

OUR LADY OF PROMPT SUCCOR, Hasten to help us.

January 8 is when the Church honors the Blessed Virgin Mary under the title of Our Lady of Prompt Succor. Our Lady under this title is the Principle Patroness of the State of Louisiana. Throughout the ecclesiastical Province of New Orleans, this day is observed as a Solemnity. The title “prompt succor” means speedy or prompt assistance.

In 1727, French Ursuline nuns founded a monastery in New Orleans, Louisiana, and organized their area schools from it. In 1763 Louisiana became a Spanish possession, and Spanish sisters came to assist. In 1800 the territory reverted back to France, and the Spanish sisters fled in the face of French anti-Catholicism. In 1803, short on teachers, Mother Saint Andre Madier requested reinforcements in the form of more sisters from France. The relative to whom she wrote, Mother Saint Michel, was running a Catholic boarding school for girls. Bishop Fournier, short-handed due to the repressions of the French Revolution, declined to send any sisters. Mother Saint Michel was given permission to appeal to the pope. Pope Pius VII was a prisoner of Napoleon, and it seemed unlikely he would even receive her letter of petition. Mother Saint Michel prayed,

“O most Holy Virgin Mary, if you obtain for me a prompt and favorable answer to this letter, I promise to have you honored at New Orleans under the title of Our Lady of Prompt Succor.”

and sent her letter on 19 March 1809. Against all odds, she received a response on 29 April 1809. The pope granted her request, and Mother Saint Michel, commissioned a statue of Our Lady of Prompt Succor holding the Infant Jesus. Bishop Fournier blessed the statue and Mother’s work.

The victory of American forces over a far superior British army at the Battle of New Orleans on January 8, 1815, has been attributed to the intercession of Our Lady of Prompt Succor; as a matter of fact, General Andrew Jackson, the commander of the American forces, went personally to the Ursuline Convent to thank the Sisters for their prayers and the intercession of Mary; the image of Our Lady of Prompt Succor is enshrined at the Ursuline Convent to this day. It is still customary for Catholics of New Orleans to pray for her intercession when threatened by hurricanes.

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