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

Apparition of the Virgin Mary in GOZO

ISLE OF CALYPSO, 1575

The origins of the Shrine of Our Lady of Xl-Imġrija have been lost in the history of time. Information regarding its existence is held in the archives of the Curia of Gozo and it came about when Bishop Dominiak Cubelles paid a visit to the chapel. In these archives it is noted that the chapel had just been rebuilt and it belonged to the noble "Gentile" family.

In 1575, the apostolic visitor, Monsignor Peter Dunia, was mandated by Pope Gregory XII to visit the Maltese Islands and during his pastoral visit to the church, he discovered that it was falling into bad condition. He ordered that the church be closed and demobilized and that the events on the calendar be moved to the parish church, which today is the Cathedral of Gozo.

However, when one of the workmen was striking the first blow, he broke his arm. The event was considered an omen that the chapel should be salvaged and in fact, it was the first chapel to survive the decree in which Monsignor Dunia ordered the demolition of other similar chapels on the island.

In 1669, the church was given a new lease of life with the name changed from "St. Mary's" to "St. Thomas" which means "Of Philip". This change took place because Philip de Gua became the power of attorney for the church and in 1666 he generously gifted the church for the restoration. The church was rebuilt, a stone altar was erected and decorations and useful objects for the liturgical functions were furnished. In addition, he commissioned the painting of the Assumption of Our Lady for the main altar. The work was completed in 1670 by Amedeo Perugino, who was probably a member of the Inquisition.

On June 22, 1680, Karmella Grima, a forty-five year old maiden woman, devoted to the Virgin Mary, heard a voice call out to her from the chapel while she was returning home one day. "Come, Come", called out a heavenly female voice. Confused and afraid, she fled and went far from there. The voice called her again, this time Karmella understood that the voice was coming from inside the chapel and she went inside. She recited her usual prayers. Suddenly the Virgin Mary appeared in the painting seemed to come to life and said to her: "Recite three Hail Mary's in honor of the three days that my body was closed in the tomb before my Assumption into Heaven".

Karmella obeyed that which Our Lady had asked of her. A little while later Karmella got sick and was bed ridden for more than a year. After that long period of time she decided to reveal her secret to a friend, Francesco Fortelli, who at that time confided in her that during that same period he also had been hearing a woman's voice coming from inside the chapel asking him to pray. Shortly after that mysterious call, the mother of Francesco miraculously was healed through the intercession of Our Lady of Xl-Imġrija. The small chapel became a place for pilgrimages for many people from the island and elsewhere. The Bishop Peter Pace was informed of these events and after speaking with Karmella and Francesco, he concluded that that voice had divine origins. The devotion of Our Lady of Xl-Imġrija grew rapidly and numerous pilgrims began to flow into the chapel. In the meantime, the decision was made to construct an adequate shrine that could accommodate the large crowds that were coming to the shrine and in 1920 began the construction of a magnificent Roman style church. In 1932 the new church was blessed and opened to the public. In 1985 Pope Pius XII bestowed upon it the title of Minor Basilica. In the same year, the miraculous image of Our Lady was crowned by Cardinal Crescenzio Sepe, a signed decree from the Secretary of State, Cardinal Eugenio Pacelli, who later became Pope Pius XII.