

Marian Apparition Receives Church Approval

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Staff Writer

(May 6, 2008) The first Marian apparitions to be approved in the 21st century took place in France on Sunday, May 4, when Bishop Jean-Michel de Falco announced the official Church approval of apparitions that occurred to a French girl named Benoite (Benedicta) Rencurel between 1664 and 1718.

During a Mass which was attended by officials of the Roman Curia, Bishop de Falco called the approval the most singular event to take place in France since the apparitions of Lourdes in 1862.

“I recognize the supernatural origin of the apparitions and the events and words experienced and narrated by Benedicta Rencurel. I encourage all of the faithful to come and pray and seek spiritual renewal at this shrine,” the bishop said.

Benoite Rencurel was born on September 16, 1647 in Saint-Étienne d'Avançon, located in the valley of Laus in the French Alps. Unable to read or write, her only education came from listening to homilies at Sunday Mass. One day in May, 1664, she was praying the rosary while caring for animals when an old man dressed in the vestments of a bishop appeared to her and told her to go to a certain place where she would see the Mother of God.

“But sir, She is in Heaven,” Benoite said. “How can I see Her there?”

“Yes, she is in Heaven, and on earth too when She wants,” the man said, and disappeared.

The next morning, Benoite did as instructed and had just arrived when a woman of incomparable beauty and holding a child appeared before her.

“Beautiful Lady!” Benoite exclaimed. “What are you doing up there? Do you want to eat with me? I have some good bread which we can soften up at the fountain.”

The Lady smiled but said nothing.

“Beautiful Lady! Could you give us that child? He would make us so happy,” Benoite persisted. Again the Lady smiled but did not respond. She remained a few more minutes before disappearing into a cave.

For four months, the Lady appeared to the 17 year old Benoite every day and began talking to her and preparing her for her future mission. But it was not until later that summer when the Lady finally revealed her identity. “My name is Mary,” she told Benoite.

For the next year, Mary continued to appear to Benoite in Laus, telling her to “pray continuously for sinners.” Revealing herself as the reconciler and refuge of sinners, she was careful to speak on a level the uneducated child could understand. One time, She even allowed Benoite to take a

nap at Her feet while lying on the hem of Her mantle.

Slowly and carefully, Our Lady began to form Benoite in her mission - to work for the conversion of sinners through prayer, sacrifice and exhortation. Because God granted her the charism of reading hearts, Benoite was often given the task of correcting souls, frequently having to remind them of forgotten sins.

This occurred one day when Benoite's employer, Mrs. Rolland, a woman with no interest in religion, decided to see for herself what was going on at the apparition site. She secretly followed Benoite and hid behind a rock during the apparition. Although Mrs. Rolland saw nothing, she heard a voice tell Benoite "Your mistress is over there, hiding behind the rock. Tell her not to curse with the name of Jesus, because if she keeps it up there will be no paradise for her. Her conscience is in a very bad state; she should do penance." Mrs. Rolland was so moved by the message she returned to the sacraments and lived piously for the rest of her life.

Word of the apparitions spread quickly and by the time Benoite turned 18, diocesan authorities had officially recognized the events and constructed a small church on the site. Benoite continued to have regular apparitions of Mary accompanied by miraculous cures. Our Lady told Benoite that the oil from the sanctuary lamp would work miracles with the infirm if they received the anointing with faith in her intercession.

As the throngs of pilgrims grew, a new church was built in honor of Our Lady of Laus who became known as the Refuge of Sinners.

Benoite took the mission she received from Mary very seriously and dedicated herself to preparing sinners to receive the sacrament of Penance. She encouraged the two priests at the shrine to receive penitents with charity and kindness in order to help them convert.

"I asked my Son for Laus for the conversion of sinners, and He has granted it to me," Our Lady told Benoite.

Benoite was also asked to admonish women and girls about living lives of scandal, especially those who commit abortion, the unjust wealthy and the perverse. She also encouraged priests and religious to be faithful to their vows.

Between 1669 and 1679, Benoite received five visions of the suffering Christ. On a Friday in July of 1673, the suffering Jesus told her: "My daughter, I show myself in this state so that you can participate in my Passion." For the next 15 years, Benoite suffered a mystical crucifixion every week that lasted from Thursday evening to Saturday morning.

Benoite would receive regular apparitions of Our Lady for 54 years. A month before her death, she became bedridden with fevers. On December 28, 1718, she received the last rites and around 8 p.m. said goodbye to those around her. Benedicts then kissed a crucifix and passed away peacefully.

The shrine of Our Lady of Laus now attracts 20,000 pilgrims each year and is run by diocesan clergy with the assistance of a community of the Brothers of St. John who are dedicated to promoting the sacrament of Reconciliation.

The Catholic philosopher Jean Guitton called it “one of the most hidden and powerful shrines of Europe.”

“Nobody is obliged to believe in apparitions, even in those officially recognized,” Bishop de Falco said during the May 4 Mass. “But if they help us in our faith and our daily lives, why should we reject them?”

To read the complete story about Our Lady of Laus, visit <http://www.catholictradition.org/Mary/laus.htm>

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Let Marian theologian, Richard May, lead you into a deeper appreciation of Mary. See “Mary Our Mother,” a 4 part series available in our store at www.womenofgrace.com/catalog

Women of Grace Study Question:

Bishop de Falco is right; Christians are not obliged to believe in apparitions or other private revelation. Why? (See the Catechism of the Catholic Church, articles 66 and 67)