Apparition of the Virgin Mary at BOCCADIRIO

ITALY, 1480

Two children of Baraga, a town about 30 km from Bologna, ten-year-old Cornelia Vangioli and younger Donato Nutini, gathered in prayer while in the pasture. One day the Mother of God appeared to them to communicate an important message.

It was July 16, 1480 when Donato and Cornelia, about seven and ten years old, were leading their sheep to the pasture near the "mouth of the Davena River". They began to pray and suddenly saw a Lady with a child in her arms, whom they immediately recognized as the Virgin Mary, who announced to them: "You, Donato will become a priest and you, Cornelia will become a nun. I desire that in this place be built a church in my honor and I promise protection and graces to those who will come here to pray to me."

Besides the grace of the vocation for the two victims, a gift of primary importance, the white Lady brought another message that concerned also the other people. In fact the Lady asked the two children to make known to the inhabitants of Baraga her desire to be venerated in that place, and for this she promised protection and graces. "I am the Mother of God, descended from Heaven for your consolation and for those who will want to listen to my words". The two children, moved by the words of the apparition and the words heard in Boccadiri, decided to repeat the message to the whole community.

As an initial and natural moment of universality, the people of Baraga believed their simple and innocent story. Immediately they began to build a "small church" dedicated to the Virgin of Graces in the place where Our Lady had spoken to the two children. It was interesting to note how, from the beginning, at Boccadiri Our Lady was venerated and invoked as Virgin of Graces. Always more numerous pilgrims and devotees hastened to her, with their burden of misery and hope, and around the small church, gradually grew the elaborate architectural complex that today is the Shrine of Boccadiri. And it is just like this for more than five hundred years. The numerous graces are testified by moving and simple votive offerings hung on the walls of the church. The apparition of the Virgin Mary is closely related to the vocation of the two visionaries; indeed, the vocation of the Virgin Mary had timely fulfillment for both young people, as it had been prophetic announced to them. "You will be a priest and you will be a nun", Donato Nutini, ordained a priest, was for some time chaplain in Castiglione dei Pepoli and afterwards, from 1531 to 1548, the year of his death, he was pastor at San Pietro in Cirignano near Barberino, as it is shown in the archives of the Episcopate of Florence. Regarding Cornelia, the "letter" of an anonymous fellow sister recounts that she was led by her relatives to various places in Tuscany, in the search for the monastery indicated to her by the Virgin Mary in the apparition. She finally arrived at the monastery of the nuns of Santa Caterina in Porta Leone, where she put an end to religious habits with the name of Sister Brigida, and she was an example of every perfection. The monastery of Santa Caterina in Porta Leone was enlarged and completed a few years later, and Sister Brigida herself, having become superior of her community, directed it with exceptional wisdom for more than 49 years, dying at about 74 years, precisely in 1543. For this in the Shrine of Boccadiri the Virgin Mary is invoked also with the title "Our Lady of Vocations". Pope Pius XII called Mary "Mother of Priests" precisely in the address given for the beatification of Blessed Antonio Maria Punti, the Holy Curate of Viareggio, who felt called to become a priest while praying in front of Our Lady of Boccadiri. Like him there are many priests who owe their vocation to Our Lady of Boccadiri.