

religious schools were closed. Soon after Lithuania declared its independence from the U.S.S.R. in 1989, these religious houses were re-opened. Church services are once again freely celebrated.

For the third time in its history, Our Lady of Dawn was honored by the Vatican when in 1954 a stamp was issued which bore the likeness of the miraculous image. Four years later, the Lithuanian people installed a chapel in honor of the Gate of Dawn in the lower Basilica of St. Peter in Rome.

*\*(excerpted from [Miraculous Images of Our Lady](#))*

### **MIRACLES AND VOTIVE OFFERINGS**

**\*\***In 1761, monk Hilarion published a book, collecting miracles attributed to the painting of Mary. His first recorded miracle occurred in 1671, the same year the first chapel was built. A two-year old child fell from the second floor onto stone pavement and was badly injured. The parents then prayed to *Our Lady* and the next day the child was healthy once again. In 1702, Vilnius was captured by the Swedish Army during the Great Northern War. The Swedes, who were Protestants, mocked the painting, forbade songs and prayers, and partied around the gate of Dawn. One soldier even shot at the painting (the hole can still be seen on the right sleeve). Other stories of various miracles were kept by the Carmelite monks, but those books did not survive.

Votive offerings became a tradition. They are usually small silver objects (hearts, crucifixes, figures of praying people, images of cured eyes, legs, arms). Currently, there are about 8,000 silver votive objects in the chapel. The large crescent moon, located right beneath *Our Lady*, is also a votive offering. Its origins are unknown, but it bears an inscription in the Polish language and a date of 1849. The moon incorporates well with the silver cloth, adding additional parallels with the Woman of the Apocalypse, described in the Book of Revelation as *a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of TWELVE stars.*

*\*\**(excerpted from [en.wikipedia.org](http://en.wikipedia.org))



Original Painting of Our Lady with the metal removed.

**Note:** In 1995, on a pilgrimage, Nick and I were privileged to attend Mass in the chapel at the Vatican dedicated Our Lady of Dawn.

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## ***Our Lady of Dawn***

***(Gate of Dawn)***

***Vilnius, Lithuania***

***Sixteenth Century***



***Our Lady of Dawn— also known as  
The Blessed Virgin Mary Mother of Mercy***

### ***Prayer to Our Lady***

***O my Mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary,  
I offer myself entirely to Thy grace and to Thy overwhelming mercy  
today and forever,  
but mostly at the hour of my death do I dedicate myself to thee.  
To thee do I dedicate my body and soul, all my happiness and hope, all  
my sorrows and sufferings!  
I offer my life and the end of my life to Thy holy hands so that through  
Thy merits all my deeds and acts go according to  
Thy holy will and  
according to the will of Thy sweetest Son! Amen.***

## OUR LADY OF DAWN

\*The historical monument and religious shrine which is known as the Gate of Dawn, or *Ausros Vartai*, is found in Vilnius, the capital city of Lithuania. In the first years of the sixteenth century, a great stone wall with nine gates and defense towers was built around the city. The Gate of Dawn, on the southeastern side of the city, was located near the Orthodox Church of the Most Holy Trinity. The Gate soon became a religious shrine when two paintings were hung on it, one depicting Jesus Christ, the other the Blessed Virgin Mary. This original painting of Our Lady sustained weather damage and was replaced by the one now treasured by the people of Vilnius.

Painted on eight oaken boards, the Blessed Virgin looks downward. Her hands are gracefully crossed at chest level. With only the face, neck and hands visible, the rest of the figure is entirely vested with intricately designed silver. The head of the Blessed Mother, which is inclined toward her right side, is covered with a silver veil and is surrounded by a golden halo that emits golden rays and stars.

According to the Carmelite Friar Hilary, who first recorded the history of the painting, the friars were particularly devoted to the painting of the Blessed Virgin on the Gate of Dawn. For this reason the Carmelite friars built a monastery in 1620 near the Gate. A year later, the friars began building a monastery church. At its completion in 1650, the church was dedicated to St. Theresa of Avila.

Twenty-one years after the completion of the church, the friars felt the need to express their devotion to the Mother of God by building a wooden chapel on the gate. Here they placed the painting, which was already covered with silver. It was during this time that the Blessed Virgin began to perform miracles for those who were devoted to her portrait. A Carmelite preacher recognized several miracles that took place during the transfer of the painting to the wooden chapel. Friar Hilary, the historian of the painting, recorded 17 other miracles that took place between 1671 and 1761. Although the Church declined to pass judgment on these miracles, the wonder-working

Powers of Our Lady of Dawn became widely known through the efforts of the Carmelites and the Jesuits.

While the miraculous nature of the portrait was still being considered by Church authorities, the newly consecrated bishops of Vilnius acknowledged their belief in the miraculous character of the painting by initiating a custom in 1688 whereby each joined a procession to the Gate of Dawn to pray for the Blessed Mother's guidance before assuming their episcopal duties.

When Vilnius suffered from a disastrous fire in 1715, the wooden chapel on the gate that was built by the Carmelites was unfortunately lost. However, before the flames reached the chapel, the Carmelites transferred the painting to the safety of the Church of St. Teresa. The painting was restored to its original site when a brick chapel was built for it in 1726.

The first official recognition of the miraculous painting occurred in 1773, when Pope Clement XIV granted an indulgence to all who worshipped at the Gate of Dawn.

When the Russians occupied Lithuania in 1795, they destroyed the wall that encircled Vilnius but, as though by a miraculous intervention, the Gate of Dawn shrine remained standing and untouched. When Friar Hilary's history of the shrine was reprinted in 1823, the miraculous painting became more widely known. The Carmelites at that time produced holy cards bearing the likeness of the venerated image. These they freely distributed to the faithful who recorded that 28 different reproductions of the portrait were painted by Polish, Lithuanian, German and French artists who wanted larger reminders of the miraculous image.

Our Lady of Dawn was greatly honored in 1927, when Pope Pius XI ordered its solemn crowning. This crown of precious metal is positioned atop the elaborate silver veil of the Madonna. Miniature angels on either side seem to assist in supporting the crown's weight.

Before World War II, the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass was offered every morning in the Gate of Dawn chapel. In the evening a litany and hymns were sung in praise of the Virgin Mary. The chapel was usually filled to capacity for these services, but was especially filled to overflowing on November 16, the Feast of Our Lady of Mercy. Often, when the chapel was filled with worshippers, many were obliged to kneel outside the chapel to express their devotion. Because of the busy pedestrian traffic, the street in front of the chapel was closed to all motor vehicles.

The situation was changed after the Russian occupation of 1944. The street was opened to vehicular traffic, religious processions were forbidden, and religious freedom at the shrine was curtailed. Convents, monasteries and