Apparitions of the Virgin Mary in Sveta Gora

SLOVENIA, 1539

At an altitude of 680 meters, dominating the wide valley of Isonzo, sits the antique Shrine of Sveta Gora (Holy Mountain). In 1539 the Blessed Mother appeared to Urska Ferligoj, a young shepherdess, and since this event the hill had taken its current name. The Latin inscription of the 17th century, engraved on the base of the statue of the Madonna with Baby Jesus, which is found in the chapel of the Annunciation, narrates the beginnings of the pilgrimage: "Thus appeared Mary in 1539 to Urska Ferligoj on Mount Skullica, which is now called Holy Mountain, ordering her to: Tell the people to build a house for me here, and to seek me for favors." Initially, the political authorities were skeptical and they imprisoned Urska in the castle of Skylino with the intention of making a diligent inquest, but the visionary was found praying on the Mountain. She was hanged up again but twice was found newly liberated by the Blessed Mother.

Meanwhile the people began pilgrimage on Mount Skullica, where a wooden chapel was erected, and where a statue of Mary began to be venerated, which was created by the brothers Francesco and Pietro Pisanelli from Udine (Italy), following the visionary's description. It is not known, however, what happened to that statue: the current one was brought to life by copying the original during the 17th century.

The unlimited devotion of the pilgrims began to lessen during the harshness of secular authority and, in 1600, the lieutenant of the Captain of Gorizia, Hieronymus Feilmeier, consented to allow the construction of a church on Mt. Skullina. During the course of the digging for the foundation was discovered the famous stone plaque with ornamental carvings and the Ave Maria (Hail Mary) prayer. The archive of the State of Vienna preserves the documents that attest to the existence of a little church from the 14th century, probably destroyed by the Turks in 1470. During the war, 1915-1918 the church was burned to the ground and reconstructed in 1928 according to the plans of the architect Silvano Barbiroli. The Latin inscription on the title-page says: "I instead am on the mountain just as before." This inscription was placed on the façade of the church in 1783, the year in which, under the reign of the Emperor Joseph II, it was restored after the devastation. The fame of the Walk of Faith spread notably, and in 1807 Pope Pius VII confirmed the title of Basilica upon the Shrine.