

## Our Lady of Banneux (1933)

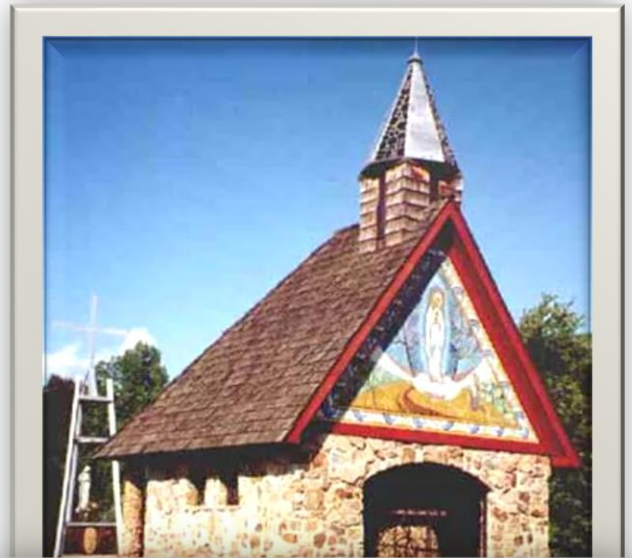
The apparitions of Our Lady of Banneux were reported by a young child, Mariette Beco a native of Banneux, Belgium in the 1930s. They are also known as the Virgin of the Poor. The apparitions were approved by the Roman Catholic Church in 1949.

Beco reported eight visions of the Blessed Virgin Mary between January 15 and March 2, 1933. She reported seeing a Lady in White who declared herself the Virgin of the Poor and told her: "Believe in me and I will believe in you". In one vision, the Lady reportedly asked Mariette to drink from a small spring and later said that the spring was for healing. Over time the site drew pilgrims. Today, the small spring yields about 2,000 gallons of water a day with many reports of miraculous healings.

Our Lady of Banneux' is the sobriquet given to the apparition of the Virgin Mary to Mariette Beco, an adolescent girl living in Banneux, province of Liège (Belgium). Between January 15 and March 2, 1933, Mlle Beco told her family and parish priest of seeing a Lady in white who declared herself to be the 'Virgin of the Poor', saying I come to relieve suffering and believe in me and I will believe in you. In one of these visions, Mariette said the Lady asked her to drink from a small spring, telling her the spring was for healing and "for all nations". Over time the site drew pilgrims. Today, the small spring yields about 2,000 gallons of water a day with many reports of miraculous healings.

Her claims were subject to an official investigation from 1935 to 1937 by an episcopal commission. The evidence collected was submitted to Rome for further analysis. In May 1942 Bishop Kerkhofs of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Liège (Belgium) gave a first recognition of the authenticity of the facts. Then, in 1947, approval for the apparitions came from the Holy See. It was declared definite in 1949. After the apparitions, Beco decided to remain a private person, married and had a quiet family life. A small chapel stands where the Virgin of the Poor requested it to be built. Mariette Beco died 2 December 2011 at the age of 90.[6] In 2008 she made a final statement about her role in the apparitions: "I was no more than a postman who delivers the mail. Once this has been done, the postman is of no importance any more".

On the evening of Sunday 15 January, 1933, at about seven o'clock, Mariette Beco was in the kitchen with her mother while waiting for her younger brother Julien to arrive home at their house in Banneux, a Belgian village fifty miles north-east of Beauraing. She looked out of the



window into the dark night again, to see if he was coming, and was surprised to see a young lady out in the yard, seemingly made of light and smiling at her. Mariette noticed the oval light that surrounded her body; she was bent slightly forward and inclined to the left and was wearing a long white gown with a blue sash, as well as a transparent white veil on her head. Mariette could see a golden rose on her right foot and a rosary with a golden chain and cross hanging on her right arm, which was joined to the left in prayer.

Mariette told her mother about this, but Mrs. Beco, who had initially joked that perhaps it might be the Blessed Virgin, became frightened on seeing a white light shaped like a person, with what looked like a sheet over its head, and closed the curtain. Mariette though took another look and still saw the Lady smiling at her, and taking courage she began to pray with the rosary beads she had only recently found on the road.

She recited several decades and saw the apparition's lips move in prayer, before the Lady beckoned her with her finger to come outside. As she moved towards the door though, her mother, alarmed by now, locked it, and by the time Mariette had returned to the window the Lady had gone. Nothing happened the next evening, Monday 16th, but the local priest, Fr. Jamin, was surprised to see Mariette at Mass on the Tuesday morning for the first time in months. She also came to his catechism class, and impressed, he asked her to give her account of what had happened, which he noted down immediately afterwards.

He tried to catch her out by claiming she had seen the statue of Our Lady of Lourdes, but Mariette insisted that the Lady she had seen was inclined forward and much more beautiful. On Wednesday 18 January, Mariette left the house at seven o'clock in the evening, and knelt to say the rosary near the front gate as her father watched. Suddenly she raised her arms, because, as she was later to recount, she could see the Blessed Virgin descending towards her between two tall pine trees, a tiny figure growing larger and more luminous as she approached, stopping near her on a small greyish cloud about a foot from the ground. She joined in Mariette's prayers but did not touch the rosary that hung from her arm. Mariette then rose and went out through the gate and onto the road. She later said that the Lady had again beckoned her with her finger and she had followed her out. She fell to her knees with a thud on two occasions, before turning to the right and kneeling for a third time on the ditch, placing her hands into some water there. She said later that the Lady had told her to do this, and the bystanders heard her repeat aloud: "This stream is reserved for me," and "Good evening." As the apparition disappeared over the pines, growing ever smaller, Mariette came to herself and was then questioned about what she had seen.

