



A priest holding a police motorcycling helmet, blesses the helmets of faithful during the IX Pilgrimage of the Blessing of Helmets that draws tens of thousands at the Roman Catholic holy shrine of Fatima, in Fatima, Portugal, Sunday, Sept. 22, 2024. (AP/Ana Brigida)

by Associated Press

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Fatima, Portugal — September 23, 2024

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An estimated 180,000 motorcyclists gathered Sunday at the Our Lady of Fatima shrine in central Portugal for the ninth annual Pilgrimage of the Blessing of Helmets.

Carlos Cabecinhas, the rector of the Sanctuary of Fatima, said the event has steadily increased in prominence — renowned for its conviviality as well as its shows of devotion. This year's turnout was the largest ever,

Under the motto “We are shaped and guided by what we love!”. the pilgrimage started with the parade of a group of motorcyclists carrying Our Lady of Fatima’s statue next to the Basilica of the Holy Trinity, followed by a Mass during which the bikers’ helmets were blessed.

The pilgrimage is organized by Blessing of Helmets Association and by numerous national and international motorcycle clubs. Various police forces join and support the event.

“Many of these motorcyclists come to ask for God’s protection through Our Lady for their trips,” said Cabecinhas. “But they also come to remember those who have already left. who have already died, many of them in accidents, and those who are hurt, those who need help.”

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According to national data, there were 8,936 motorcycle accidents in Portugal in 2023, resulting in 124 deaths and 766 serious injuries.

The most important pilgrimage to the Fatima shrine takes place on May 13 of each year, celebrating the date on which — according to Catholic believers — Mary, the mother of Jesus, appeared before three shepherd children in 1917.

Pope Francis canonized two of children on May 13, 2017, during the centennial of that apparition. The third child, who became a nun known as [Sister Lucia](#), is the focus of a Vatican-led procedure that could lead to her canonization as well.