

THE SHRINE OF SCALDAFERRO

Center for Marian Spirituality and Human Advancement



Shrine of Mary, Health of the Sick

Historical Notes

Scaldaferro, a town near the city of Vicenza, Italy, is home to the *B.M.V. Salus Infirmorum* (Blessed Virgin Mary, Health of the Sick).



The church-sanctuary had its origin in a small fresco representing the Virgin, painted on the outside wall of a stable around the year 1665. Being in a marshy and unhealthy area, the Shrine became, in the faith of the believers, like a bulwark against the bubonic plague and of gratitude for having overcome it through the intercession of Mary. Hence the name "Blessed Virgin Mary, Health of the Sick."

To preserve the sacred image, the faithful of Scaldaferro first built a domed chapel and then, in 1715, an octagonal church, enlarged in 1923.

In the old Shrine, above the main altar, a piece of 18th century Baroque work, a marble background holds the image of Our Lady between Saints Anthony and Francis, painted in later times, and recalling the era of a Franciscan community here.

In 1923 the sanctuary was enlarged, but in 1972 the farm located behind the sanctuary was acquired, thus obtaining additional space for religious functions. Now the sacred image is found with two spaces: the old Shrine with the venerated image on one side, and behind it, the further extension, once the location of the farm's stable.

The modern part, thanks to the interest of the Marianist

Community, has made it possible to welcome more and more numerous pilgrims. On the pavement, behind the main altar, a glass pane covers a piece of the trough that recalls the origin of the Shrine and its precious link with Bethlehem.

The wall that divides the old and the modern parts of the Shrine was decorated in 2006, at the initiative of the Marianist community, with a stupendous mosaic of about 90 square meters, the work of Jesuit Father Marko Ivan Rupnik. The events of the life of Christ illustrate the salvation brought by Jesus, with which Mary has been wonderfully associated.



On the pavement, behind the main altar, under a glass panel, there is a piece of the old cattle trough that recalls the origin of the Shrine and the precious link with Bethlehem and the crib set located at the exit of the sanctuary. The artistic nativity scene, the work of local artisans, is frequented by thousands of visitors during the Christmas period.



Conceived by the priest present in Scaldasferro before the arrival of the Marianists, it is called the “Biblical Crib” for its resemblance to Palestinian places and adherence to the episodes in the gospels. It occupies an area of about 200 square meters and is recognized as one of the most significant in the area. An original sound and light presentation serves as a true catechesis.

The Marianist Religious

The invitation of Bishop Pietro Nonis in 1993 to animate this Shrine suddenly seemed to us like a great grace from heaven. “You are consecrated to Mary,” the Bishop told us, “that is why I want to entrust you with the animation of the Marian Shrine of Scaldasferro.” The Marianists took it over on September 18, 1993.

By calling us to be Marianists, God invites us to follow more closely Jesus Christ, his Son, become son of Mary for the salvation of mankind. We come together in community to live out our common faith. We welcome Mary as Mother, as a precious gift from God and, animated by the same love that Jesus has for his mother, we consecrate ourselves to her, so that the Holy Spirit

might form us more perfectly each day into the image and likeness of the Son. Strengthening our covenant with Mary by our vow of Stability, we strive to assist her in her mission: to form in faith, through her first-born son, a multitude of brothers and sisters.

The life of the Shrine includes various activities: listening to the Word of God (*lectio divina*), a course on Consecration to Mary, vocational discernment for young people, an iconography course, a ceramics laboratory, pastoral care for the sick and for people in difficulty. Most recently, in 2020, a work of a social nature has come to fruition: accommodations to welcome persons in difficult situations. People stay in the old farm house next to the Sanctuary. That work is dedicated to Mary "Mother of Mercy" because the initiative originated directly in the Jubilee Year of Mercy (2016).



Maria Salus Infirmorum

The Biblical Reading of the Image

When one looks at the image, two contrasting features are striking. Mary is dressed poorly, girt with the apron of a servant girl, but around her neck and on her chest, she wears the ornaments of a Queen and in her apron appears a scepter. The local inhabitants, referring to the title of the Sanctuary, "Mary, Health of the Sick," have identified the apron with that of a nurse, so that Mary has become "Lady Nurse." But actually, one must think more about the Annunciation, seeing the dove above her head, a symbol of the Holy Spirit. To the angel announcing the birth of Jesus, Mary replied: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord, let it be done to me according to your word," and to her cousin Elizabeth, who proclaimed her blessed, she replied: "[the Lord] has looked upon the lowliness of his servant."

