

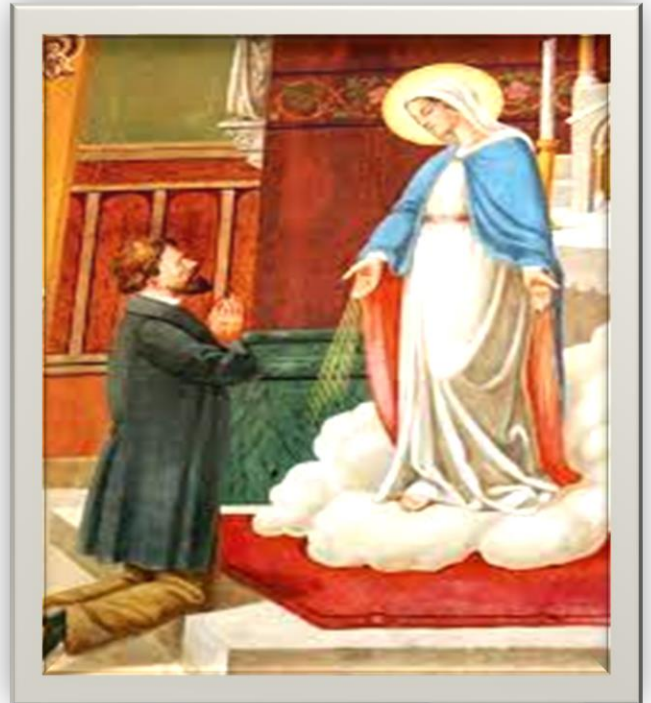
## OUR LADY OF THE MIRACLE (OUR LADY OF ZION)

Rome, Italy 1842

MARIE Alphonse Ratisbonne was the son and heir of a wealthy, aristocratic Jewish family of bankers. While he was still a child an older brother converted to Catholicism and became a priest. Ratisbonne resolved then to avoid his brother and never speak to him again, and developed a passionate hatred of the Catholic religion.

At the age of twenty-eight, he was engaged to his own niece, and was scheduled to assume a partnership at his uncle's bank. During the engagement, he decided to tour some of Europe for health reasons and pleasure, and was on his way to spend the winter

in Malta when his travel plans were unexpectedly changed. Instead of Malta, he arrived in Rome. While walking through the streets of the ancient city, he encountered a former Protestant classmate, Gustavo de Bussieres. In the process of rekindling their friendship he met Gustavo's brother, Baron Theodore de Bussieres who was a convert to Catholicism and a close friend of Alphonse's priest-brother. Immediately, Alphonse felt a repulsion toward the Baron, a zealous Catholic whose mission was to convert every Jew he met. Since, by a coincidence, they would both be going to Constantinople, Alphonse tolerated his friendship. The Baron, eager to convert his new friend, challenged Alphonse to a little test. This consisted of wearing a Miraculous Medal and reciting every day the Memorare, a prayer composed by St. Bernard to the Blessed Mother. Alphonse smilingly agreed, knowing that his hatred for the Faith would shield him from all influences toward a reversal of his Jewish beliefs. Determined to win him over, the Baron sought out his friends, many of whom were converts themselves, to pray for the conversion of the young Jew.



## **THE FIRST VISION**

Soon after, when the Baron was arranging the funeral of a friend in the church of St. Andrea delle Fratte in Rome, he brought Alphonse with him to the church and asked him to wait while he consulted the priest. In a short time, he returned and found Alphonse on his knees reciting the Memorare through abundant tears. Alphonse tells what happened:

I was scarcely in the Church when a total confusion came over me. When I looked up, it seemed to me that the entire Church had been swallowed up in shadow, except one chapel. It was as though all the light was concentrated in that single place. I looked over towards this chapel whence so much light shone, and above the altar was a living figure, tall, majestic, beautiful and full of mercy. It was the Most Holy Virgin Mary resembling her figure on the Miraculous Medal. At this sight I fell on my knees right where I stood. Unable to look up because of the blinding light, I fixed my glance on her hands, and in them I could read the expression of mercy and pardon. In the presence of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, even though she did not speak a word to me, I understood her perfectly. I realized the frightful situation I was in, my sins, and the beauty of the Catholic Faith.

Weak from his experience, the Baron helped him to his hotel where Alphonse sobbed uncontrollably and asked, "When can I receive Baptism without which I can no longer live?" He took off the Miraculous Medal and held it up crying, "I saw Her! I saw Her!"

## **ALPHONSE IS CONVERTED**

When he recovered, the Baron took him to a Jesuit retreat house where Alphonse received instruction under the guidance of a Father Villefort. Then, at the hands of His Eminence Cardinal Patrizi, the Vicar of His Holiness, Alphonse was baptized, confirmed and received his First Holy Communion.

The following month, the Vatican began a canonical process to investigate the circumstances of the conversion and, after many interviews and depositions, it determined that the conversion was altogether miraculous.

A few months later, a picture of the Madonna of the Miracle was painted according to Alphonse's description, and was placed for veneration in the same place where she had appeared.

That same year, Cardinal Patrizi declared the conversion to be a divine miracle and

permitted the publication of texts recording the event.

## **THE SISTERHOOD OF OUR LADY OF ZION IS FOUNDED**

After his conversion, Alphonse Ratisbonne reconciled with his brother, the priest, and assisted him in founding the Sisterhood of Our Lady of Zion.

The conversion of Ratisbonne was so complete that he studied for the priesthood and was ordained as a member of the Society of Jesus. He eventually left the Society with the consent of Pope Pius IX to assist the Sisters of Zion for whom he built, in Jerusalem, a large convent, a school and an orphanage for girls. Another convent was established on the mountain at Ain Karim together with a church and another orphanage for girls. Alphonse stayed there for the rest of his life and labored with a few companions for the conversion of Jews and Muslims. He died on May 6, 1884.

Because of the many miracles worked at the shrine where the apparition took place, and where Our Lady's portrait is displayed, Pope Leo XIII visited there in 1892, to crown the Holy Virgin with a splendid diadem. Pope Pius XII elevated the church to the rank of a basilica while Pope John XXIII in 1960, elevated the basilica of the vision, Sant Andrea delle Fratte, to the title of a Cardinal's Church. The third pope to recognize the miraculous conversion and the apparition was Pope John Paul II who visited the basilica on February 28, 1982