Apparition of the Virgin Mary in PLANTÉES

FRANCE, 1649

The history of the Shrine of Our Lady of the Willow Tree (Notre-Dame du Vert) is linked to an apparition of the Virgin Mary that occurred in 1649 during the reign of Louis XIV. On the 25th of March, 1649, in Plantée, an obscure village of the marquisate of Vigny's territorial jurisdiction, in the diocese of Grenoble, which is found not too distant from the hamlet, there were about 20 inhabitants, and among them was Pierre Port-Corbe. Pierre was a Huguenot, a French Calvinist Protestant, whereas his wife, Jeanne Pillon, was Catholic. In those days, the great religious feasts were obligatory respected throughout the kingdom, as in the case of the 25th of March, feast of the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary. But Pierre was not interested in the great Marian feast and, ignoring the absolute ban on working, despite the plea of his wife, he took the pruning hook and began to cut the willow tree sitting in front of his home. After having worked for a few moments, he realized that his head and his clothes were covered in blood. Believing himself to be injured, he went back home, and helped by Jeanne, he cleaned himself, but he did not find any wound. Together with his wife, he returned to the tree to resume working; at this point they both verified that the blood was not from the cut in the willow. A neighbor that was passing by saw there was a witness. News of this extraordinary event spread, Pierre became persecuted and condemned by the law of the King for having violated the prohibition of work on a feast day. However, he was interrupted by order of a religious officer led by Maréchal Sarron, Bishop of Grenoble. The religious authorities raised the importance of the event the news of which spread well beyond the confines of the region. One year later it was even the subject of a publication in the "Gazette de France" (Parisian Gazette) of the great journalist Théophile Renaudot, with the title "Notizie Etrangementes" (Extraordinary News). The pilgrims began coming to pray around the miraculous willow tree. Eight years passed and in March morning in 1657 Pierre was again working in his field, south of the village, in which a small chapel had already emerged. Suddenly Pierre was stopped by a beautiful lady who he did not know but who made him understand that she knew him well; she inquired about the relics to the Little sanctuary, then she asked him about his religion and announced to him an imminent death that "she will not be able to evade if she will not change." She asked him also for more fervent prayers from those who went to visit the chapel of the willow tree.

A few weeks later, Pierre fell ill; he understood the end was near, and remembered the message and warning of the beautiful stranger ("the most beautiful creature that exists in the world", according to his own words), he renounced the Calvinist errors and converted to Catholicism before dying on the 23rd of August, 1657. A cross and a chapel were built on the site of his encounter with the beautiful lady. The apparition of 1649, the conversion of Pierre Port-Corbe, the numerous documented miracles that were confirmed in the weeks and months that followed rendered the shrine famous. Pilgrims arrived from all the dioceses but also from nearby provinces. In 1663 there were not fewer than eleven tons and helped with regular licenses. Up to ten priests took up residence in Ouxer. The miracles followed one another according to the rhythm of the pilgrims: 67 recognized between 1666 and 1669, 9 between 1661 and 1670. And as the shrines, land of miracles, would live more than 100 years of intense religious activity, interrupted because of the French Revolution. In 1829, Our Lady of the Willow Tree became a parish. Then, in 1834, the very young Congregation of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate was called to occupy the place of pilgrimage. In 1840, the Oblates constructed the Hospice de Bon Retraite (Home of Good Encounter) and founded a community of Oblates entrusted with hosting the pilgrims during their journey to Ouxer. In 1841, they opened a novitiate which would accrue up to 70 brothers each year. This institute of religious formation would provide many missionaries to Africa, the Indian, and to North America. The Revolution of 1848 opened the shrine. In 1856, the inauguration of the tower joined to the chapel of the Good Encounter (apparition site of the Virgin) was blessed. On the 15th of May 1856, the Oblates placed the first stone of a new church, the present Basilica, based on the project of Alfred Beranger. Her construction would require 20 years of labor and would never be brought to completion, for lack of funds! It would remain without steeples, pinnacles, and bell tower. Inaugurated in 1868, consecrated on the 8th of September 1873, it would become a Minor Basilica by the hands of Pius XI in 1934.