

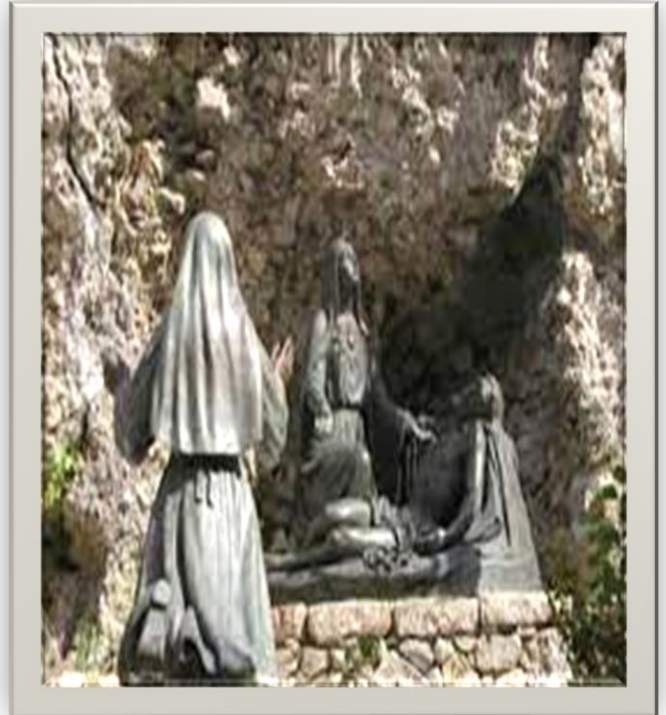
OUR LADY OF SORROWS

Castelpetroso, Italy 1888

Nine years after the apparition in Knock, Ireland, in which the Blessed Mother remained silent, another such vision occurred in Italy during which the Blessed Virgin again said nothing. Just as in Ireland, where many people of the village saw the apparition, so, too, in Castelpetroso crowds of people, including priests and bishops, saw the Heavenly Queen.

THE FIRST VISION

The vision took place on March 22, 1888, the day before the feast of the Compassion of Our Blessed Lady. Two women, Fabiana Cecchino, a thirty-five-year-old unmarried woman and Serafina Giovanna Valentino, a younger married woman, were searching for some lost sheep that had strayed to a neighboring hill, to which Castelpetroso is the nearest village. When they returned home crying, trembling and terrified, they told those who came to help them about the vision they had seen. They reported that they had seen a light coming through some fissures in a rocky



cliff and when they investigated, they saw distinctly the image of Our Lady of Sorrows kneeling beside her deceased Son. She was a fair-skinned, lovely young woman with disheveled hair who was bleeding from seven swords that pierced her heart. This report was met with the expected skepticism, but when a few of the curious visited the place and witnessed the cure of a seriously ill child and the conversion of an avowed heretic, not only did they believe, but so did the crowds that converged there.

A priest of the diocese who for a time disbelieved later saw the apparition and filed this narrative:



I had many times derided those who visited the mountain on which these wondrous apparitions took place. On May 16, 1888, however, more to pass the time than for anything else, I felt a desire to visit the place. When I arrived I began to look into one of the fissures, and I saw with great clearness Our Lady, like a statuette, with a little Child in her arms. After a short interval I looked again at the same spot; and, in place of the Most Holy Virgin I saw, quite clearly, the dead Saviour bearing the crown of thorns and all covered with blood. From that time forward when I have heard a mention of that thrice-blessed mountain and of the apparition I have felt myself moved to tears, and have not been able to say a word. Signed: Don Luigi Ferrara, Priest.

As at Fatima, in which Our Lady appeared in the sky with the Holy Family and then in the brown robes of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, this vision at Castelpetroso also featured changes in her appearance. Some of the people who climbed the mount of 2,600 feet to the apparition site testified that they saw the Blessed Virgin under the form of Our Lady of Mount Carmel; others saw her as Our Lady of Grace and still others as Our Lady of the Holy Rosary. But the majority saw the vision as Our Lady of Dolours. She was sometimes accompanied by St. Michael, at other times by St. Anthony, St.

Sebastian and sometimes by flights of angels.

News of the miracle soon reached Bishop Macarone-Palmieri of the diocese of Bojano in which the village of Castelpetroso is located. On his visit to Rome on other business in September of the same year, he acquainted Pope Leo XIII of the apparitions, and it was the pope's suggestion that an inquiry be conducted and that the bishop should visit Castelpetroso to study the events, which he did on his return. In the company of the archpriest of Bojano, the bishop saw the apparition on three occasions.

During May of 1888, a spring of water appeared at the place of the visions and in March of the following year, the Bishop of Bojano confirmed its existence to the editor of the periodical, *Servo di Maria*, which publicized the fact. Just as the people of Lourdes began to use the water of Bernadette's spring, the people of Castelpetroso began using the water of their new spring for medicinal purposes which resulted in reports of healings and favors received.

The bishop wisely ordered an examination of the evidence and called upon Father Joseph Lais of the Congregation of the Oratory of St. Philip Neri. Father Lais was a physicist, a medical doctor and the sub-director of the Vatican Observatory. Father Lais, in questioning the witnesses, learned that some people saw the apparition on one visit but not on other visits. For instance, one man saw her once in six times, another might have seen nothing, while another had seen Our Lady on almost every visit. According to a reliable source, the apparition was so overwhelming that two men fainted.

After carefully examining all aspects of the visions and reported cures, this well-appointed scientist declared without reservation that the apparitions were not the result of optical delusion and that any claim otherwise was ill founded. Father Lais declared in a statement:

The observations I made of the character of the people lead me to recognize that they are profoundly convinced of the event having taken place; and, on the other hand, their simple and ingenuous demeanor does not suggest the suspicion that the fact should be, to some extent, fanciful or the effect of the imagination; whilst the natural formation of the rocks excludes the theory of trickery. After this favorable report, the Bishop of Bojano formed a committee for the purpose of planning the collection of funds for a church to be built on the place favored by the Blessed Mother. In approval of this effort, Pope Leo XIII had his Secretary of State, Cardinal Rampolla, send a message imparting the Apostolic Blessing to the

members of the committee and to all those who contributed to the fund. In May of 1890, the cornerstone was laid for a beautiful Gothic church.

In a lengthy article published in 1888 by the religious periodical, *Servo di Maria*, The Bishop of Bojano gives details of the apparition, which includes his own experience. I myself can bear witness that I visited the sacred spot, and after sometime spent in prayer, saw the apparition of the Blessed Virgin. At first the image of Our Lady appeared faint and indistinct, but at length she appeared in the attitude and proportions of the representation of the Mother of Sorrows ... Beside myself and the very large number of persons whose names are recorded in the official report, there are the Vicar General of the Diocese, the Archpriest of the Cathedral, and many other ecclesiastics who also beheld the miraculous apparition