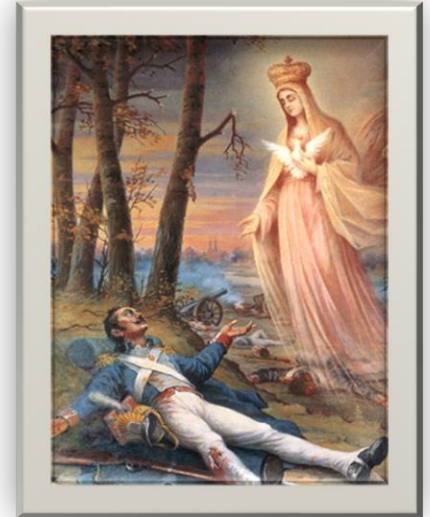


OUR LADY OF LICHEN **Lichen, Poland 1813 and 1950**

THE FIRST VISION

DURING a time when Polish soldiers were fighting with the French under Napoleon, a fierce battle took place in Leipzig, Germany, in 1813. One of the Polish soldiers, Tomasz Klossowski was seriously wounded. If he were to die, he wanted to do so in his native land. While praying fervently to Our Lady for this intention, the Queen of Heaven appeared to him. Holding a white dove, the vision wore a gown with a golden mantle and a golden crown upon her head. She comforted the soldier and promised he would recover and return to Poland. In addition, she asked him to find a portrait of her that resembled the apparition.



Just as she had promised, the soldier recovered and returned to his home near Lichen. Year after year he tried to find the image requested by the Lady and wandered about the countryside searching for it. Eventually, in 1836, he found it in the village of Lgota. The portrait was first placed in his home, but wanting others to be inspired by the Holy Mother, he hung it on a pine tree in the forest, beside a well-traveled path.

An Episcopal committee examined the details of the apparition and decided to move the portrait to the parish church in Lichen. This took place in 1852. Church records reveal that in 1939, three thousand answers to prayers were recorded, including miraculous recoveries. Unhappily, it is also recorded that during World War II, both the church and the rectory were confiscated and used by the Nazi Youth Organization. Fortunately, the portrait was hidden and preserved.

VISION TO MIKOLAJ SIKATKA

In 1950, the Blessed Virgin revealed herself to the shepherd, Mikolaj Sikatka, who was pasturing cattle near the image. In her message she exhorted people to conversion and to break from greed and sinfulness. She requested that they pray the Rosary and that priests should celebrate the liturgy worthily and reverently. Finally, she requested that her image be moved to a more fitting place. The Lady predicted that a church and monastery in Lichen would be built in her honor and warned that if her message were not accepted a terrible plague would punish the land for its obstinacy.

Mikolaj, the poor shepherd, spread the message as best he could, but was persecuted and even imprisoned because of it by the Russian invaders. The people scoffed at him, but two years later when, according to Mary's prophecy, a cholera epidemic broke out, they remembered the Virgin's warning and flocked to the image to pray the Rosary for the sick and dying.

As Our Lady had predicted, a marvelous shrine was built and was entrusted to the care of the Marian Fathers (the Marians of the Immaculate Conception), who administer the National Shrine of the Divine Mercy in Stockbridge, Massachusetts. This church was consecrated by Cardinal Stefan Wyszynski, the Primate of Poland, who crowned the miraculous image in the presence of several bishops, hundreds of priests, religious and approximately 150,000 laypeople. Built entirely by the contributions of pilgrims, the architecturally splendid church that stands today was consecrated by Pope John Paul II on June 7, 1999. It is rightly claimed to be one of the largest and most beautiful in the world. To this day, the recommendation of the Virgin Mary that all should convert and avoid sin is heeded since the majority of pilgrims receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation. So many, in fact, that the pilgrimage center seems to have been built specifically for the reception of the Sacrament.