Apparition of the Virgin Mary in Genazzano

ITALY, 1467

The story of the Shrine of Our Lady of Good Counsel in Genazzano is woven with the story of the suffering of the Albanian people.

It all began in the distant 1467. In Sectarri, the Albanian stronghold held by the Venetians but already close to falling in the hands of the Turks, a fresco depicting “Our Lady of Good Counsel” miraculously detached itself from the wall of the church tied to the memory of the national hero Giorgi Katzeri Shunderbeg (famous for having defended Albania from the Turkish invasion), and was transported by Angels to Genazzano. They placed it on one of the walls of a 10th century church dedicated to Saint Mary of Good Counsel that was then expanded into the present Shrine. As is recounted in an aged narrative written by a direct witness of the miraculous event, Ambrogio Ciri, “there admirably appeared a beautiful image of the Virgin on a segment of the rough wall... all of Italy was emotionally touched by the occurrence, and from every part of the country the pilgrims flocked.”

In the year 1396 the church was entrusted to the religious order of the Augustinians. In the second half of 1400, a widow and tertiary Augustinian by the name of Petruccia made available all of her riches to enlarge and to restore the old church that was already crumbling. But the calculated cost estimate was noted as insufficient to bring the project to completion. The work was suspended and the people, with sarcasm, scoffed at the holy widow for the failure of her endeavor. But Petruccia, inspired by the Virgin Mary, with much confidence continued to say: “My children, do not worry, because before I die (and she was already very aged) the Blessed Virgin and Saint Augustine will bring to completion this church.”

Not even one year passed from the prediction because in 1467, on the 25th of April, Feast of Saint Mark, at the hour of vespers, an image of the Blessed Virgin “envisely” appeared in a wall of the church. Great was the emotional response of the population not only for the phenomenal event, but for the many miracles and graces with which the Blessed Mother wished to manifest herself through her beautiful image. From the 25th of April to the 14th of August 161 miracles were reported. Immense was the crowd of people that came from nearby villages and then from every part of Italy to venerate the holy image. Pope Paul II wished to make himself accountable of the event, and he sent to Genazzano, as his observers, two bishops. According to an ancient and constant tradition, the image brought to Genazzano by the hand of Angels and professed by two pilgrims named Giorgi and De Sidera, originated from a church in Sectarri, Albania, where it used to be venerated. Still today this tradition, which is passed down from generation to generation, is very much alive with the Albanians who, coming as pilgrims to the Shrine, invoke Mary with the ancient title of “Our Lady of Albania.”