

Our Lady of Laus, Refuge of Sinners

Our Lady of Laus, in the French Alps, is a unique shrine of its kind because during the 54 years where Mary appeared to Benoîte Rencurel, she did not cease to call for conversion, which gave the name "refugee of sinners." {cimovie}Laus.flv|Title|laus.jpg{/cimovie}

In May of 1664, the 17 year-old shepherdess saw St. Maurice, a great saint of the Alps, who declares to her that she will soon see the Virgin Mary in a near-by valley. Benoîte, confident and innocent, goes with her flock to a grotto in the Valley of Kilns, where Mary appeared to her while she was praying the rosary.

The apparition continued for four months. Mary appeared holding her son in her arms, the child Jesus, who came to bring reconciliation to the world. This is the message that some time later Mary will convey to Benoîte in a different place, in the small chapel of the village of Laus. This chapel, dedicated to Our Lady of Good Encounter, will rapidly become a larger church. In fact, Mary requested that a place of prayer be built for the conversion of sinners, as well as a house for the priests. It is an invitation to acknowledge God's mercy, since Benoîte Rencurel herself named the place "Refuge of sinners," and so also an invitation to conversion.

News of the apparitions began to spread quickly in the region and pilgrims started to come. According to magistrate Grimaud, who came to examine the veracity of the accounts, there were sixty miraculous healings between 1664 and 1666. These would take place after the oil of the lamp in the chapel was applied with faith on the ill, according to the advice that the Virgin Mary had given to Benoîte.

The first healing, that of Catherine Vial in 1665, gave rise to an official pronouncement of the apparitions on September 18th of the same year. However, it was not until May 4th, 2008, that the supernatural basis of these apparitions were officially recognized by the Church. The shepherdess, whose beatification process has been opened, never asked for her special grace, but rather for trials. Throughout her life, she was filled with spiritual graces, with apparitions until her death at age 71.

Entering into the Third Order Dominicans, Benoite Rancurel continued her mission to serve pilgrims at the Laus shrine until her death. It was a pilgrimage that was almost never interrupted. From the beginning, since the 17th century, pilgrimages began, and though they were interrupted during the revolution, there has always been on pilgrimages, and of course they continue today.

The call to conversion, which is at the heart of the message from Mary to Benoite, is found through the sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist. The teachings of Mary to Benoîte remain valid today: no one is truly converted except through being encouraged by the sweetness of mercy. In the shrine of Laus, the maternal presence of Mary, Refuge of sinners, is experienced with a palpable force.

Prayer:

Queen of Laus, kind and loving Mother, hear our pious pleas. Your son always hears your prayers, and you always hear your children.

O pure Virgin, ceaselessly watch over our hearts from heaven.

Let no dirt tarnish the heavenly whiteness.

Be our support in virtue, all-powerful Virgin, and guide our feeble steps.

If we fall, Compassionate Mother,

kindly embrace us in your arms.

Give us shelter under your wings when the storms burst with fury,

spare us from cruel agony,

and may the sinner repent with true remorse.

Leave us not at our last hour,

but let us sleep in peace at your maternal breast.

And once awakening, drawing back the veil,

we will see you in the splendor of heaven.

Our Lady of Laus, Refuge of sinners,

pray for us who have recourse to thee.