News



A box containing relics of the 17th century St. Mary Margaret Alacoque, a French nun whose reports of visions of Jesus has led to the modern devotion of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, stands June 11 in front of the Basilica of the National Shrine of Mary, Queen of the Universe in Orlando, Fla., before a service in which U.S. Catholic bishops consecrated the United States to the Sacred Heart upon the nation's 250th anniversary. (AP Photo/Peter Smith)

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Orlando, Fla. — June 12, 2026
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The nation’s Catholic bishops gathered June 11 in Orlando for a liturgy consecrating the United States to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, drawing on a centuries-old devotion to mark the country’s 250th anniversary.

Organ, brass and choral singing thundered inside a modern Orlando shrine during the service, a centerpiece of the spring assembly of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Just before the liturgy, bishops and other worshippers knelt before relics of the 17th century St. Mary Margaret Alacoque, a French nun whose reports of visions of Jesus led to the modern devotion of the Sacred Heart as embodying the core of Christ’s suffering love. Since then, the devotion has spread worldwide, with many Catholic schools and churches bearing the Sacred Heart name and many homes and businesses displaying images of it.

The service celebrated the nation’s history, alluding to the Declaration of Independence’s proclamation of rights to "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." It also included prayers acknowledging national failures, including its "original sins of slavery and racism." It's necessary to acknowledge the good with the bad, said Oklahoma City Archbishop Paul Coakley, president of the bishops conference.

"To consecrate ourselves to the Sacred Heart is ultimately to accept Jesus’ invitation to remain in his love and to allow that love to shape every aspect of our lives, public and private," he said. "If we are honest, we must acknowledge that neither our nation nor the church has always reflected that love."

It’s the first time such a service has been held in this country, although similar ones have taken place in several other countries since the 19th century. Such services, occasionally in conjunction with civil leaders, have taken on political and sometimes controversial overtones when it has been used in support of Catholic nationalistic movements.

Pope Leo XIII, the most recent namesake of the current pontiff, consecrated the entire world to the Sacred Heart in 1899.

Before the service, bishops heard devotional talks from some of their members, emphasizing Pope Francis' final encyclical, or teaching document, in which he highlighted the Sacred Heart as an inspiration for service and justice.

The relics of Alacoque were brought from their permanent location in France and displayed in front of the church for the occasion. While scholars trace the roots of the Catholic devotion to the Sacred Heart to ancient times, her reports of visions are credited with fostering the modern images, prayers and piety surrounding it.

The June 11 service took place at the Basilica of the National Shrine of Mary, Queen of the Universe. The strong afternoon Florida sun shone brightly even through the filters of stained-glass windows beside and above the worshippers.

Rows upon rows of bishops in their purple hats and white robes sat in front of the sanctuary, with other worshippers behind and beside them.

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