

Our Lady of Altötting

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The Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception will soon dedicate a new oratory in honor of Our Lady of Altötting. The Oratory is located at the end of the ambulatory in the east apse of the Great Upper Church. It is the gift of the Archbishop of Cologne, Joachim Cardinal Meisner, under the direction of Msgr. Alois Furtner. The statue is an exact copy of the original, which is venerated at Shrine of Our Lady of Altötting, Bavaria, Germany. Included in the case is a Brautsrosenkrantz or a Bride's rosary made of coral and ornamented with silver work. The design and construction of the Oratory was completed by Rambusch Inc., in January 2005.

The original statue is an early Gothic figure from the beginning of the 14th Century. Hand carved of Lindenwood (literally, "soft wood", a.k.a. limewood). The statue is 25 inches tall with garments of a rich baroque style. The darkening of the hands and face is from centuries of candle soot and fire. According to ancient stories, the statue was rescued from a great fire in the year 907. It is thought to have come to Altötting via the Cistercian Abbey of Raitenhaslach, located between Salzburg and Altötting, not far from Burghausen.

The statue stands in a richly decorated silver tabernacle created in 1645. To the right of the altar, an almost life-size solid silver sculpture of Bavaria's Duke Maximilian Joseph kneels praying before the shrine. It was an offering by his father, Elector Karl Albrecht, for his 10-year-old son's recovery from a serious illness in 1737. To the left, a statue of St. Conrad of Parzham, O.F.M. Cap. (1818-1894), the beloved "Porter" or doorkeeper of the shrine for 40 years, also in silver.

The replica housed in the Basilica of the National Shrine is an exact copy of the original. During World War II, the sculptor Josef Neustifter of Eggenfelden (a town close to Altötting) carved a replica to replace the original, which was hidden for safekeeping; after which he carved three more. The locations of these four exact copies are two in Altötting, one in the Vatican, given to Pope John Paul II during

hills of Upper Bavaria, between Munich, Passau and Salzburg. For more than 1,250 years, Altötting has been the spiritual center of Bavaria, and for over 500 years, the most important place of pilgrimage in Germany associated with the Virgin Mary, the patroness of Bavaria. The Gnadenkapelle (Chapel of Mercy), which houses the statue of the Blessed Mother and which is located on the Kapellplatz, is the center of the city and the "National Shrine" of Bavaria. Each year, more than half a million pilgrims come to this Shrine, at least 30,000 of which come by foot.

The Gnadenkapelle or Heilige-Kapelle (Holy Chapel) located in the center of the square, is a small octagonal building constructed of volcanic rock, which dates back to the Carolingian period (7th – 8th centuries). Legend states that the missionary-monk of Germany, St. Rupert, baptized Otto the Bavarian in this place (circa 680). The Chapel is one of the oldest preserved church constructions of its kind in Germany. The nave, a later addition to the original octagon-shaped Kapella, was in existence by 1490. Among its rich contents are old and richly ornamented candles, a gothic relief of St. Rupert, a silver oil lamp donated by King Ludwig I, two side altars of marble from 1668.

Altötting became a Marian Shrine of renown in 1489 through two miracles: a 3-year-old child, who had drowned, was restored to life when his grief-stricken mother placed him on the altar in front of the miraculous statue, and a child crushed by a fully laden farm wagon was completely healed. Thus began the tradition of the Marian Pilgrimage and pilgrims in Germany. The most famous pilgrim of modern times to this place was Pope John Paul II who visited in 1980.

The exterior and interior walls of the chapel, as well as the sacristy of the adjacent 16th-century Collegiate Church of Sts. Philip and James are covered with offerings of thanks for deliverance from sickness and danger. Among them are hundreds of painted wood votive tablets, some of them five centuries old, which are fine examples of folk and peasant art. Since the year 1561, the hearts of all Bavarian rulers are buried in heart-shaped containers made of pure silver in the Chapel of the Virgin, sub umbra Magnae Mariae, i.e., "in the shadow of the great Mary." The last two hearts placed there were those of the Bavarian King Maximilian III (1921) and that of crown princess Maria Antonia (1954).

The gift of the replica of Our Lady of Altötting to the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception is a gesture of solidarity and faith by the German Church. Mary is the patroness of the United States even as she is of Bavaria.



his 1980 visit, and one in Washington, D.C. Like the Shrine in Altötting, a statue of St. Conrad of Parzham is located to the left of the Oratory.

Altötting (ahlt-ötting = no English equivalent; mouth is rounded as if to say "o" but say oo) (literally "old ötting") lies in the beautiful Alpine foot-