

# THE NATIONAL MONUMENTS AT THE INTERNATIONAL FRIENDSHIP GARDENS OF CHRISTIAN COUNTRIES THAT DISPLAY NO SYMBOLS OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

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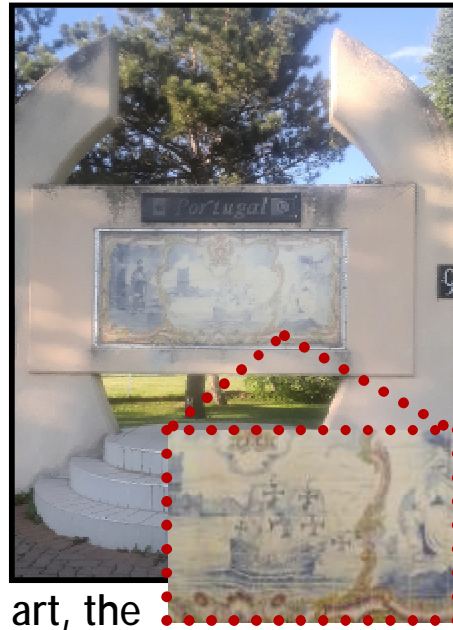


Commentaries by Msgr. Pat Stilla  
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## PORTUGAL The Monument

Portugal's Monument is the first of the nine memorials of predominantly Christian nations in the International Friendship Gardens, which do not display explicit symbols of Christianity. However, it does depict hints of that nation's Catholic heritage and Faith. This majestic and beautiful Memorial erected by the Portuguese Canadians of Thunder Bay recounts, in art, the history of Portuguese sailors who visited



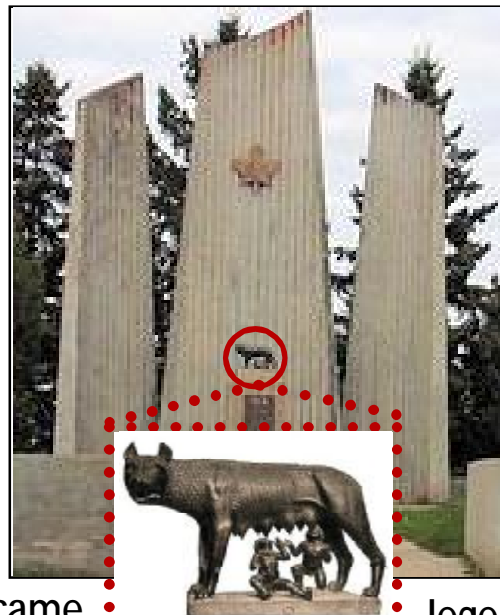
two thousand years ago.

and explored many corners of the globe. On the billowing sails of the vessels displayed here in the painted ceramic tiles, the viewer sees several crosses (*as in the inset*). These crosses serve as indirect representations of the Christian Faith that has influenced and shaped the development of Portugal's inhabitants since it was geographically part of the Roman Empire, over

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## ITALY The Monument

Christianity has been present in Italy for at least 2,000 years, predated by forms of paganism practiced by the inhabitants of Imperial Rome. After the death of Christ, the Apostles Peter and Paul travelled across the Roman Empire preaching the Christian Faith. Though both were executed by Emperor Nero in 65 AD, Christianity grew exponentially and became permanently intertwined with the Italian Peninsula from Apostolic times. Three hundred years later, it officially became the state religion of the Roman Empire and, since then, Italy's capital city has been the centre of Roman Catholicism.



legend, when these 2 brothers were abandoned by their mother on the banks of the Tiber River, they were found and suckled by a she-wolf, as depicted in the Memorial's statue (*see inset*). Today, replicas of this same image are displayed everywhere in Rome and throughout Italy.

Despite this rich legacy of Christianity, the Italian Monument surprisingly does not display on it any recognizable Christian symbols. Instead, the tri-walled memorial focusses on Rome's legendary founding by the brothers Romulus and Remus, as described in the writings of the Roman poet, Virgil. According to this pagan

## GREECE

### The Monument

The Christian Faith has been an integral part of Greek life and culture since it was introduced there in the first century by St. Paul and St. Andrew. However, despite Greece's Christian heritage, their Monument in our Gardens, like the Italian one, does not contain any recognizable Christian symbol. Instead, an Olympic Flame is proudly displayed here at the top of a solitary Greek column. Perhaps



in that it speaks of the value of peace and harmony among all peoples!

the monument's designers wanted us to know that the Olympics were always designed to be *peaceful*. Before the Games began in ancient Greece, all wars were stopped so that people could travel safely to Olympia to compete. In this indirect way, I suppose, the Greek monument does echo the Christian Gospel,

in that it speaks of the value of peace and harmony among all peoples!

