Apparitions of the Virgin Mary at Betharram

The Marian Shrine of Betharram is located about fifteen kilometers from Lourdes, on the bank of the same Gave River where in 1846, Saint Bernadette Soubirous, the visionary of Lourdes, had the apparitions of the Virgin Mary near the Grotto of Massabiel. Bernadette often visited Betharram and went there in pilgrimage also to thank Our Lady for the graces she received at Lourdes. At Betharram, Saint Michael Garrotte founded the Congregation of the Priests of the Sacred Heart of Jesus of Betharram (officially approved in 1841) and was able to restore the shrine, in a miserable condition after the French Revolution. According to an ancient tradition, the origins of the shrine date back to the XI Century, when under the vision of Saint Bernard, centers of Marian faith and devotion were established throughout Europe. Betharram became one of the main stops for the pilgrims who, from France and from all of Europe, traveled towards the Shrine of Santiago de Compostela in Spain. The Virgin of Betharram became very famous also for a copious number of miracles and healings attributed to her through the centuries. The first documented miracle dates back to around the beginning of the XI Century. One day some shepherdess were leading their flock to pasture on the banks of the Gave River. When suddenly their attention was attracted by a very bright light that was coming from some rocks at the shore of the river. Upon hurrying to the place, they found themselves in front of a small statue of the Virgin Mary. After being informed of the discovery, the inhabitants of Lesclide Betharram immediately built a small niche on the opposite bank of the Gave River to hold the statue. But every time they tried to house there the small statue of Our Lady, it miraculously returned to the other bank of the Gave, to the place where it had been found. Thus they understood that Mary wanted to remain at the original place. It was in this way that, according to popular tradition, the first small Marian chapel of Betharram arose. The second miracle dates back to 1616. Some farmers of the village of Montaut were resting after a long day of work in the fields. Suddenly they noticed the raising of a strong wind that violently devastated the hill adjacent to Betharram, on which had been planted a large wooden cross (that still is in place). A few moments later the farmers saw the same cross rise itself up, surrounded by a halo of light. The news spread rapidly and in the following days an immense crowd of pilgrims began to rush to the place of the miracle. Thus in 1625 the first Calvary of Betharram was inaugurated. Initially to this place the Virgin shall be invoked with the name of Our Lady of Calvary and in a short time it will become the second place of pilgrimage of the kingdom. For example, the Archbishop of Paris, Pierre de Marca, collected the documentation of about eighty-two miracles that occurred between 1630 and 1641 thanks to Our Lady of Calvary of Betharram: blind, lame, and lepers were liberated from their affliction. It was thanks to one of these miracles that Our Lady of Calvary began to be invoked with the name of Our Lady of Betharram. The chronicles recount that a young girl, attracted by a particularly beautiful flower that bloomed on the bank of the Gave River, leaned forward to pick it and she fell in the swirling water. The waves were about to submerge her when she desperately invoked Our Lady of Calvary of Betharram. Suddenly in front of her she saw appearing a branch that the same Virgin Mary in person held out so she could cling to it. As a sign of gratitude for this miraculous rescue, the girl wanted to give to the Virgin a beautiful golden branch, that in the local dialect is actually called Betharram.