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A motorcyclist holds an umbrella for a nun carrying a ciborium at the Roman Catholic holy shrine of Fatima, during the 10th Pilgrimage of the Blessing of Helmets that draws tens of thousands, in Fatima, Portugal, Sunday, Sept. 21, 2025. (AP/Ana Brigida)

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Fatima, Portugal — September 22, 2025

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Motorcycle rallies have a reputation for beer drinking, rock 'n' roll and perhaps the odd brawl. But at an annual gathering in northern Portugal, the strongest tippie is a sip of communion wine and the music is strictly hymns set to a church organ.

Over the weekend, an estimated 180,000 members of Portugal's motorcycling community converged on the Fatima shrine for the so-called [Blessing of the Helmets](#). The pilgrimage to the Sanctuary of Fatima, now in its 10th year, aims to bestow bikers with a sense of spiritual protection from the Virgin Mary as they ride across Portugal's open roads.

Leather vests creaked as riders walked around the shrine dedicated to the three shepherd children who saw an apparition of the Holy Virgin. They participated in a talk on road security and faith, and attended Mass, some with their helmets lifted in order to receive the host.

But the rally's highlight was the blessing, when priests walked through the sea of leather-clad pilgrims and sprinkled holy water on the helmets held aloft.

"We make this pilgrimage every year because we have faith that she is always watching over us," 49-year-old Manuel Santos said.

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More than 9,900 motorcyclists were involved in crashes in 2024, according to Portugal's national road safety authority. Most were minor incidents, but there also were 120 deaths.

"Many of these motorcyclists come to ask for God's protection through Our Lady for their trips, but they also come to remember those who have already left, who have already died, many of them in accidents and those who are hurt, those who need help," said Fr. Carlos Cabecinhas, the sanctuary's rector.

The possibility of an accident is never far from the mind of Marlene Seabra, who was wearing a black bandana and leather waistcoat adorned with biker club badges.

"Whenever I get on my motorcycle, I ask Our Lady to protect me," Seabra said.