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## 'great cross --- beacon of the faith'

Hampton Dunn

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# Photouring Florida

By HAMPTON DUNN



## THE 'GREAT CROSS --- BEACON OF THE FAITH'

By HAMPTON DUNN

ST. AUGUSTINE --- In 1965, when this historic city celebrated the 400th anniversary of the arrival of Pedro Menendez, it noted another significant event.

The "Great Cross --- Beacon of the Faith," located at the Mission of Nombre de Dios, on Matanzas Bay in the shadow of the big Castillo de San Marcos fortress, marks the site where the cross of Chirstianity was first planted in this nation over 400 years ago.

Erected "to remind all men who pass through or enter St. Augustine of our country's religious beginnings," says Mission Director Father Michael Gannon, the 208-foot cross is visible from some 23 miles by sea for large vessels and 19 miles for smaller craft, and from highways leading into St. Augustine.

Nombre de Dios Mission also celebrated with an excellent architectural project that included a sanctuary and a library to serve as a center for historical research. Referring to this universal symbol of Christianity, the then Archbishop of Florida, Joseph P. Hurley, said: faith, and that by a rebirth of faith, this nation shall overcome its atheist enemies, and continue its glorious career of freedom under God."

The 65-ton, 20-story stainless steel cross, believed to be the tallest in the Western Hemisphere, stands at the approximate site where priests in the Menendez expedition first planted the cross, and from which they launched an extensive mission program to the Indians. The Mission is often called America's most sacred and historic site.

The program to construct the giant cross was started by then Vice President Lyndon Johnson, later President, on a visit to the Mission in September, 1963. Its was dedicated Oct. 30, 1965, by the Archbishop of Spain. A 5,000-voice choir and the Stetson University (Baptist) Band participated.

Father Lopez de Mendoza Grajales, who accompanied Menendez on the Spanish expedition, described the commemorated event; "On Saturday (September) the 8th, the General (Menendez) landed with many banners spread, to the sounds of trumpets and salutes of artillery. As I had gone ashore the evening before, I took a cross and went to meet him, singing the hymn 'Te Deum Laudamus' (O God We Praise You). The General marched up to the cross, followed by all who accompanied him, and there they all knelt and embraced the cross. A large number of Indians watched. . .and imitated all they saw done."

