

OUR LADY OF CHINA **Dong Lu, China 1900 and 1995**

BOXER REBELLION

THE anti-colonialist, anti-Christian members of the Boxer Rebellion harassed China between November 2, 1899, and September 7, 1901. They were against many political issues, but were also against religion and often attacked mission compounds. They also besieged foreign embassies and performed so many atrocities that diplomats, foreign civilians, soldiers and some Chinese Christians retreated to the Legation Quarter where they stayed fifty-five days until the Eight-nation Alliance, which included the United States, brought twenty thousand armed troops to defeat the rebels.



THE FIRST APPARITION

But during the time of their activity, in the year 1900, ten thousand rebels attacked the small impoverished village of Dong Lu, the home of about one thousand Christians. While firing their weapons into huddled groups of frightened Christians, the attackers suddenly began shooting in the air. When they saw that their attack was not gaining the expected result, they stopped. It was then that the people saw in the air a vision of the Blessed Virgin surrounded by a mystical light. The rebels, to their surprise and shock, were chased from the village by the apparition of a fiery horseman thought to have been St. Michael. Grateful for Our Lady's protection, the villagers built a beautiful church in her honor. The pastor at the time had a painting made that depicted the Virgin dressed in the imperial robes of Dowager Empress XI, and the Christ Child clothed in a costly imperial robe. This painting was hung in the church of Dong Lu where it was honored by pilgrimages starting in 1924. It was this painting that was officially sanctioned in the name of Our Lady of China. It was blessed by Pope Pius XI in 1928, in response to the

requests made by the 1924 Shanghai Synod of Bishops in China. This was the first national conference of bishops in the country.

The little church was recognized in 1932, when Pope Pius XI approved the church as an official Marian Shrine. Pope Pius XII in 1941 designated the second Sunday of May as a special feast day of Our Lady of China and approved its insertion in the liturgical calendar. Unfortunately, the little shrine was destroyed during the Second World War when the Japanese bombed it, but it was rebuilt in 1992, and is now the largest church in Northern China.

THE SECOND APPARITION

Yet another apparition of Our Lady and Christ Child took place on May 23, 1995, when 30,000 Catholics gathered at the shrine on the vigil of the Feast of Our Lady, Mary Help of Christians. Present were four bishops and almost one hundred priests who gathered in an open field to celebrate an outdoor Holy Mass. When the opening prayer began, and then again during the Consecration, everyone observed the sun spinning from right to left with various colors emanating from it. Our Lady of China holding the Child Jesus was also clearly seen. Just as at Fatima, during the miracle of the sun, when the tableau increased, here too Our Lady was met by the Holy Family and other figures. The phenomenon lasted approximately twenty minutes.

PILGRIMS FORBIDDEN ACCESS TO THE CHURCH

The following day, May 24, 1995, members of the Public Security Forces forbade pilgrims to gather on the hill and forced many into buses and trains. An estimated one hundred thousand, however, went by way of different routes and successfully joined others to celebrate the Feast of Mary, Our Lady of China.

The harassment of pilgrims continued the next year when, in April and May 1996, five thousand troops were mobilized with thirty armored cars and helicopters in an effort to isolate the village. At this time a dearly loved statue of Mary was confiscated. The painted portrait of the Blessed Mother and Child was saved because it had been safely hidden while a reproduction was displayed in the church. The original portrait is in the possession of Chinese priests who carry out their activities in disguise.

Presently, because of the political situation in China, many bishops, priests and Catholics, loyal to the Pope, have been arrested and tortured. Pilgrimages to Dong Lu

have been declared illegal by the government, and the faithful who are loyal to the Pope must observe services in secret. There is an “official church” in which certain services are permitted, and these are strictly monitored by the government.

Every year on October 1, celebrations are held that commemorate Pope John Paul II’s canonization of the 120 martyrs of the Boxer Rebellion