



## **AMERICA/NICARAGUA - Nicaragua celebrates 450 years of devotion to Mary**

El Viejo (Agenzia Fides) - The Episcopal Conference of Nicaragua makes a pilgrimage tomorrow, December 6, at the Basilica of Our Lady of Nicaragua, in the town of El Viejo, in Chinandega, where a Mass will be celebrated for the traditional "Lavada de la Plata", the feast in which thousands of Nicaraguans and pilgrims from other countries come to pay homage to the Immaculate Conception of Mary. The main Mass will begin at 10 am and there will be, however, other celebrations because the 450th anniversary of the arrival of the sacred image in the country will be celebrated.

According to the note sent to Fides Agency by the Episcopal Conference, there are three versions of the story about the arrival of the little statue in Nicaragua: it was delivered by St. Teresa of Avila to her brother Lorenzo so he would be protected during his travels in Latin America. After stopping in El Viejo in his journey to Peru, Lorenzo could not leave due to a series of phenomena that convinced him to leave the image of Mary there, immediately worshipped by the local population. The Bishops state that "all the stories show Santa Teresa's desire that the image of Our Lady accompanies and protects her family during the travels to the new world, and also the willingness of the Madonna to stay in Nicaragua. The ways of God are incalculable and, legends or stories, the truth is that the Blessed Virgin in the mystery of the Immaculate Conception, chose the village of El Viejo to begin to 'win' the hearts of Nicas and from there it spread to all others."

The church was declared a National Shrine on October 8, 1995; Pope John Paul II, in his second visit to Nicaragua declared it a Minor Basilica on February 7, 1996; the Episcopal Conference of Nicaragua, on 13 December 2001, declared the Virgin Immaculate Patroness of Nicaragua. (CE) (Agenzia Fides 05/12/2012)