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

Apparition of the Virgin Mary in Rome

In the year 1842, in the chapel of Rue de Bac in Paris, the apparitions of the Blessed Mother to St. Catherine Labouré occurred. Precisely because of three events, in 1830 the minting of the Miraculous Medal began, a little medal upon which are found an image of the Madonna and a short prayer engraved in her honor. Twelve years later Alphonsine Ratisbonne, born to a rich Jewish family of bankers, converted thanks to the Miraculous Medal and to the apparition of the Blessed Mother which occurred in Rome.

Alphonsine decided to marry her cousin Flora, but before their wedding he wanted to go to Jerusalem to visit the cradle of his religion. Because of a breakdown of the ship that transported him, he was forced to stop in Rome while waiting for repairs. Here he encountered the baron of Rasseneur, a fervent Catholic and family friend. Challenging the anticlericalism of Rasseneur, one evening the baron gave him a Miraculous Medal as a gift. Alphonsine accepted to wear it around his neck, to demonstrate the futility of his friend's faith. The meeting of January 20th of the same year, he found himself in the horse-drawn carriage of the baron of Rasseneur, who was going to the church of Saint Andrew of the Thieves for an sermon. Even though he would have asserted that he wished to stay on board the carriage to wait for his friend, Alphonsine, invited by curiosity, decided to visit the church. Upon entering, Ratisbonne had the experience which changed his life. "All of a sudden I felt myself taken by a strange turmoil: the church seemed all dark, except for a chapel, as if the light was focused all there. Nevertheless, I raised my eyes towards the light that shone and I saw standing on the altar, alive, grand, majestic, beautiful and of a merciful air, the Holy Virgin Mary, similar in gesture and in stature to the image of the medal which was given to me so that I would wear it... The Virgin said not even one word but I understood perfectly... I felt within me such a total change that I thought I was someone else, a most ardent joy burst in the depth of my soul; I was unable to speak... I could not be accountable for the truths which I obtained: faith and knowledge. All that I can say is that the veil fell from my eyes; not just one veil, but the whole multitude of veils which had surrounded me disappeared; I came out of an abyss of darkness, I saw in the pit of the abyss the extreme miseries from which I was extracted by means of an infinite mercy; many men calmly descend into this abyss with eyes closed because of pride and indifference... It is asked of me how I came to learn these truths, since it is certain that I never read a single page of the Gospel... All that I know is that, entering into the church, I ignored everything, and exiting it, I saw everything all clean. I did not have a literal knowing but I interpreted the sense and the spirit of the dogmas... All of this occurred within me, and these impressions, a thousand times more rapid than thought, did not just touch my soul, but they directed it toward a new life... the prejudices against Christianity no longer existed, the love of my God had taken the place of every other love."

Eleven days later he was baptized with the name of Alphonsine-Marie, subsequently he decided to become a Jesuit. And on September 24, 1848 he was ordained a priest. In the meanwhile, a scrutiny of inquiry was instituted to verify the authenticity of what occurred. After months of depositions and testimonies, Cardinal Perrone, on June 3rd, 1842, signed a proclamation in which it is recognized as " instantaneous and perfect" the conversion of Alphonsine-Marie from Judaism as a result of the apparition.