



Our Lady of the Rock *Salamanca, Spain*

Our Lady of the Rock, known as Peña de Francia, is located on a rocky precipice in the province of Salamanca, Spain. At an elevation of 5,652 feet, it is the highest Marian shrine in the world.



Simon Rolan, a Franciscan tertiary, lived in Paris, France in the 1400's. He was a pious Catholic devoted to the Blessed Mother. When his parents died, they left him a substantial inheritance. Simon gave away much of his wealth to the Church and to the poor. He began having dreams about finding a statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

In 1425, Simon was awakened by a voice. He was told that his name would now be Simon Vela which means "candle." He was instructed to leave France and go to Peña de Francia to find an image of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Simon set out at once not knowing where to find this place. Our Lady told him that the Rock of France would be found in Spain.

Simon traveled for nine years without finding anyone who knew anything about Peña de Francia. He was about to give up his search and return to France when he heard a voice urging him to persevere in finding the Rock. Finally, in 1434, Simon met a traveling merchant who pointed him in the direction he sought. Though the craggy mountain was in view, the destination was still far off.

Simon set off at once without any provisions. When he was at his weakest, he happened upon an abandoned basket of food, then slept in the nearest cave. In the morning, Simon realized just how cavernous the top of the precipice was. Overwhelmed at the daunting task of trying to find the image of the Virgin Mary in the vast system of caves, Simon dropped to his knees and spent the day prayer. He drifted asleep. The next morning, Simon heard Our Lady urge him to continue the search. A brilliant light led Simon to the top of the hill where he found the Blessed Virgin Mary sitting on a golden throne holding the Christ Child.

The Blessed Mother instructed Simon to dig at this site. Once he found the image, he was to take it to the highest point and build a shrine. She told Simon to gather help. Simon found five willing men, though, each man had a different ailment. The men were eager to help, believing they would find gold despite Simon's attempt to get them to believe they were digging for an image of the Blessed Mother. They dug for quite a while before hitting a large stone. Beneath the stone they found a black Madonna and Child nestled in smaller cove of rocks. The four men were healed of their afflictions. French knights hid the statue at this site in the 9th century upon the invasion of the Moors.

Miracles have happened at the site. For example, a child fell from the top and was unharmed. A great devotion to Our Lady of the Rock emerged. Peña de Francia is even referenced in the book *Don Quixote* by Miguel Cervantes written in 1605.

Dominican monks built the chapel and convent that remains there today. The original statue was stolen and damaged. A new statue was made around the old one. Pilgrims are able to see and touch the statue which currently resides in the shrine.

This year, we focus on Mary, [the Mediatrix of All Graces](#), the model disciple, who shows us how to receive and bear the Word to the world. For more on Year 2 preparation, visit: www.arlingtondiocese.org/goldenjubiliecelebration/