

Our Lady of the Assumption

The Feast of the Assumption on 15 August celebrates the Blessed Virgin Mary's assumption into heaven. It is also the patronal feast of the Catholic people in New Zealand. It is one of two Holy Days of Obligation for New Zealand Catholics. The other is Christmas Day.

The depiction of the Blessed Virgin Mary on this page is called the Pompallier Madonna and is of special significance to Catholics in Aotearoa New Zealand. This Madonna was presented to Pius IX in the 1840s by the Benedictine Nuns of Campus Martius. In turn, this Madonna was given to Bishop Pompallier by Pope Pius IX on the occasion of Bishop Pompallier's visit to Rome in April 1847. He brought the Madonna back to Aotearoa New Zealand and had copies distributed widely. This work has now become known in New Zealand as "the Pompallier Madonna".

On 13 September 2004 the New Zealand bishops on their ad limina visit to Rome met with Pope John Paul II. Bishop Denis Browne, then the President of the New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference, presented the Holy Father with a copy of the "Pompallier Madonna". In his address to the Holy Father Bishop Browne said the following: "We offer you this copy of the Madonna as an appreciation of your own love for Mary and the frequent calls that you make for us to place all we do in Her hands. "

The original Pompallier Madonna is believed to date back to before 750 AD. Sadly the original was stolen in the late 1960s from St Patrick's College in Wellington. Soon after it vanished from the glass cabinet where it was stored a passerby saw it in the window of a second hand shop and called the school. The shop was closed when the school staff arrived and when it reopened the man in the store said he could not remember any such item being for sale. It is much more likely it is in the collection of a private owner who may not know of its significance to the Church in Aotearoa New Zealand.

