

**OUR LADY OF THE GUARD Ceranesi,
Mount Figogna
(Genoa), Italy 1490**

THE FIRST VISION

Atop the tall mountain known as Monte Figogna are numerous church buildings whose history involves a peasant named Benedict Pareto. He was grazing his flock on the mountain when his attention was drawn to a brilliant movement. Within this heavenly glow was a woman holding a child on her arm. As the lady approached him, Benedict Pareto felt compelled to kneel. Standing before him, the beautiful Lady assured him, “Do not be afraid. I am the Queen of Heaven and have come to you with my Divine Son for this reason. You are to arrange for a church to be built on this spot, to be dedicated in my name.”

When the poor man protested that he had no money with which to build a church the Lady calmed his confusion with the words, “Trust me, Benedict. The money will not be lacking; only your own good will is needed. With my aid all will be easy.”

After the Lady departed, and after Benedict recovered from the sweetness and beauty of the apparition, he felt a great urgency to report the event to his parish priest and ran excitedly down the mountain path. The priest and Benedict’s neighbors, on hearing about the event, were skeptical.



THE SECOND VISION

Sometime later, when Benedict climbed a fig tree looking for fruit, he fell and broke a number of bones. We are told that he was carried to his home where he received the Last Sacraments. Because he was unable to move, he deeply regretted that he could not share Our Lady's request with those in a position to provide what she wanted. While he grieved, the Blessed Mother once more appeared to him and again requested a shrine at the place of her first appearance. When the Lady left, Benedict Pareto was instantly cured.

His neighbors, who knew the severity of his injuries and his immediate cure, replaced their skepticism with wholehearted belief. They again listened to Benedict's story of the apparition and, with the authorization of the parish priest, they contributed to a fund for the building of a small oratory on Mount Figogna. That oratory was constructed and later replaced in 1530, by a large chapel that was maintained by a group of laypeople and members of Benedict's family, including two of his sons.

Following the Council of Trent, the Bishop of Navarra visited the sanctuary in 1582 to enforce regulations formulated by the Council. After learning about the history of the shrine, he formally rendered his approval and looked favorably upon an artistic relief located on the high altar, which depicts the scene of the first apparition.

On May 27, 1604, the history of the shrine was again approved, this time by the Archdiocese of Genoa. The papers drawn as a result of an inquiry were duly notarized and can still be found in the Genoa State Archives. As a result of this study, permission for the publication of miracles was given and devotion to Our Lady of the Guard was authorized.

MIRACLE OF OUR LADY OF THE GUARD, 1625

Of all the miracles attributed to Our Lady of the Guard, the most famous is that which took place in 1625, when Charles Emmanuel, Duke of Savoy, marched on Genoa with an army of fourteen thousand men. Knowing they were outnumbered, a saintly Capuchin lay brother, Fra Tomaso da Trebbiano, exhorted the people to pray to Our Lady of the Guard for protection. The next day, when the Duke attacked, he was roundly defeated by a small band of peasants who had been sent into battle with the blessing of their parish priest. The victory was everywhere accepted as a miracle of Our Lady of the Guard.

During the second half of the nineteenth century, a new shrine was built to

accommodate the huge increase in the number of pilgrims. A hospice was erected, as well as a guesthouse.

There are three statues named for Our Lady of the Guard. After the victory at Genoa, a marble statue was placed in a chapel on the mountain which marks the actual site of the first apparition. The second statue is found in the wayside chapel of St. Pantaleon on the mountainside. The third statue is found above the high altar in the church on Monte Figogna. This statue was given a formal coronation in 1894, as commanded by Pope Leo XIII. This wooden statue depicting Our Lady was credited with numerous miracles which are confirmed by costly tokens of appreciation given to the shrine and by thousands of ex-votos which decorate the walls of the church.

The shrine has been recognized by many popes who granted special indulgences to the devotees, including Pope Clement XVI, Pius VI and Pius XII. One native son of Genoa, who had a particular devotion to Our Lady of the Guard, was elevated to the Chair of St. Peter as Pope Benedict XV. It was this pope who assigned to the church the title of Basilica on March 11, 1915. Two additional popes who honored the shrine were Pope John Paul II who visited on September 22, 1985, and the reigning Pope Benedict XVI who prayed there on May 18, 2008.