Saint Mother Theodore Guerin



Sisters of Providence
OF SAINT MARY-OF-THE-WOODS
Breaking boundaries, creating hope.®

20th Anniversary of the Canonization of

Saint Mother Theodore Guerin

Walking with Mother Theodore: a Pilgrimage of Providence

Welcome,

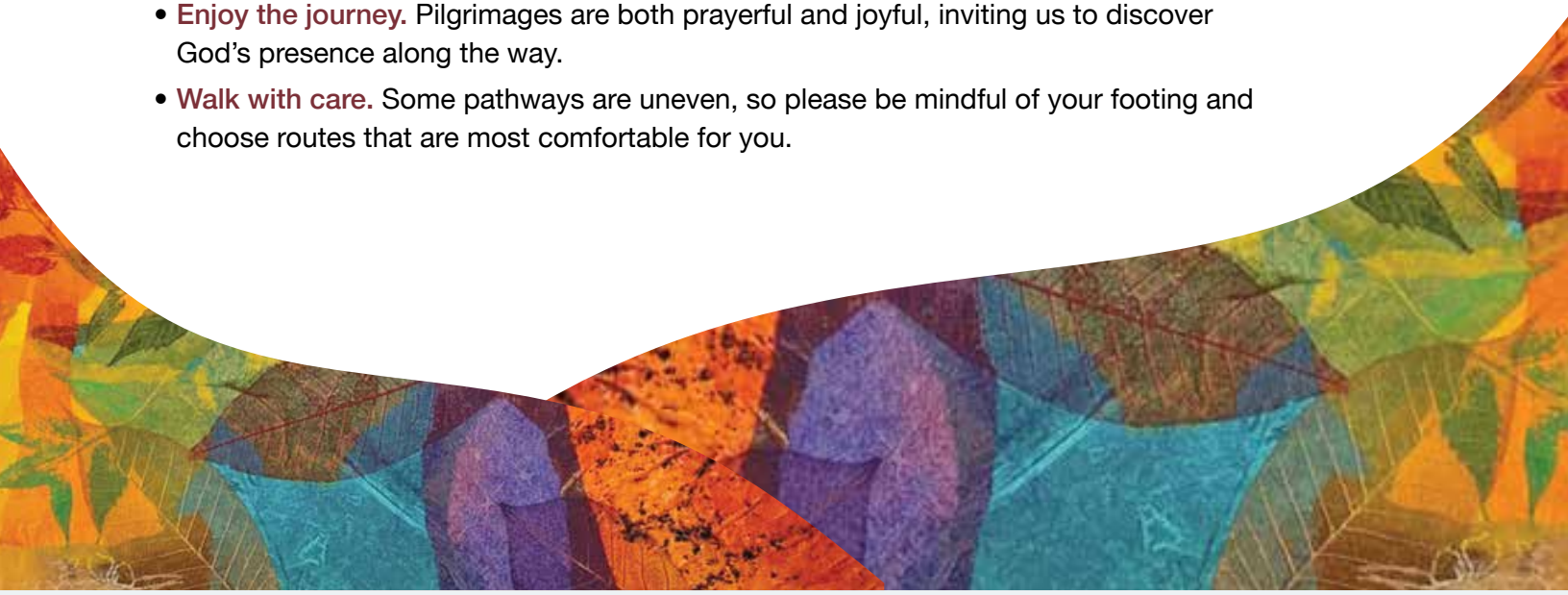
Today is more than a walk through historic places; it is a pilgrimage. A pilgrimage invites us to journey with attentive hearts, to notice God's presence, and to be open to transformation.

A Question to Carry on the Pilgrimage

How are we called to co-create a world where every person's dignity is honored and the sacredness of all creation upheld?

As you journey, we invite you to:

- **Walk at your own pace.** There is no "right" way to make this pilgrimage.
- **Pause often.** Allow time for silence, prayer, and reflection.
- **Listen deeply.** Attend to the stories, to one another, to creation, and to the quiet movements of your heart.
- **Notice the virtues of a saint.** Consider how Mother Theodore's trust in Providence, courage, compassion, and hope might inspire your own life.
- **Enjoy the journey.** Pilgrimages are both prayerful and joyful, inviting us to discover God's presence along the way.
- **Walk with care.** Some pathways are uneven, so please be mindful of your footing and choose routes that are most comfortable for you.



