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Ukrainian Catholic Pilgrimage to Lourdes in Litchfield

CONNECTICUT, USA - Sunday, April 3rd, Bishop Paul Chomnycky, OSBM, head of the Ukrainian Catholic Eparchy of Stamford, led a gathering of Ukrainian and Latin Rite Catholics at our Montfort Shrine: Grotto of Lourdes in Litchfield for a "*Moleben*" to the Mother of God / Prayers for Ukraine. Despite a cold and rainy day, the Chapel was filled, many having been born in Ukraine or with relatives now in grave danger. The prayers, litanies and hymns were all sung in Ukrainian, in a spontaneous choral harmony. The Prayers to the Mother of God ended with the Lourdes Hymn, sung at the Grotto.

Our *Shrine Grotto of Lourdes in Litchfield* was chosen because of the cherished link to two famous shrines: **Our Lady of Lourdes in France**, with its sacred waters and healing, and to **Zarvanytsia**, the ancient and most significant pilgrimage center in Ukraine.

According to the local tradition, in the year 1240, a monk was fleeing the Mongol invaders. He stopped in the woods for a night, exhausted from hunger and his wounds. The monk sincerely prayed for his war-torn land, asking for the intercession of the Mother of God, yet soon fell asleep while praying. In a dream, the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared with two angels holding white lilies. The monk awoke and saw a beautiful valley surrounded by a dense forest. Suddenly a spring of clear water shone in the grass, and above it, the Icon of the Blessed Virgin Mary with the baby Jesus in her arms. The monk fell to his knees and prayed earnestly while washing his wounds. Soon his strength returned to him, and in honor of this miracle, he built a cell in a cave and placed

the Icon there. He called the place where he fell asleep – **Zarvanytsia**. People heard about the miraculous cure and started coming from everywhere.

During the Second World War, the Icon of the Mother of God was hidden by the villagers. It was returned to the church only in 1989 when services resumed after the era of the Soviet bans. Actually, the Soviet authorities did everything possible to prevent people from coming to **Zarvanytsia**. In 1960 the Soviets decided to destroy the spring itself, blowing up the chapel above it, and fencing the area with barbed wire. But even this did not stop the pilgrims, who, hiding from the Secret Police, came to the stream at night, begging for healing.

Zarvanytsia is one of the 25 largest Marian spiritual centers in Europe. Before this War, millions of pilgrims came to this place to pray to the Blessed Virgin. The Montfort community serving the Shrine Grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes in Litchfield were honored to host this Pilgrimage of Peace for the people of Ukraine and Eastern Europe. We echo Pope Francis' words in his Act of Consecration on March 25, 2022:

"O Mother, amid the thunder of weapons, may your prayer turn our thoughts to peace. May your maternal touch soothe those who suffer and flee from the rain of bombs. May your motherly embrace comfort those forced to leave their homes and their native land.... Grant that war may end, and peace spread throughout the world..."

Fr. Bill CONSIDINE, SMM