

Columns

Why is the Lady of Good Counsel patron of the CWL?

YOUR QUESTIONS

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Where does the devotion to Our Lady of Good Counsel originate and why is she the patroness of the CWL?



Catholics have had a strong devotion to Mary under numerous titles. Some titles come to us from her life, others from apparitions, while many come from Mary's miraculous intervention in our lives.

There appear to be two strands to the story of the icon which is venerated as Our Lady of Good Counsel. The earliest is associated with Albania's Our Lady of Shkodra (Good Counsel) and the second is part of the Italian village of Genazzano.

Numerous churches to Mary were built in Albania but the church at Shkodra (also known as Scutari) was a centre of special devotion. The protection received through the intercession of Mary and the beautiful painting which hung above the main altar drew large crowds. In the 15th century, when the Ottoman Turks were advancing, this church became a haven and Shkodra was the last stronghold of resistance.

When Shkodra was being attacked, two Albanians stopped at the church to pray to the "Blessed Lady" for a safe escape. They suddenly noticed the painting moving away from the wall. They followed it to Rome where the image disappeared. They heard about a miraculous image appearing in nearby Genazzano and found their Blessed Lady icon.

As reward for their generosity in renovating Rome's churches, Genazzano was given property to build a church. In 1467, it needed repairs; a local wealthy woman, Petruccia de Geneo, felt called to help. When she ran out of funds, she was mocked and the church was left unfinished.

On St. Mark's Day, April 25, 1467, during outdoor celebrations, exquisite music was heard. A cloud appeared and moved down to the unfinished wall of the church. When it dissipated, a portrait of the Blessed Virgin and the Christ Child was seen suspended on top of the wall, only touching it at the upper edge. The people marvelled at its beauty.

Pilgrims began coming and miracles were reported. Pope Paul II (1464-71) sent two bishops to investigate.

POPES' PARTICIPATION

The involvement of many popes shows a significant commitment. In 1630, Pope Urban VIII went on pilgrimage, as did Pius IX in 1864. In 1682, Innocent XI had the picture crowned with gold. The clergy of Genazzano were granted an Office and a Mass of Our Lady on its 260th anniversary.

The Pious Union of Our Lady of Good Counsel was approved in 1753 by Benedict XIV who became a member himself. Later Popes Pius IX and Leo XIII became members.

This church was under the Augustinians since 1356 and they were granted an Office and a Mass by Pius VI in 1779. This pope also granted a plenary indulgence to the faithful and Pius VIII extended it to all pilgrims. In 1884, Leo XIII approved a new Office and Mass for Augustinians and in 1903 raised the church to a minor Basilica. In 1904, he inserted the invocation to Our Lady of Good Counsel in the Litany of the Blessed Virgin.

In the 1988 revision of Masses of the Blessed Virgin, a special votive Mass under Mother of Good Counsel title is included. Her feast is celebrated April 26.

Devotion remained strong in Albania. It spread quickly in Europe and the United States through the work of the Augustinians and the Jesuits. A chapel to Our Lady of Good Counsel in the national shrine in Washington, D.C., shows her importance.

Our Lady of Good Counsel became a symbol of lay involvement and responsibility due to the woman Petruccia who saw the need to repair, restore and beautify the church in Genazzano when it was in ruins.

Therefore, it was natural that the World Union of Women's Organization chose Our Lady of Good Counsel for their patroness when they formed in 1910. When the Canadian league was invited in 1920, it joined the world federation and in 1923 took the same patroness.

VERONESE MASTER

Recent restoration work in 1957-61 seems to confirm the Scutari origin. An inscription indicates it was painted by Antonio Viviani, a Veronese master of the early 15th century.

The original, measuring 18 by 15 inches, is painted on light plaster and is brilliant and brightly coloured. The faces are simple, compassionate and devotional. The image appears to have different expressions at different times. The child is so close to his mother that his simple gesture seems to draw us to Mary, Our Lady of Good Counsel.

(Other questions? Email: zdunich@telus.net)