THE APPEALS OF OUR LADY APPARITIONS AND MARIAN SHRINES IN THE WORLD

Apparition of the Virgin Mary in FUERTEVENTURA

CANYON ISLANDS, 1443

The miraculous statue of Our Lady of the Rock, which still today is the object of great devotion on behalf of the inhabitants of the Canaries, is able to be venerated at the Hermitage de la Virgen de Vega de los Palmas (Fuerteventura). The little statue is made of alabaster and represents the Virgin Mary seated with Baby Jesus in her lap. It is 20 centimeters high, according to the norms of the French Gothic period of the 15th century, and is located in the center of the altar piece of the high altar of the very frequented sanctuary of Vega de los Palmas. It is thought to have been brought from France by Jean de Bethencourt (1380-1425), who received the title of King of the Canaries. This event occurred around 1409 and the Virgin began to be venerated in the primitive sanctuary which the conquistador from Normandy built in Vega de los Palmas. The presence of the Marian image was always linked to the French-Norman conquest of Fuerteventura and of Lanzarote that occurred at the beginning of the 1400s. The image would have been utilized as an effigy of the battle and as an icon for evangelization of the natives, a common strategy with other nations of the same kind which took place in the process of expansion of the Atlantic societies. Manuel Berrueta, historian originating from Fuerteventura, spent a quarter of a century consulting ancient texts and treatises and found reference both in the Diocesan Archives of Europe and in Le Convaint, an inquisitory document found in the British Museum and of which many editions are printed in facsimile. It is a work that narrates the chronicles of the conquest by the French, guided by Bethencourt, whose chronicles were the story of this possession and how he left his proprietary mark on the island in 1409. In this written account, the author informs that the conqueror went to Seville where he sought to obtain the favor of the king to return to Betancuria and conquer Maseras. It is narrated how, among the abandoned places, there was this image of the Virgin, called at the time Our Lady of Malpas, because it was found in this location. The book was entitled La Virgen de La Peta de Fuerteventura, Su Historia, Sus Copias. (The Virgin of the Rock of Fuerteventura). Her history. Her copies. An arduous and difficult labor since documents relative to the story of the Patrones of Fuerteventura did not exist previously. After the battle, the Virgin was abandoned, covered by stones, and forgotten until 40 years later, in 1443, it was discovered by two Franciscan monks. Probably after the French had abandoned the island in 1405, the image was missing for a while, because attacks by pirates led the faithful to protect it from danger so that it would not become plundered or stolen. Afterward it was found thanks to a miraculous apparition which occurred in the pooled water of the dam of Malpas, in the presence of San Diego de Alcalá and Brother Juan de Lancaster, Franciscan monks who were considered saints and who lived near the monastery of Saint Benedict in Betancuria. This is the traditional report of the history of the Patrones of Fuerteventura, the Virgin of the Rock: “Brother Diego, guardian of the monastery of Betancuria, one day saw in the absence of Brother Juan de Lancaster: noticing his tardiness, he asked the shepherds of the area if they had seen him since he knew that the zeal of Brother Juan frequently motivated him to go to inaccessible places that were difficult to evangelize. The shepherds said only that they had seen some lights and flashes in the ravine of the Rio Palmas. Brother Diego then descended down the ravine with the shepherds and some other religious. There they saw Brother Juan's hat floating on the water of the dam and in the deep end saw him kneeling in a position of prayer. One of the shepherds approached the water and made him get out. The brother was in ecstasy and his clothes were dry. Brother Juan then recounted that, while he was passing by those parts, he had slipped and in the moment in which he was falling into the dam he entrusted himself to the Virgin Mary who had saved him, appeared to him. This site was called Buen Paso y Mal Paso. Seeing the glares of light coming from the rock, Brother Diego decided, because of divine inspiration, to open it. Once the rock was opened, the white sculpture appeared of the Virgin with Baby Jesus that since that time has been called the Virgin of the Rock.”