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A father and daughter kneel in prayer before a reliquary holding first-class relics of St. Margaret Mary Alacoque at Denver's Cathedral Basilica of the Immaculate Conception Aug. 3, 2026. (OSV News/Denver Catholic/André Escaleira Jr.)

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St. Margaret Mary Alacoque's relics drew pilgrims from across Northern Colorado for prayer, veneration and a historic meeting with Denver's own apostle of the Sacred Heart and a servant of God, Julia Greeley.

Denver's Cathedral Basilica of the Immaculate Conception became home to a second apostle of the Sacred Heart Aug. 2, as the first-class relics in the care of the Knights of Columbus were placed mere steps from the tomb of Greeley, a formerly enslaved woman known for her works of charity and a candidate for sainthood.

Thousands of faithful from across Northern Colorado made a pilgrimage to the Cathedral Basilica, the heart of the archdiocese, to venerate the relics and pray before them, asking St. Margaret Mary's intercession for their needs.

The 17th-century French Visitation nun is known for the visions she received from Jesus, in which he revealed his profound love for humanity through his Sacred Heart. In those same visions, Jesus encouraged St. Margaret Mary to foster devotion to his Sacred Heart, which she endeavored to accomplish with the help of her spiritual director, St. Claude de la Colombiere.

"The relics themselves connect to St. Margaret Mary, and she adored and loved the heart of God, and being able to connect directly to the heart of God is a special honor," Joe Kaplan, a parishioner at St. John XXIII Parish in Fort Collins, told Denver Catholic, the archdiocesan news outlet.

Through prayer before the saint's relics, the faithful were able to bring family and friends, vocations, health challenges and gratitude to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

For one local family, that meant asking St. Margaret Mary's prayers for their unborn daughter — named after the saint — as she faces a serious heart condition. For others, the experience of praying before the relics was less dire but powerful all the same.

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"Venerating the relics was an experience of heaven on earth. To be in the presence of a saint who provided the message of mercy and hope in the Sacred Heart of Jesus was surreal," said Deisy Muñoz.

No matter how the faithful approached the relics, their prayer pointed to an age-old reality: God is among his people.

"The Israelites were proud to call themselves the children of God, and the greatest gift God granted them was his presence," said Fr. Bernald Ssubi, the cathedral's parochial vicar, in his homily as he drew on the Sunday's Scripture readings.

That presence, he said, offers abundant life and a message of hope for God's people in exile, calling them to return to him so that nothing can separate us from his love.

Acknowledging that suffering, uncertainty and persecution can disturb the heart, Ssubi reminded those gathered that God's presence in Christ can conquer all things.

"God remains our support and our strength," he explained. "He is always compassionate to the poor and the marginalized, to the sick and the weak, to the sinners and to the outcasts."

As the line to venerate the relics stretched around the church, a lively, childlike excitement filled the sacred space. Among the thousands who came to the cathedral basilica were several Colorado Catholic families and plenty of young Margarets, Marys and Margaret Marys.

For Andy Green, a parishioner at Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish in Northglenn and a father of four, the relics' visit was the perfect opportunity for family prayer.

"It was really cool to see my second youngest daughter, because she's named after St. Margaret Mary, pray in there and hold her little rosary up to St. Margaret and ask for her intercession," he told Denver Catholic.

"It was fun to encourage devotion in her. I mean, she's only three, but I still like to encourage that devotion," he added. "To see that spark of joy there, to know that someone has come before and lived with such joy and power, and to hope that my daughter will be able to experience that as well."

This sort of prayer opportunity strikes Green as particularly meaningful, he said, because it allowed his family to encounter the beauty of the Church, the cathedral and the saints.

"I have four daughters, and they don't have a lot of exposure to relics yet. So my wife and I feel a responsibility to get them out to go see relics or holy places, so they have an encounter with these saints and just holy places in general," he said. "So I think just being here and visiting St. Margaret Mary and the Cathedral is encouraging to us parents."

As the cathedral basilica prepared to celebrate its Sunday Masses, St. Margaret Mary was moved from her place in front of the main altar to the side altar of the Sacred Heart of Jesus — mere feet from Greeley's tomb.

The symbolism was not lost on attendees: Denver's apostle of the Sacred Heart was, in a sense, welcoming her saintly sister and apostle to the Mile High City.

Greeley was known for her extraordinary charity in Denver's Five Points neighborhood and for the red wagon she used to deliver food, clothing and other necessities to families in need, including poor white families who might have been embarrassed to receive help from a Black woman in public.

Born a slave in Missouri sometime between 1833 and 1848, she moved to Denver around 1880. When she died in 1918, her ceaseless efforts to aid the poor had made Greeley so well-known in Denver that an estimated 1,000 mourners came to Loyola Chapel where her body lay to pay their respects.

Known as Denver's "Angel of Charity" — and despite her own modest means and painful arthritis — she walked miles to serve others and to spread devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, especially among firefighters.

With these two apostles of the Sacred Heart together at the heart of the Archdiocese of Denver, the love of Jesus became a bit more visible for the local faithful. In that meeting of hearts, both burning with charity, Denver Catholics caught a renewed glimpse of the heart of Christ, burning with love for them.