

## OUR LADY OF MONTALLEGRO RAPALLO, ITALY 1557

THE magnificent Sanctuary of Our Lady of Montallegro is nestled on a wooded hill, called the “Hill of Joy,” overlooking the city of Rapallo. It was here that the Blessed Mother deigned to leave a precious icon depicting her dormition as she passed from this world to the Heavenly Kingdom. Our Mother is pictured lying on a bier with the Holy Trinity represented by the figures in the central part of the icon. Surrounding her in mournful attitude are several saints and two angels.

### **THE FIRST VISION**

The discovery of the icon on the hill was made by a farmer, Giovanni Chichizola, on July 2, while he was walking nearby on a donkey trail. Suddenly he had an apparition of Our Lady who reassured him:

Do not fear, Giovanni, I am the Mother of God. I have chosen you to be a messenger of my motherly will. Visit the ecclesiastics of Rapallo and let them know that the Mother of God has chosen this place as her perpetual dwelling place and would like a church to be erected here. I leave here a pledge of my love. When the Virgin disappeared, the farmer discovered an icon on a rock and attempted to remove it, but could not. He notified the villagers of Rapallo who journeyed



to the hill, lifted it and brought it to the church in Rapallo. The next morning the icon had disappeared, only to be found where John had originally discovered it. Much to their surprise, a spring had started to flow at the very place above which the Blessed Mother stood during the apparition.

The villagers, once again, brought the icon to the church where it was displayed all day to the veneration of many who were impressed with the details of Giovanni's experience. In the evening, the icon was locked away for safekeeping. They were surprised the next morning when they discovered that it had disappeared once again.,

The icon was subsequently found on the rock up the hill. All agreed that the mysterious travels of the icon indicated the Blessed Mother's wish that it remain in that particular place, to be protected by the church she had requested.



### **CHURCH IS BUILT IN 1558**

The very next year, 1558, the Archbishop of Turin authorized the building of church on the Hill of Joy, which began immediately. The following year it was opened and dedicated to the Blessed Mother.

For seventeen quiet years the precious icon was loved and venerated on the Hill of Joy until a group of Greek sailors, sailing from Ragusa, experienced a storm while crossing the Gulf of Tigullio. The ship's captain, Nicholas de Allegretis, together with the crew, promised Our Lady that if they were saved, they would make a pilgrimage to the nearest sanctuary dedicated to her. Upon safely reaching land, they climbed to the sanctuary to fulfill their vow of thanksgiving. It was then that they noticed the precious icon and declared that it was formerly venerated in Ragusa, and that it had mysteriously disappeared from there in 1557. They claimed ownership, which resulted in court proceedings before the magistrate of Genoa. Eventually, the icon was given over to them for safe delivery to its former location. The icon was taken to the port, boarded on the ship, and placed in a secure location.

The ship was well out to sea when they found that it had disappeared. Eventually the captain and his crew learned that the icon had been discovered in the church where all agreed it was meant to stay.

### **APPARITION DAY**

Every year on the anniversary of “Apparition Day,” the people of Rapallo travel to the hill in a grand procession, carrying an ancient wooden crucifix and a silver shrine with the Mother’s statue. Upon reaching the sanctuary, the first-time pilgrim is amazed by the huge collection of votive offerings and ex-votos, some of them in silver, which decorate the walls, giving proof of prayers answered and miracles worked through the Virgin’s intercession. In the chapel of St. Joseph can be found the spring that began flowing from the time of the apparition. It is said to originate from the rock where the icon was originally found. The pilgrim has two unique ways to reach the sanctuary on the Hill of Joy: by walking along an ancient mule track or by cable car from Rapallo, which was specifically constructed for the convenience of the pilgrims. The pilgrims are well rewarded when reaching the sanctuary. They are intrigued with its beauty and can pray before the miraculous icon of Our Lady of Montallegro. Joining in the celebration for the 450th anniversary of the apparition of Our Lady of Montallegro, in 2007, was Tarcisio Cardinal Bertone, the Secretary of State of the Vatican. The feast day of Our Lady is celebrated with great joy on the first three days of July.

