificent altars and paintings dedicated to Our Lady. The paintings of Trakai Mother of God, Our Lady of Šiluva with Child and Our Lady of Mercy at the Gate of Dawn known for miracles and special graces are adorned with papal crowns.

## Trakai Mother of God

The image of The Blessed Virgin Mary received golden crowns sent by Pope Clement XI as well as the title “Health of the Sick” in 1718. It was only the second image of Mary to be crowned outside of Rome worldwide. Since then, the Feast of the Nativity of Our Lady, lasting 8 days, has been celebrated every year, attracting thousands of pilgrims coming to pray to the image of The Blessed Virgin Mary, enshrined in the Basilica of Trakai. The Construction of the Basilica of Trakai was funded by Vytautas, the Grand Duke of Lithuania, and it is one of the very first churches built after the christening of Lithuania in the 14th century. It has been the centre of pilgrimage for those seeking graces and praying for the peace and prosperity of Lithuania since the 17th century. The parliament of Lithuania declared 2018 the Year of the Trakai Mother of God, Protectress of Lithuania, to mark the 300-year jubilee of the coronation of the image. In September 2017, the Trakai church was raised to the status of a basilica. The title of basilica recalls the church’s historical significance.

## Our Lady of Mercy at the Gate of Dawn

The image of Our Lady of Mercy at the Gate of Dawn gained fame for miracles and special graces in the 17th century and was crowned with papal crowns in 1927. In one of his speeches, St. John Paul II recalled rushing to the Lithuanian Chapel of Our Lady of Mercy in the Vatican Basilica grottoes to pray after being elected the Pope. During his visit to Lithuania in 1993, the Pope said a Rosary at the Gate of Dawn Chapel, a place where “Christians of Lithuania, Poland, Belarus, Ukraine and other countries gather here like brothers and sisters to share their faith, hope and love in the presence of the Virgin Mary.” Nowadays the image of Our Lady of Mercy is enshrined with great respect in the chapel of the Gate of Dawn, but at the beginning of the 17th century, it hung on the outside of the gate that served as one of the main entrances to the city. It is owing to the Discalced Carmelites, who came to Vilnius in the middle of 17th century, that the chapel was built and the image of Our Lady of Mercy of the Gate of Dawn became an indissoluble part of religious life in the Archdiocese of Vilnius. The chapel at the Gate of Dawn is also a starting point for various processions and pilgrimages, and it is included within the European Marian Network linking twenty of the most significant shrines honoring Mary in Europe.

## Mother of God in Šiluva

Basilica of Šiluva had been erected to celebrate the miraculous apparition of the Mother of God. In the middle of the 16th century, when Calvinism became dominant in the region of Šiluva, the Catholic Church was demolished, and its founding papers were put in a chest and secretly buried. In 1608, the Blessed Virgin Mary first appeared to the children tending their sheep on the grounds of the demolished Catholic church. The children brought their teacher, Calvinist by his belief, to the site of the apparition, only to hear Mary say that her Son used to be worshiped on this place, now used only for plowing and sowing. It is the only known apparition where Mary approached a person from another Christian (non-Catholic) denomination. Afterwards, the Calvinists lost the ownership of that particular property to the Catholics, and a Catholic church was rebuilt. An image of Our Lady of Šiluva with Child Jesus commemorating the apparition began to gain fame for its special graces and was adorned with Papal crown in 1786. The Indulgence Feast of Siluva became especially popular in Lithuania during the interwar period. During the Soviet occupation the government attempted to disrupt the traditional indulgence feast, but it was unsuccessful. Today Šiluva is one of the best-known sites of the pilgrimage, attracting thousands of worshippers annually to the Indulgence Feast of Šilūnės.

In 1991, Cardinal Vincentas Sladkevičius and the Speaker of the Lithuanian Parliament Vytautas Landsbergis signed an Act in Siluva consecrating Lithuania to the Blessed Virgin Mary. In 1993, St. John Paul II prayed in the Apparition Chapel in Siluva and participated in the celebration of the Liturgy of the Word in the Basilica of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary.



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