Apparition of the Virgin Mary in MONTSERRAT

SPAIN, circa 9th century

The first image of the Virgin (in Catalan: "La Mare de Déu de Montserrat") was found by some young shepherds who tended a flock in a grotto in the year 880, after having seen a light upon the mountain. When the Bishop learned of the discovery he sought to transport the little statue to Manresa, but it was not possible for him to do so because the statue became too heavy. For this reason the Bishop interpreted this sign as the desire of the Virgin to remain in the vicinity of the site of its recovery and he ordered the construction of the Shrine.

The statue of Mary now venerated is a wooden sculpture, measuring about 90 centimeters in height, and it represents the Blessed Virgin Mary with the Baby Jesus. In her right hand the Madonna holds a sphere that symbolizes the universe, while Jesus, with his right hand gives a blessing and in his left he holds a pine cone. The Virgin is portrayed with sorrowful features, a mantle which earned her the popular nickname of "La Moreneta," "the dark little one." On the 11th of September, the annual event of the national feast of the region of Catalonia, Pope Leo XIII officially declared the Blessed Mother of Montserrat as Patroness of Catalonia and he ordered for her to have her own feast day in the liturgical calendar, that festivity is celebrated the 17th of April.

Among the numerous miracles that happened in the monastery, the one that is remembered is the one of a mother who had gone on a pilgrimage to the Shrine of Our Lady of Montserrat to beg for the liberation of her son who had fallen prisoner of the Muslims. According to the ancient tradition, here the Virgin appears to her and said: "Do not lament and do not cry, because soon you will see your son again." In fact, after a few days, the son returned and recounted to his mother that the Madonna appeared, miraculously unchained him, and arranged for his return. The pilgrimage to Montserrat goes back to ancient times: since the 9th century many hermits retreated upon this mountain to conduct an ascetical life and, since the 9th century, many pilgrims went there to pray with the hermits.