The cover image, Her Spirit Prevails, of Saint Mother Theodore Guerin, is a mixed-media collage created by Sister Jody O'Neil, SP, as a celebration of Mother Theodore's canonization. Through this artwork, Sister Jody sought to express that Mother Theodore's spirit continues to live among us in these Woods, in this sacred place she loved, and in the ongoing mission of Providence.

Your generosity makes a difference. Consider making a gift today.
SistersofProvidence.org/Donate.

Courage

The Story of This Sacred Space

This statue honors Saint Mother Theodore Guerin, whose journey to holiness began long before her canonization twenty years ago. In October 1840, she arrived at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods with five Sisters of Providence. They came from Brittany, France with few possessions but with abundant faith, remarkable courage, and an unwavering trust in God's Providence. What began as a humble mission in the Indiana wilderness grew into a lasting legacy of love, justice, and mercy. As we begin this pilgrimage marking the twentieth anniversary of her canonization, we remember not only the extraordinary woman she became, but also the simple, faithful "yes" that started it all.

Encountering Mother Theodore

"Peace be with you, my friends. When I first arrived on these grounds, I did not know what God had prepared for us. I did not think I was the best person to answer the call to come to the United States. I was 42 and suffered the effects of smallpox that left me with a weak constitution. Yet, I said yes to the mission. I knew only that we were called by Providence and I believed that God would provide. There were many reasons to fear. The journey had been long. The wilderness was unfamiliar. Our resources were few. As we begin this pilgrimage together, I invite you not simply to learn about my life, but to discover where God may be inviting you to trust in Providence."

Pilgrimage Reflection

Mother Theodore stepped into an unknown wilderness, leaving behind everything she had known. Even before entering religious life, she had already known profound suffering, the tragic loss of two brothers in a fire and the violent murder of her father. Those early experiences influenced a heart that learned to trust God even when life made little sense. Later, she would face illness, poverty, misunderstanding, and countless hardships, yet she continued to believe that God was already preparing the way. Providence is not having all the answers. Providence is trusting the One who leads us.

Pilgrimage Prayer (All are invited to pray)

God of Providence,
give us the courage to say yes,
even when we cannot see the road ahead.
Like Mother Theodore, may we walk forward with faith,
believing You are always with us.
Amen.

Reflection:



Saint Mother Theodore's Wisdom

Put yourself gently into the hands of Providence. Trusting all your affairs to Him and putting them also under the protection of Mary and Joseph, you will see that all will be well."
— Saint Mother Theodore Guerin, Letter to Cécile Choisnet, March 27, 1854

Prayer

The Story of This Sacred Space

This cabin reminds us of the humble beginnings of the Sisters of Providence. When Mother Theodore and her companions arrived in 1840 after their long and difficult journey from Brittany, France, they were shown what they believed would be their new church. To their surprise, it was a simple log cabin that served as the priest's residence and the dwelling place of God.

Encountering Mother Theodore

"When we arrived, the priest walked ahead, and we followed in silence to what I believed would be the church. Imagine my surprise when I saw a humble log cabin. In a letter to my friends in France, I wrote, 'The church? Yes, dear friends, that is the dwelling of the God of the Universe.'

"The cabin was simple, and the reality before us was far different from what we had expected. Yet the first place my sisters and I wished to go was the chapel to pray. Before making plans or giving in to discouragement, we entrusted ourselves to Divine Providence. I did not always know the path before me, but I learned to trust the One who was already there. When life brings unexpected turns, pause and listen. Open your heart to the gentle movement of the Provident God, who is always present, always faithful, and always inviting you to walk forward in hope."

Pilgrimage Reflection

Mother Theodore knew that faithful leadership begins by listening for God's voice. Many of life's most important decisions are made not in certainty, but in prayer. Her journey to Saint Mary-of-the-Woods unfolded during a time when slavery remained a brutal reality in the United States, when Indigenous peoples faced the ongoing loss of their homelands through displacement and broken treaties. When immigrants like Mother Theodore and her companions, Sisters Mary Ligouri, Olympiad, Basilide, St. Vincent Ferrar and Mary Xavier, crossed oceans and borders seeking to serve, survive, and begin anew, they had to rely on prayer and trust in the Creator for strength and courage.