Observing her apron, the viewer recalls the gesture of Jesus at the last supper: "[he] got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet ..." (Jn 13, 4-5). Mary, perfect disciple of the Son, places herself at the service of God and of us: at the Annunciation, at Cana, where she obtains the first

miracle, at the cross where, at the wish of her Son, she opens herself to a universal spiritual motherhood. But because of the scepter and the crown [formerly just painted] that she wears, she is also she Queen. She reigns because she is the mother of the great King, the Son of God. The Church applies Psalm 45 to her: "At your right hand stands the queen in gold from Ophir... the king will desire your beauty. Since he is your Lord... All glorious is the princess ... gold embroidery is her clothing; in many-colored robes she is led to the king."

Contemplating the image in prayer

I contemplate the image, she appears to me as the expectant lady; she is pregnant waiting for her Son. The dove over her head testifies "the Holy Spirit will overshadow you." You are both the Virgin of the Annunciation and the Virgin of the Magnificat.

I look at your luminous face and with the Scripture I say: "she won the king's favor" (Esther 5:2), "like the sun shining with full force" (Rev 1:16). You are all beautiful, my friend, in you there is no stain.

I admire her mouth and say: "Your lips are like a crimson thread, and your mouth is lovely. Your cheeks are like halves of a pomegranate behind your veil" (Song 4:3).

I contemplate your womb and with the Song I say: "Your belly is a heap of wheat" (Song 7:3) and with the angel I repeat: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born of you will be holy; he will be called Son of God" (Lk 1:35b).

United with the Christians of the East, I acclaim:

"Hail, O all pure, palace of the sole King. Hail, O brilliant throne of the Almighty... You are the temple, the door, the palace and the throne of the King, O worthy and venerable Virgin. You have become a golden censer, the purest flower vase of the invisible Trinity. In you the Father has been pleased and the Son has made his home; and the Holy Spirit, covering you with his shadow, has manifested you as the Mother of God. Like a burning bush that is not consumed, so you have given birth, remaining a virgin... Hail, great Tabernacle of God. Hail, Ark of the New Covenant. Hail, Golden Vessel from which manna has been given to all... Hail, Mother of God, who have carried in your womb the One that the heavens cannot contain."

Intercessory Prayers

- That in this time of uncertainty, the Church may be an important and constant testimony of God's Love for us. To help us understand that being united to Christ is a consolation that actively generates common well-being. **Let us pray.**
- Sweetest Heart of Jesus, you who have said that the harvest is great but the workers are few... let us pray to the Lord of the harvest to send workers, let us beg the Father who has said: everything you ask in the name of my son I will grant you, We ask, Father: send workers, many vocations to your Church, to the Marianist Family throughout the world. We ask this not through our own merits, but through the merits of Mary, mother of Jesus and our mother. **Let us pray.**
- Contemplating you, Mary, who at the foot of the cross experienced such deep pain, we confidently invoke your help. O Mother of Mercy, help our humanity suffering from the

difficulties of the present time, drive away the specter of the pandemic and the madness of war, have compassion on our miseries, inspire in the hearts of those who govern feelings of benevolence and fraternal charity, so that, after the anguish of this time of trial, the joy of the feast might shine again, as in Cana of Galilee. **Let us pray.**

- Mary, we entrust our young people to you so that, facing the future with confidence and recognizing their own talents, they might understand God's plan for them, knowing how to make hard choices, even against the current. **Let us pray.**
- O Mary, Mother of the Church and our Mother, bless our Marianist Family, accompany us with your maternal presence so that, in covenant with you, we might always know how to assist you in your mission. Through the intercession of our Founders, Father Chaminade and Mother Adèle, grant all the members of our Family to grow in faith, hope and charity, to respond to the needs of the women and men of our time, witnessing, under your guidance, to the Gospel and the presence of Jesus. **Let us pray.**
- For the representatives of institutions so that, sustained by faith in Christ, inspired by the Gospel and supported by our prayers, they might always work for the common good, for the defense of Life, and for peace in the world. **Let us pray.**

(At the end of the prayer) **Our Father...**

Let us conclude with the prayer so dear to our Founders:

We turn to you for protection, holy Mother of God.
Listen to our prayers and help us in our needs.
Save us from every danger, glorious and blessed Virgin.
May the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit be glorified
in all places through the Immaculate Virgin Mary. Amen.



Shrine of Scaldasferro – Crown of Angels