

MADONNA OF MOUNT BERICO

VICENZA, ITALY 1426 AND 1428

The sanctuary of mount berico is located high above the city of vicenza and provides

a sweeping view of distant valleys, cities, farmlands, and the majestic alps. because of

its location, the sanctuary serves as a veritable lighthouse for the region. it was here that

our lady deigned to visit on two occasions to console and provide help during the

stressful times of the plague. according to manuscripts of the time, from the year 1404 until after the year 1428, the territory was shaken and tormented by pestilence and sickness, so much so that the

population declined drastically both from the many deaths due to sickness and those who

were fleeing it. in those trying years, a seventy-year-old woman of vicenza, vincenza passini, went

up the hill each morning to bring food to her husband who worked in his small vineyard.

documents reveal that vincenza led a simple and honest life and was devoted to her faith, and especially nurtured a heartfelt devotion to the mother of god. she attended church services regularly and was mindful of the poor.



The first vision:

at nine on the morning of march 7, 1426, vincenza was climbing to the top of the hill as was her custom, when she saw in front of her a woman who, according to documents, was “in the likeness of a most beautiful queen, with garments more resplendent than the sun, wreathed in a fragrance of a thousand scents.” vincenza was so overcome by the beauty of the vision that she swooned and fell to the ground.

when she recovered, the blessed virgin identified herself, i am the virgin mary, the mother of christ who died on the cross for the

salvation of men. i beg you to go and say in my name to the people of vicenza

that they must build in this place a church in my honor if they want to recover

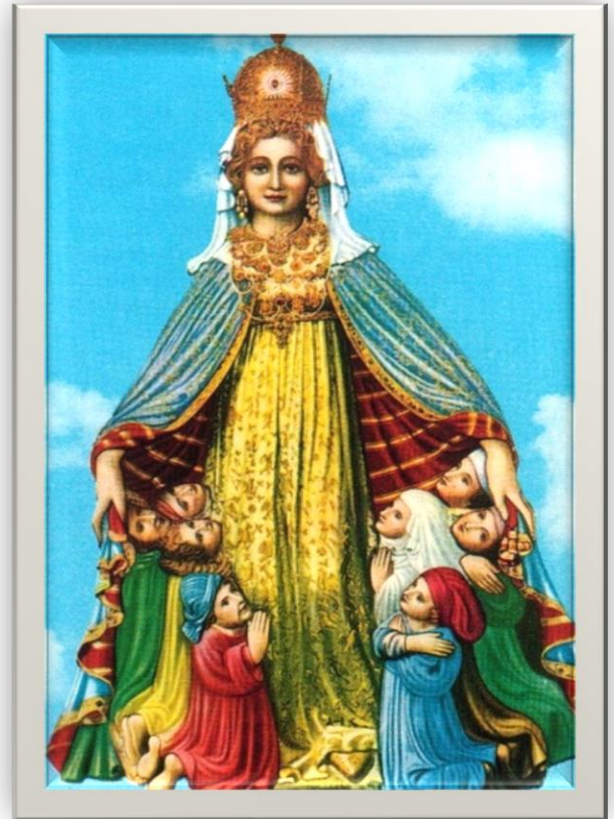
their health, otherwise the plague will not cease.

weeping with joy and kneeling in front of the madonna, vincenza questioned, “but

people will not believe me. and where, o glorious mother, will we find the money to do these things?”

the madonna replied, you will insist so that my people do my will, otherwise they will never be rid of the plague and until they obey, they will see my son angry with them. as proof of what i say, let them dig here and from the rock living water will spring

and, as soon as the building begins, money will not lack. after saying this, the madonna, with a graceful movement took a twig, traced the sign of the cross on the ground and even drew the shape of the church to be built. She then planted the twig in the ground where the high altar of the shrine now stands. The lady then added, all those who visit this church with devotion on my feast days and on every first sunday of the month, will be given an abundance of grace and the mercy of god and the blessing of my motherly hands. vincenza immediately obeyed the vision and began telling everyone she met, but she soon realized no one believed her. the plague had forced people to think about other matters. she then went to bishop pietro emiliani, who also gave little value to her report. in the meantime, the plague raged on. vincenza resumed her work and her deeds of charity and on feast days she climbed the hill to pray on the spot where the Madonna had stood.



The second vision:

According to other documents, the virgin once again appeared to vincenza, this time on august 1, 1428. the lady repeated her previous warning and her recommendation for the health of the people. because of the horrific plague conditions, the people then believed her and had a change of heart. the severity of the plague had induced the people to seek

help from the madonna. the council and the hall of government decided to build the church on mount berico and began work only twenty-four days after the last apparition. as soon as the church was completed, the plague disappeared and from that day, the region no longer suffered from it. the lady had spoken of water that would spring from a rock at the place where the shrine was to be built. while the earth was being dug for the shrine, “a wonderful and incredible quantity of water welled out like a spring overflowing like an abundant river that ran down the hill with great noise.” a beautiful statue of the madonna of mount berico is enthroned in the shrine, now a grand basilica, to receive the prayers and veneration of her people. documents in the archives describe the statue as being, “an imperious image in marble, painted with skill in various and precious colors.” it depicts the madonna with an open smile. her head is framed by curls, and she wears a gold-decorated veil, a gold-colored dress with a greenish, gold-edged mantle. figures of children, women and men are huddled beneath the mantle that drapes over the virgin’s extended arms. the blessed mother also wears necklaces and a golden crown that was placed there by cardinal giuseppe sarto, the patriarch of venice, who was the future pope pius x.

The third vision

During the first world war, the city of vicenza was behind the lines of conflict. thoroughly frightened, the people made a solemn vow to the madonna of mount berico promising that if they and their lands remained safe, they would observe the birthday of the madonna every year in a special way. the madonna answered the prayer of the people so that every year, on september 8, great crowds of people visit the sanctuary to offer their gratitude. because of the many people who visit on that day, plus those who observe the madonna’s wishes that they visit her on the first sunday of every month, it became necessary in 1972, to construct next to the basilica two large chapels with both upper and lower levels. also constructed were thirty additional confessionals inside the basilica. the servants of mary took possession of the shrine in the year 1435, and have been ministering to the pilgrims ever since—almost six hundred years.

Visits by popes

In addition to pope pius x who crowned the madonna, the basilica has been honored by the visit of pope paul vi, who announced on january 11, 1978, we decree that the most blessed virgin mary be honored with the name of madonna of mount berico and that from now on truly be the principal patron next to god of the city and diocese of Vicenza. in observance of the centenary of the crowning of the image, pope john paul ii sent a message to the patriarch of venice, cardinal marco ce, from castel gandolfo on august 22, 2000, in which he recounted his visit to the madonna stating, I too had the joy of making a pilgrimage to the shrine of mount berico on 7–8 september 1991 to ask the blessed virgin to bless the people of the area and to show herself to be the tender and provident mother of those who suffer and those who long for justice and peace.