Like so many who have journeyed before and after her, Mother Theodore faced an uncertain future with faith as her guide. She did not have all the answers, but she trusted that Providence was present and that each faithful step would reveal the way forward.

Pilgrimage Prayer (All are invited to pray)

God of the Universe,
quiet our hearts, open our ears to Your wisdom,
and guide our steps that we may walk humbly in
love, mercy, and justice.
Amen

Reflection:


Log Cabin Chapel

Saint Mother Theodore's Wisdom

"I may say, however, that I was not at all alarmed. When one has nothing more to lose, the heart is inaccessible to fear."
— Saint Mother Theodore Guerin's First Journal of Travel (1840)

Peace

The Story of This Sacred Space

Although Our Lady of Lourdes Grotto was not built during Mother Theodore Guerin's lifetime, it reflects the enduring legacy of faith, hope, and trust in Divine Providence that she established at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. During World War I, Mother Mary Cleophas Foley, then General Superior of the Sisters of Providence, promised to build a shrine in honor of Our Lady of Lourdes if peace was declared before the Feast of the Immaculate Conception on December 8. When the Armistice was signed on November 11, 1918, she fulfilled that promise. Inspired by the Grotto of Lourdes in France, this sacred place became a lasting expression of gratitude for peace and a sanctuary of healing, hope, and reconciliation. Today, pilgrims are invited to pause here in prayer, entrusting their hopes, joys, and burdens to God through the loving intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Litany for Peace at the Grotto

This grotto was built in 1918 as a prayer of gratitude for peace at the end of World War I. More than a century later, we gather in that same spirit of gratitude and hope, trusting in God's Providence as we pray for peace for our world, for our communities, for all creation, and for one another. As we pray today, may we open our hearts to God's invitation to co-create a world where every person's dignity is honored and the sacredness of all creation is upheld. As a community of pilgrims journeying together in faith and hope, I invite you to unite your hearts and voices in prayer. After each petition, please respond: God of Providence, hear our prayer.

Reader: For all people whose lives have been shattered by war, violence and wherever conflict robs people of safety, home, and hope … **All:** God of Providence, hear our prayer.

Reader: For those who mourn loved ones, for those living in fear, and for refugees, immigrants, and all who have been forced to leave their homes in search of safety, dignity, and belonging … **All:** God of Providence, hear our prayer.

Reader: For communities suffering the impacts of climate change; for those affected by floods, droughts, fires, rising seas, and environmental destruction; and for the healing of Earth's fragile ecosystems … **All:** God of Providence, hear our prayer.

Reader: For leaders of nations, diplomats, peacemakers, humanitarian workers, faith communities, and all who labor for justice, reconciliation, and the common good … **All:** God of Providence, hear our prayer.

Reader: For our own communities, where division, loneliness, injustice, and suffering cry out for compassion, understanding, and hope … **All:** God of Providence, hear our prayer.

Reader: For the intentions we carry in our hearts today, for those we love, for those seeking healing, safety, and belonging, for our local community, and for our world … **All:** God of Providence, hear our prayer.

If you feel called, you are invited to share a prayer aloud. You are also welcome to write your prayer on one of the prayer cards. Together, these prayers become a visible expression of our hopes and intentions as we carry them with us into the Eucharistic celebration.



Saint Mother Theodore's Wisdom

"Have confidence in the Providence that so far has never failed us. The way is not yet clear. Grope along slowly. Do not press matters; be patient, be trustful."
— Saint Mother Theodore Guerin, Letter to the Sisters at Jasper, March 20, 1842

Joy

The Story of This Sacred Space

During her second difficult ocean voyage from France, after seeking funds, Mother Theodore Guerin and her companion, Sister Mary Cecilia Bailly, faced fierce storms and rough seas by trusting in Divine Providence. Mother Theodore promised that if they arrived safely, she would build a chapel in honor of St. Anne, the patron saint of sailors, protectors against storms, and those who travel by water. Faithful to that promise, she built this chapel as a lasting expression of gratitude for God's protection and care. Crafted with shells gathered from the nearby Wabash River, the chapel remains a cherished place of prayer, lovingly preserved by the Sisters of Providence as a testament to gratitude, faith, and the enduring promise of Divine Providence. Each year, on the Feast of St. Anne, July 26, the Sisters of Providence gather here in prayer, honoring Mother Theodore's promise to St. Anne and continuing a tradition of gratitude that has endured for generations.