## THE PHILIPPINES

### The Monument

Several families in our Parish together with Fr. Marco Ladao, who resides in the rectory, are proud of their Filipino heritage and of their Catholic Faith. This year, Filipinos around the world are celebrating 500 years of the arrival of Christianity in their nation. Today, over 92% of the population of the Philippines professes the Christian Faith and most are devout practising Catholics. Their Monument is formed by a grouping of 3 metal obelisks resting on a stone plinth, each representing one of the 3 main islands of this nation, which



is often called the "*Pearl of the Orient*": (Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao).

Many may not be aware that our Cathedral has a special connection to this Filipino Memorial. It was designed years ago, by one of our parishioners, Reynaldo Hernandez. Though it does not display Christian symbols on it, like some of the other Christian nations, the words etched on the

Monument express the ultimate goal of every Christian and of every Filipino: "*A national commitment to Peace, Friendship and Understanding*".

## THE NETHERLANDS

### The Monument

It was in Roman times that Christianity came to the territory which we now know as Holland or, more accurately as, "The Netherlands". Although today, 65% of this modern nation's inhabitants claim that they do not profess any Faith affiliation, those who do, are devout members of the two predominant Christian Faiths: Roman Catholicism and



Christian Reform. This same commitment to Faith practice also applies to our parishioners of Dutch descent and to most of the Dutch immigrants of Thunder Bay. Again, no Christian image is displayed on their monument. Instead, The Netherlands is represented in our Gardens by its easily recognizable landmark, an iconic windmill.

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## GERMANY

### The Monuments

Our parishioners of German descent continue to actively practice their Faith in our Parish. Christianity was first introduced in the Germanic lands and has flourished since the 4<sup>th</sup> century. Our Thunder Bay German Canadians have erected 2 memorials in the Gardens to honour their culture. The first is a large stone obelisk set on a



plinth and the other is a pastorally inspired green space of relaxation, decorated with flowers and equipped with a watermill.

The sign on the arch over its entrance announces: "*Germany: from the Mountains to the Sea*". Although no Christian symbols are displayed on either one, I personally find the watermill space a perfect place for prayer and quiet reflection.

## CROATIA

### The Monument

In our Diocese, many Catholics of Croatian descent attend Mass in their own Church of the Assumption on Oliver Rd. while some are members of our own Parish. Two monuments commemorate their culture. The first represents its secular side: a blue industrial obelisk with "Croatia" inscribed on it. The second recalls its religious dimension, honouring the first King of Croatia, Tomislav. Although Christianity was practiced in what is now Croatia since



the 7<sup>th</sup> century, it was this King, who united his nation to the Catholic Church in 925 A.D. Since then, the Church played an important role in Croatia until 1945 when it was forced to be part of Communist Yugoslavia. The Communists attempted, though unsuccessfully, to banish Faith from the lives of the people. Then, in 1990, when Croatia became independent again, the Church regained its prominent role and now, 90% profess Catholicism.

## SLOVENIA

### The Monument

Some parishioners hail from the Republic of Slovenia. The territory of their heritage was first Christianized at the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> century under the ruler, "Borup". It was he who made Slovenia part of Christian Europe. Later, his son who succeeded him, invited Irish monks to Slovenia to help further Christianize the people. The Mission-



aries, Sts. Cyril and Methodius also played a part. Today, over 92% of the population is Christian. Despite this, their monument does not display symbols of Faith. Instead, Slovenia is represented by a three dimensional version of its coat of arms with 3 slanted pillars in its national colours of red, blue and white, emerging from it.

## FINLAND

### The Monument

Finland has been Christian since the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Today, 75 % of the people profess Christianity, with the great majority belonging to the Evangelical Lutheran Church. Still, no Christian symbol is depicted on its Monument. Instead, our Finns have



chosen two whooping swans in flight, at the top of a pillar to: *"commemorate the early Finnish immigrants who settled here in 1876 to make our country a better place by hard work and dedication"*. The Whooping swan is Finland's national bird.