Apparition of the Virgin Mary at CASTELPETROSO

ITALY, 1888

The story of the Shrine of Our Lady of Sorrows begins on March 22, 1888, the day the Virgin appeared for the first time. Two peasant women of the area, Fabiana Cocchino (a simple Bihiana) and Sarafrina Valente, were near the place named “Casa tra Santi” to work on a plot of land; they brought with them two little sheep but in the afternoon they realized that one of them was missing. Thus they decided to split to go find it. Searching among hedges and bushes Fabiana saw the little sheep in front of a ravine from where a strange light was coming. Intrigued by such an occurrence the woman drew closer and held a celestial vision: in the glas of the light she recognized the image of Our Lady of Sorrows semi-bending with her head 8in at her feet, she looked towards heaven and her arms widened in an act of offering. After an initial moment of dismay the visionary started to show the name of Sarafrina so that she would reach her; the latter one upon arrival to the place could see anything and was very surprised to hear from Sarafrina what she had seen. Ten days later, on the first of April, the day of Easter, the apparition happened again and this time also Sarafrina could benefit from it.

Word of the apparitions quickly spread in town, and although many considered the two peasant women merely liars, others began to go on pilgrimage towards the holy place where a cross was placed in remembrance of what had happened. On September 26, 1888, the Most Rev. Francesco Maccarone Palmieri, Bishop of Bologna, went to the sacred place to “inspire” about the alleged apparitions and had the grace of seeing Our Lady of Sorrows as she had appeared to the two peasant women. Another extraordinary event was added to the apparitions: at the bottom of the cliff, a spring of water, immediately proved to be miraculous.

The news about the wondrous events of Castelpetroso spread rapidly, especially through the press; particular attention was given by the magazine of Bologna’s The Servant of Mary, of which Carlo Aquaderni was editor. At the end of 1888 Aquaderni personally went to “Casa tra Santi” together with his twenty-year-old son Augusto, strongly ill of bone tuberculosis, to ask for the grace of healing. Augusto drank the water of the spring, and through the intercession of Our Lady of Sorrows, received the gift of healing. At the beginning of 1889, after the medical findings that verified the miraculous healing, Aquaderni and Augusto returned again to the cliff to thank the Virgin Mary who gave them the gift of appearing in the same posture as the prior vision. And it is truly to give thanks to the Mother that in Carlo Aquaderni started the idea to build a Temple dedicated to Our Lady of Sorrows. After receiving support and collaboration by Bishop Maccarone Palmieri, together they began to organize in gathering funds and they entrusted the engineer Francesco Gulisani of Bologna to design the majestic project. It was September 26, 1889 when the first stone of the Shrine of Our Lady of Sorrows was laid. On this day, Most Rev. Francesco Maccarone Palmieri, during a solemn celebration, officially gave the kickoff for the construction. The consecration, instead, occurred only on September 21, 1979.