Encountering Mother Theodore

"Many people think joy comes after life's struggles are over. I discovered something different. Joy comes from knowing that God walks beside us in every struggle. Let gratitude become your daily prayer, and joy will quietly find its home within your heart. There is no assurance for our future other than that Divine Providence takes care of the birds of the air and the grass of the field."

Pilgrimage Reflection

As we journey together, we hold in prayer a world longing for peace and healing. Even amid uncertainty, Mother Theodore invites us to cultivate grateful hearts, not because life is free from hardship, but because gratitude opens us to recognize God's presence and the goodness that still surrounds us. May our gratitude inspire us to become bearers of hope and joy for others.

Pilgrimage Prayer (All are invited to pray)

God of Joy,
give us hearts that remain grateful, even in uncertain times.
May the joy we receive from You
become a source of hope and encouragement for a world longing for peace.
Amen.

Reflection:



Saint Mother Theodore's Wisdom

"Yet there is no assurance for the future other than that Divine Providence takes care of the birds of the air and grass of the field."
— Saint Mother Theodore Guerin, Journals and Letters, Journal entry (1850s)

Humility

The Story of This Sacred Space

Here rests generations of Sisters of Providence whose lives were shaped by trust in Divine Providence and expressed through lives of prayer, courage, and loving service. Inspired by Mother Theodore Guerin, they responded to the needs of their own times, educating children, caring for the sick, advocating for justice, and walking with those on the margins. Though their earthly journeys have ended, their witness continues to inspire all who seek to live lives rooted in love, mercy, and hope.

Encountering Mother Theodore

"Before I leave you, I ask you to carry one truth with you: Providence is not only the story of my life or the story of these Sisters, it is the story of your life as well. You may wonder what difference one person can make. I tell you, small acts of love have always been the way God's work unfolds. A child welcomed, a person comforted, a neighbor helped, a prayer offered, these are the seeds from which a more loving world grows. Give yourself generously to God with all that belongs to the Divine. Oh, how many graces would be the fruit of this self-surrender."

Pilgrimage Reflection

Every pilgrimage leads us to this question: What will I carry home? The Sisters of Providence entrusted their lives to God and answered the needs of their generation with courage, compassion, and faith. Today, the invitation is ours. As we leave this sacred place, may we continue the journey by becoming instruments of love, justice, and mercy in our own communities.

Pilgrimage Prayer (All are invited to pray)

God of humility,
help us live lives that become blessings for others.
May our faith inspire hope for generations yet to come.
Amen.

Reflection:

