

Mary gets her crown in Emmitsburg



The gleaming gold-leafed statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary that soars over Emmitsburg finally has her May crown.

For the first time since the statue was erected a half century ago, the much-loved figure was adorned with a gigantic wreath of silk flowers hoisted 120 feet by a crane during a May 3 ceremony at the National Shrine Grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes.

More than 2,500 people watched as Tim Mergen, a first-year seminarian at Mount St. Mary's Seminary, had the honor of being lifted in a large bucket to adorn the bronze figure's bowed head.

"I was praying for all the people there that they would honor our Lady and that she would bring them all closer to Jesus," said Mergen, calling the view from the top of the statue "wonderful" and a reminder of Mary's protective gaze.

Will Stone, owner of Flower Fashions in Frederick, designed and constructed the wreath that was 12-feet in diameter and made up of silk red roses, yellow mums and other brightly colored flowers.

"We constructed it on cable ties," he said. "Once we got it up there, it was zipped tight."

Stone said the wreath was the largest he's ever made. The 25-foot Mary statue stands on a 95-foot campanile on the campus of Mount St. Mary's University.

Lori Stewart, director of the National Shrine Grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes, said the May crowning was made possible through the donation of crane services by Steve and Cecilia Gregory, owners of Big Hook and Rigging Company.

"It was so beautiful and so exciting," said Stewart, noting that the grotto did a "practice crowning" prior to the big event to make sure the enormous flowered ring would fit. "People applauded and some of them were crying."



May crownings are a popular tradition in the Catholic Church.

“It’s a wonderful reminder to us all that Mary is the queen of heaven and earth,” said Mergen, who is preparing to become a priest for the Diocese of Madison, Wis. and the Archdiocese for U.S. Military Services.

“We don’t worship Mary in any way, shape or form,” he said. “We honor and venerate her and recognize her help and her strength for us all.”

The 27-year-old seminarian said the royal image of Mary has its roots in the Old Testament. Queen mothers traditionally had “pull” with all the Old Testament kings, he said.

“Mary is our queen mother,” he said. “On the cross, Jesus gave us his mother when he gave her to John and told him to take her into his home. That’s what we’re all called to do now – take her into our home and into our hearts as our queen mother. She always brings us closer to Jesus.”

The crown will remain on top of the statue throughout May, and will be on display after it is removed, Stewart said.

Photos courtesy Mount St. Mary’s University