



THE APPEALS OF OUR LADY APPARITIONS AND MARIAN SHRINES IN THE WORLD

Apparition of the Virgin Mary at GIETRZWALD

POLAND, 1877

Jn the parish church of the Polish village of Gietrzwald is preserved a copy of the icon of the Black Madonna of Czesochowa. In 1877 Our Lady appeared repeatedly to 13 year old Justyna Szafrańska, to 12 year old Barbara Samulowska, and to a forty-five year old woman. The Virgin Mary spoke in Polish, a language that was banned since the inhabitants of the area were under the Prussians who imposed the German language and the Protestant faith. Our Lady presented herself as the Immaculate Conception, requested the daily recitation of the Rosary and announced the end of the religious persecution.

Towards the end of the XIX Century, the Virgin Mary appeared various times in a small village in the north of Poland. They lasted from June 30 to September 16, 1877. The two visionaries were Barbara Samulowska and Justyna Szafrańska, who later entered into the Order of the Daughters of Charity. On February 2, 2005, the Archbishop Edmund Michał Piszcz, in the Basilica of the Blessed Virgin of Gietrzwald, established the diocesan tribunal for the beatification of Sister Barbara Samulowska, who in front of that basilica, a little more than a century earlier, with her friend Justyna received the apparitions of Our Lady. At the time of the apparitions, the region was under Prussian control, particularly harsh and severe against them because they were Polish and Catholic. In 1873, a few years before the apparitions, the Polish language was banned in all the schools of Warmia, and under the Kulturkampf all the religious congregations were suppressed, except the ones that were taking care of the sick, like the ones of the Daughters of Charity. In this difficult moment, the faithful of Gietrzwald gathered tightly around an ancient picture of the church depicting the Mother of God with the Baby Jesus. It was precisely in those circumstances that the Virgin Mary appeared at Gietrzwald in 1877. The pastor of the town, Augustin Weichsel (1830-1909), of a German family, was convinced about the authenticity of the apparitions since the beginning, based on good reasons. Also the ecclesiastical authorities did not delay to accept the truthfulness of the apparitions. The two visionaries were both born in Woryty, a few kilometers from Gietrzwald. Justyna was born in 1864, Barbara in 1865. It was just after the Catechism exam for her First Communion that Justyna saw the Virgin Mary on June 27, 1877, above a tree in front of the parish church near a fountain. At first the girl saw an extraordinary splendor on the tree, and then Our Lady dressed in white. From June 30 Barbara also saw the Virgin Mary together with Justyna. The apparitions continued daily until September 16, 1877, for a little less than three months. The Catholic population of the region was deeply moved and perceived such apparitions as a gift of the Mother of God to her people, for perseverance in their faith so harshly persecuted. The girls since the beginning did not have doubts that it was the Virgin Mary, and submitted requests and questions in the name of everyone. Justyna asked in the first apparition: **"What do you desire, Mother of God?"**. The answer was: **"I desire that you recite the Rosary every day"**. Barbara Samulowska, once made participant of the apparition, asked: **"Who are you?"** She obtained an extraordinary response: **"I am the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, Immaculately conceived"**. On the first of August

Barbara asked: **"Will the parishes without priests obtain them soon?"**. She received this answer: **"If the people will pray with fervor, then the Church shall not be persecuted, rather the parishes without priests will receive them"**. On August 11 Barbara asked: **"Will the Church in Poland regain liberty?"**. Mary simply answered: **"Yes"**. The faithful entrusted to the girls many requests for the Virgin. Her answer was almost always: **"Recite the Rosary"**. Barbara Samulowska, on the first of September, asked the Virgin what she desired from the pastor of Gietrzwald. She heard the following response: **"That he always try to invoke me, I have always been a protection for him and I shall be until the end"**. Particularly touching were the words said to the girls on September 8, day of the Nativity of Mary: **"Do not grieve, because I will always be with you"**. On September 16 with a large presence of the faithful, the Virgin appeared for the last time, blessed the spring that was located in the meadow, and confided the last words: **"Recite the Rosary"**. The commission established by the Bishop of Warmia, already on the first of September declared: **"We have come to the conclusion that the apparitions of Gietrzwald have a real and true foundation"**.

Under the arrangement of Bishop Philipp Krenzetz, the girls were immediately questioned by the delegates of an Episcopal commission. To have them escape the curiosity of the people, that was already becoming intense, and to avoid that the girls would agree on what to say, they were each received by a different family, in two different towns. On August 24, Barbara was questioned by the Episcopal commission. The commission remained impressed by her whole attitude, sincere, simple, humble, and straightforward. Specific responses attracted the attention of the commission, because they indicated a knowledge superior to the education of the girls. Afterwards the two girls decided to become Daughters of Charity and were sent to attend the internal seminary in the Mother House of Paris, where they arrived on January 19, 1884. The directress of the seminary left a note written about Barbara Samulowska, very laudatory of her spiritual life and her behavior. Sister Barbara (who took the name of Sister Stanisława) lived and prayed in those places where Saint Catherine Labouré had received the apparitions of the Miraculous Medal. After the profession of her first vows, on February 2, 1889, Sister Stanisława remained eleven years in Paris. Afterwards she went as a missionary to Guatemala where, because of previous laws against the Church and the religious orders, only the Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul could operate. She returned to her homeland after almost 40 years, but to avoid the small honor of being recognized and applauded, she did not go to Gietrzwald. Upon returning to Guatemala, she continued her work as always in obscurity. Sister Stanisława, after a brief period in a city orphanage, returned to the central hospital of Guatemala. There, after a life of intense and beautiful witness of holiness and charity, she died in the Lord on December 6, 1950, at the age of 85, 66 of vocation and 54 of mission in Guatemala, spent primarily among the sick and the poor.

Picture depicting the apparition

Shrine of Gietrzwald

Detail of the miraculous spring

Fragment of maple wood, exact place where the Virgin Our Lady reached her feet at Gietrzwald

Image of the Virgin with the Baby, venerated in the Polish Shrine of Gietrzwald

Interior of the Shrine

Shrine of Our Sister Stanisława Samulowska, Daughter of Charity

Placed the apparition where a miraculous spring gushed forth

The apparition immediately had an unusual resonance in all of Poland, in Europe and beyond. On September 8, 1877, the pastoral front of the parishes, 30,000 pilgrims from all of Poland gathered at Gietrzwald. In the following years, their number increased. In 1879 they reached 70,000, among the level of Lublin and Bielski. Great numbers for the time and for the place - difficult to reach. In 1877, evidence of the apparitions, a Miraculous Congress was held simultaneously in Gietrzwald and Our Lady, where the honor of the apparitions was much considered. Cardinal Weysskopf and Cardinal Kowalewski participated in the Congress. Their presence and their words contributed greatly to emphasize the reality and the significance of the apparitions themselves. Moreover also Paul Tisserand had to be convinced that he should be the first trip to Poland as Pope. In fact, he held in Our Lady, on June 6, 1880, the Mass before the full of Cardinals and religious members on the "holy" Woman. He remembered in particular the place of devotion to the Virgin, naming Gietrzwald first.