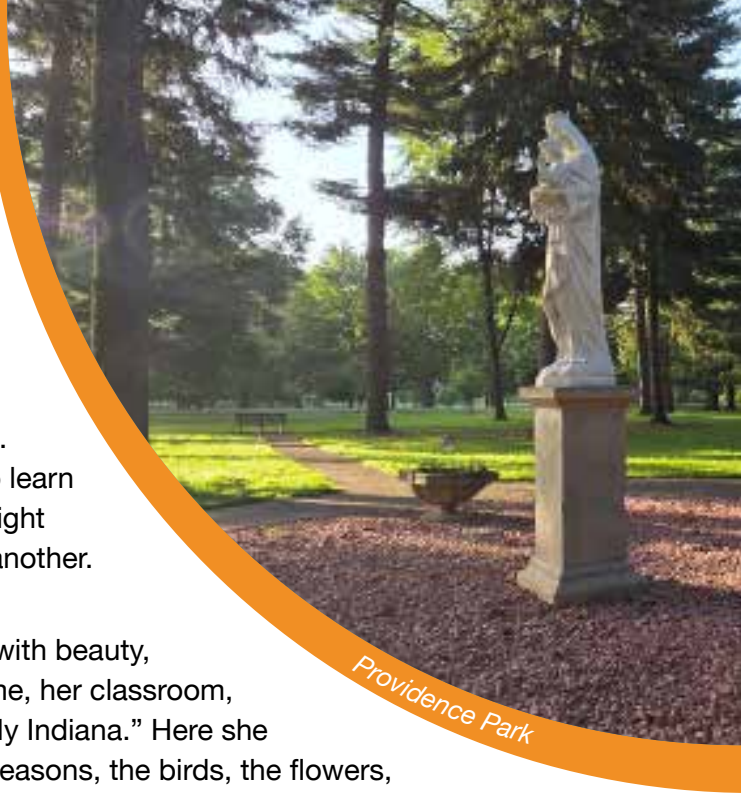


The Cemetery

Saint Mother Theodore's Wisdom

"What have we to do in order to become saints? Nothing extraordinary; nothing more than what we do every day. Only do it for the love of God."
— Saint Mother Theodore Guerin, from Instructions: On the Saints, 1854

Care of All Creation


Providence Park

Acknowledging the Land

The story of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods does not begin with Mother Theodore Guerin and the Sisters of Providence. These lands were home to Indigenous peoples, including the Wea peoples of the Miami Nation, whose relationship with this place reaches back generations. As we walk this sacred ground, we recognize that its story is larger and more complex than our own. We give thanks for the place that has become our home, seek to learn from those whose histories are woven into it, and ask how we might continue to deepen our relationship with this land and with one another.

My Indiana

When Mother Theodore arrived in 1840, she entered a land rich with beauty, history, and the presence of God. These forests became her home, her classroom, and her sanctuary. She affectionately referred to this place as “My Indiana.” Here she discovered God’s presence in the towering trees, the changing seasons, the birds, the flowers, and the quiet rhythm of the woods. She learned from the land, gathering medicinal herbs to care for her Sisters and those in need. Creation was one of God’s first teachers.

Pilgrimage Reflection

Mother Theodore’s earthly journey came to an end in 1856 at the age of 57. Her voice has guided us through this pilgrimage, and now we are invited to carry forward the mission her courageous “yes” began.

One woman’s faith became a congregation. That congregation became a living mission of prayer, education, service, and advocacy that continues to unfold in ways far beyond what she could have imagined.

The call of Providence has never belonged to one generation or one place alone. It has traveled from France to Indiana, from these woods to communities near and far, carried by many hands and many hearts.

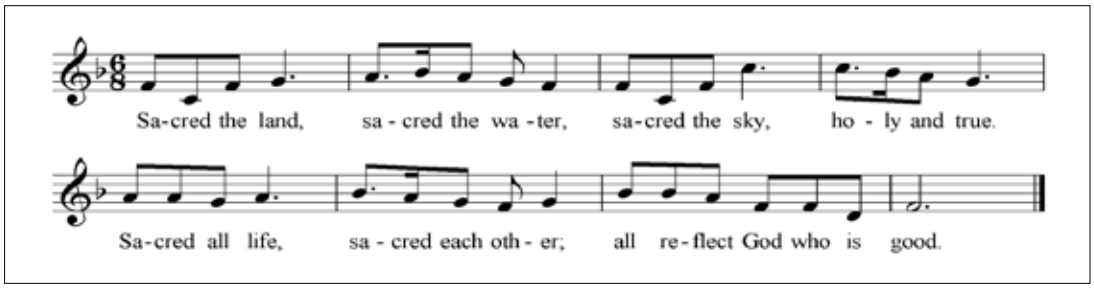
Today, that mission continues with us. We are called to co-create a world where every person’s dignity is honored and the sacredness of all creation is upheld. This is the work of Providence in our time: to recognize the presence of God in every person, to care for the gift of creation entrusted to us, and to bring hope, justice, and compassion wherever we are called to serve.

As we gather in this sacred place, we also remember with gratitude the 20th anniversary of the canonization of Saint Mother Theodore Guerin. Like Mother Theodore, may we trust in Providence, especially when the path ahead is not yet clear, and may we courageously say yes to the work that is ours to do.

Invitation to Be Still

Be still.
Listen.
Notice the wind moving gently through the pines.
Listen for the birds.
Feel the air. Breathe deeply.
Receive the gift of this sacred place.
Allow creation itself to become your prayer.

Sacred Creation



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