

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

Apparitions of the Virgin Mary in CUBA

REPUBLIC of CUBA, 1612



Alonso de Ojeda and the first conquistadors of Cuba intended to dominate over the native South American Indians. They, however, fought them back and the Spanish were forced to flee by crossing mountains and swamps in order to save their lives. In this way they reached the Indian village of Cuebá in the area of Jobabo. The Indians, seeing them reduced to a very bad state, had compassion on them and helped them. As a sign of gratitude, Alonso de Ojeda built a small sanctuary with tree branches, perhaps the first in Cuban territory. There he placed a precious image of Our Lady that was his, to honor the vow he made of donating it if he got out of that difficult situation safe and sound. He taught the Indians to recite the Hail Mary and the prayer spread so rapidly amongst the Indians that as a result Cuba began to be recognized as the "Island of the Hail Mary." Even if they did not understand the religion very well, the Indians of that place venerated the image and dedicated themselves to the sanctuary with great care and diligence when Ojeda departed. This was the situation that Padre de las Casas found when he arrived at the village of Cuebá.

Around the year 1612 or the beginning of 1613, two Indian brothers and a black boy of nine or ten years old went to search for salt near the Bay of Nipe. They were called respectively Juan de Hoyos, Rodrigo de Hoyos, and Juan Moreno ("The Three Juans" according to the tradition). While they went about the search for salt, the image of the Virgin appeared to them. That which followed is the account of the event by Juan Moreno in 1687: "... after having encamped on a little island called Cayo Francés which is found in the center of the Bay of Nipe, focused on going to the salt pit as soon as the weather improved, one morning in which the sea was calm, Juan and Rodrigo de Hoyos and the undersigned left the little island before the sunrise. They boarded a canoe to head towards the salt pit and, soon after being distanced from Cayo Francés, they noticed something white above the surf of the water; initially they were unable to understand what it was and when they got closer they thought it must be a straw and dry branches. The Indians said amongst themselves that it seemed to be a girl and, while they were discussing this, they got even closer to the object and they recognized the image of Our Lady the Most Holy Virgin with a Baby Jesus in her arms, placed on a little table upon which the writing "I am the Virgin of Charity." With great stupor, they noticed that the garment, which was of fabric, was not wet. Full of joy for this discovery, they gathered only two-thirds of the salt necessary and returned to the ranch of Barajagua..."

The royal administrator of the copper mines, Don Francisco Sánchez de Moya, ordered the construction of a chapel in which to put the image and he named Rodrigo de Hoyos as the chaplain. One night, Rodrigo went to make a visit to the Virgin and he realized that the image was not in its place. Immediately searches were organized but without success. The following morning, with enormous surprise on behalf of everyone, the Virgin was once again on the altar, a matter rather strange and inexplicable since the door of the chapel remained closed all night. The event repeated itself another two or three times until in Barajagua one began to ponder whether the Virgin desired to change location. And so, with much displeasure, they brought her in procession to the parish church of El Cobre. The Virgin was greeted in her new home, where she was placed on the high altar, with a festive pealing of the bells and great joy. From that moment she was known as the Virgin of Charity of El Cobre. The disappearance of the Virgin repeated itself even at El Cobre. It was then thought that the Virgin desired to be on the mountains of the Sierra Maestra. This was confirmed when a girl by the name of Apolonia ascended up the hill where the copper mines were in which her mother worked. The girl was following butterflies and gathering flowers when she saw the Virgin of Charity on the top of a mountain. The news of the little Apolonia put everyone in great turmoil. Some believed her and others did not, but the girl remained always coherent in her testimony. Then it was decided to transfer the Virgin onto the mountain. Starting from the apparition, devotion to the Virgin of Charity spread very rapidly throughout the island, despite difficult communication.

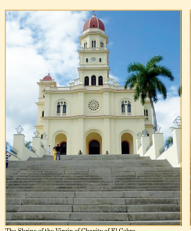
It was precisely at El Cobre, in 1801, that the miners, supported by Padre Alejandro Asciano, obtained freedom thanks to a Royal Decree issued on the 7th of April. With the passing of the years, the enclosure was enlarged to permit the construction of a new Shrine able to accommodate the growing number of pilgrims. The inauguration, with the transfer of the Virgin, occurred on the 8th of September in 1927. In 1977, Pope Paul VI elevated the dignity of Basilica the National Shrine of the Virgin of Charity of El Cobre. The Virgin was crowned Queen and Patroness of Cuba by His Holiness John Paul II on the 24th of January 1998, during the Holy Mass celebrated in honor of the occasion of his apostolic visit to Santiago in Cuba.



Painting which portrays the apparition of the Blessed Mother on the sea to Juan de Hoyos, Rodrigo de Hoyos, and Juan Moreno



Girl by the name of Apolonia ascends up the hill where the copper mines were in which her mother worked and she saw the Virgin of Charity on the mountain-top



The Shrine of the Virgin of Charity of El Cobre



Interior of the Shrine



Painting that portrays the apparition of the statue of the Blessed Mother



Table where, according to tradition, the statue of the Blessed Mother of Charity appeared to the sea had been placed



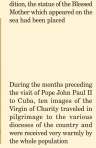
Panoramic view of the Shrine



Procession in honor of the Blessed Mother



The statue of the Virgin of Charity of El Cobre



During the month preceding the visit of Pope John Paul II to Cuba, ten images of the Virgin of Charity appeared in the various corners of the country and were received very warmly by the whole population



Procession in honor of the Blessed Mother



The statue of the Virgin of Charity of El Cobre