Vailankanni, Our Lady of Health

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Vailankanni, on the coast of the Bay of Bengal in southern India, owes great part of its notoriety to Our Lady of Health, also known as the “Lourdes of the East.”

The city of Vailankanni, in the State of Tamil Nadu, welcomes thousands of pilgrims, who each year come to venerate the Virgin Mary. Like in other shrines, the Mother of God gathers her children in this basilica, where one can attend liturgical celebrations in English and Hindi, as well as in other local languages such as Tamil, Marathi, Malayalam, Telugu and Kannada.

Since the 16th century, several miracles and Marian apparitions to different individuals have taken place. The first apparition took place when a Hindu boy had gone out to get milk. On his way back, the Virgin Mary appeared to him and asked for some milk for her child, which she held in her arms. The boy agreed, but when he returned home he was demanded a reason for his delay. He explained all that had happened, and seeing a surplus of milk, everyone realized that none was missing. The boy took his master to the place of the apparition and the Virgin once again appeared to him.

Several years later, the Virgin Mary appeared to another boy, once again asking for milk, and the same miracle took place. Furthermore, this boy, who was a cripple, was cured. This time the Virgin Mary requested that they build a chapel in her honor, and so it was done. The chapel soon became a place of veneration to Mary, Our Lady of Health (“Arokia Matha”).

However, the story does not end here. Miracles have continued to happen; in particular, the miracles that occurred in the 17th century and in 2004. In the 17th century, a merchant ship from Portugal was wrecked on the coast of the gulf. The sailors invoked the Virgin Mary, Star of the Sea, and promised to build a shrine in her honor if they reached land safely. They were miraculously saved by the Virgin and upon their arrival they were taken to the Chapel that was built in honor of Our Lady of Vailankanni. They transformed the simple chapel into a shrine, which in time has undergone several restorations until turning into a truly majestic sanctuary. On November 3rd, 1962, Pope John XXIII elevated the Shrine of Our Lady of Velankanni to the rank of basilica.

In 2004 there was a great tsunami. The area of Vailankanni was one of the most devastated areas. When the waves invaded the city, 2000 pilgrims were in the shrine attending mass. The shrine was miraculously spared, while the waves destroyed remaining buildings in the city.

In this way, Our Lady of Health has shown herself to be the caring Mother who protects her children of Vailankanni, India and the entire world.

Prayer of Consecration to Our Lady of Vailankanni:

Most Holy Virgin Mary,
Mother of God and our Mother of Health,
today we come to you fully confident in your maternal heart.
Today we consecrate to you our work and sacrifices,
all we have and all that we are.
Reign over us, dearest Mother,
that we may be wholly yours
in prosperity and in adversity,
in joy and in sorrow,
in health and in sickness,
in life and in death.
Because of you, we praise the Holy Catholic Church;
protect her against all attacks of her enemies.
Because of you,
we praise the human race;
may all men and nations come to understand
and fulfil the precepts of your divine Son,
love their neighbour in order that there may be genuine peace
in justice and in truth. Amen.