

## **OUR LADY OF MERCY SAVONA, ITALY 1536 THE FIRST APPARITION APPEARING TO ANTONIO BOTTA**

THE sumptuously decorated church of Savona owes its origin to an elderly farmer named Antonio Botta who witnessed the apparition of the Queen of Heaven on March 18, 1536. The farmer described the Virgin Mary as being dressed in white and surrounded by a dazzling light. The vision stood on a large rock overlooking a stream near the river Letimbro. As he knelt reverently before the vision, the Blessed Virgin directed Antonio to his confessor with the request that three Saturdays of fasting be observed and that three processions be organized in honor of God and the Mother of Jesus. The apparition then asked the farmer to return to the same place on the fourth Saturday to receive another message meant for the Curia and the people of Savona. Obeying the words of the Madonna, Antonio went immediately to inform the local priest, Monsignor Bartholomew Zabrerri, who then shared the message with the bishop of the diocese. Although they were receptive to the requests of the Madonna based on the sincerity and humility of the farmer, the mayor of the area, Genoese Doria, was not. He promptly summoned the farmer to the castle for questioning about the circumstances of the vision. Legend tells that during Antonio's interrogation, some fishermen off the coast of Savona saw three flames that rose high into the sky above the cathedral and the castle.



### **THE SECOND APPARITION**

The second apparition took place on April 8, 1536, four Saturdays after the first visit of the Lady. She appeared with the same illumination and on the exact place of the first visit. The farmer recalled that she stood with outstretched hands extending downward in a gesture of mercy. Once again the Lady asked the elderly farmer for the three Saturdays of fasting and the processions, and praised the local fraternities and brotherhoods for

their dissemination of the Word of God. She exhorted Antonio and his countrymen to follow the creed and disappeared with the words, “Mercy my son, not justice.” News of the apparition spread quickly and with such an increase in the number of pilgrims that a committee was formed to organize the influx. The large sums of money offered by the pilgrims resulted in the building of a place of worship. A chapel at the site of the apparition was soon authorized by Bishop Bartholomew Chiabrers on April 21, 1536. This new project was also approved by the city council of Savona, and Cardinal Spinola Horace, on July 24. By August 11 of that same year, the construction of the new church was begun. Four years after the first apparition, the local community of Savona decreed that March 18 would be observed as an annual festival with a votive procession to the shrine.

### **SAVONA’S HOSPITALITY TO POPE PIUS VII**

Savona is known for offering hospitality to Pope Pius VII who was exiled there by order of Napoleon in the year 1809, and held there until 1812. During those years he vowed that if he were released he would crown the statue of Our Lady of Mercy. The promise was kept when the pope placed a royal diadem on the statue on May 10, 1815. More recently, the church and Our Lady were honored by the papal visit of Pope Benedict XVI who went there in pilgrimage on May 17, 2008.