Next evening, Thursday 19 January, Mariette again left the house at about seven and knelt down in the snow to pray. After a couple of decades of the rosary she again saw the Lady, stretched out her arms and said: "Oh, she is here!" before asking her who she was, to hear the reply: "I am the Virgin of the poor." She then took the same path to the spring by the ditch, again falling to her knees on a total of three occasions. Mary spoke to her: "This spring is reserved for all the nations - to relieve the sick." Finally Mariette repeated the last words of the Lady for this apparition, which only lasted about seven minutes: "I shall pray for you. Au Revoir." Mariette continued on subsequent evenings to pray, on her own sometimes, often with her father too, but it was only after three weeks of disappointment that the Lady again appeared to her on 11 February, the feast of Our Lady of Lourdes. Six people were present on this cold, moonlit, Saturday evening, and after reaching the spring, with similar genuflections as before, Mariette plunged her hand into the water and blessed herself, while appearing to listen intently to someone.

After a few minutes Mariette thanked her unseen visitor and tearfully made her way back to the house, indicating the Lady's words: "I come to relieve suffering." Afterwards she went to see Fr. Jamin and gave him a full account of what had happened. There were no more apparitions until 15 February, when several ladies and Mariette's mother were with her in the garden. The rosary was recited and then Mariette again saw the beautiful Lady, reporting that the priest had asked her for a sign and then listening intently for several minutes before bursting into tears. She could only say that the Lady had said: "Believe in me, I will believe in you. Pray much. Au Revoir."

On Monday 20 February, Mariette again made her way to the spring, just over a hundred yards away, and was able to report Mary's words as being simply: "My dear child, pray much." The final apparition, the eighth, took place on 2 March 1933. In reply to Mary's words, "I am the Mother of the Saviour, Mother of God, Pray much," Mariette could only say, "Yes, yes." Mary then blessed Mariette as she had done during the fourth apparition and indicated that this was indeed the last apparition by saying "Adieu," instead of "Au Revoir," as before. Banneux was investigated from 1935 until 1937 by an Episcopal commission, after which the evidence collected was submitted to Rome. Meanwhile growing numbers of pilgrims came to the shrine, and in May 1942 Bishop Kerkhofs of Liege approved the cult of the Virgin of the Poor. In 1947 the apparitions themselves received preliminary approval, with this becoming definite in 1949. Like the children at Beauraing, Mariette married and had a family, being, like them, content to remain in the background.

## **The Message of Our Lady of Banneux**

Both the apparitions in Beauraing and Banneux have been approved by the Church – such a grace for a little country bordered by giants like France and Germany. Today, Banneux has become a wellspring from which grace flows. The chapel requested by the Virgin has been built. It is called the Chapel of the Apparitions. Since it is too small to accommodate pilgrims, a bigger church – the Church of the Virgin of the Poor – was built in 1984. This new one could accommodate some 5,000 pilgrims. It should be noted that twenty miraculous cures have been rigidly documented. There are long lines to the confessional and the rosary is prayed every day at 7 o'clock in the evening, the time when Mariette would hold her prayer vigil waiting for the Virgin. A Triduum for the Sick is held weekly during the pilgrimage season from May to October and works of charity have also spread for the poor dearly loved by Mary. The place was made a National Shrine by the bishops of Belgium in 1999 and is visited by pilgrims from all over the world.

In 1958, Bishop Kerkhofs wrote: "What is now important is not again the recognition of the facts of Banneux, but the understanding and spreading of the message of the Virgin of the Poor." And what did Our Lady of Banneux, the Virgin of the Poor, want to say? In many of her apparitions, the Mother of God was sublimely serious. In Fatima, she spoke of the dangers of atheistic communism and the grave evils threatening the world. While the apparitions in Lourdes and Banneux have similarities, in Lourdes she gave a profound statement, a re-echoing of a dogma just proclaimed: "I am the Immaculate Conception." But in Banneux, she came simply to reach out to the poor and the sick. Sent by the Good Shepherd, she led them all to the spring: "The Lord is my Shepherd... He leads me beside the still waters." (Psalm 23) With the proximity of Beauraing to Banneux, there seems to be no

logic to the Banneux apparitions. But does love need to be explained by logic? It is said that the heart has a logic that the mind sometimes does not understand.

The Virgin of the Poor in Banneux is actually also the Virgin of the Magnificat. In her hymn of praise, Mary exalted the God who has put down the mighty from their thrones and lifted up those who are downtrodden. "He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty." Her eight apparitions in Banneux to Mariette Beco are an expression of her solidarity with the poor she upholds in the Magnificat, those who are bereft of material and spiritual comforts. It did not matter that she was just in nearby Beauraing twelve days ago. Like the Good Shepherd, she seeks out each soul. Love is infinite and boundless.