



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

# Apparition of the Virgin Mary in ŠILUVA

LITHUANIA, 1608

The archbishop of the diocese of Kaunas, Monsignor Tamkevičius, in whose territory the Shrine is located, defined Šiluva in this way: "A spiritual oasis that helped the faith survive in difficult times, like the Soviet occupation of Lithuania for most of the 20th century. To the intercession of Mary are attributed favors which comprise physical healing, solutions to problems of the family or of employment, personal decisions to conduct a better Christian life and the conversions of children and of spouses. Šiluva therefore has much in common with the more famous apparition sites of Mary like Lourdes or Fatima."

Marian devotion in Šiluva dates back to the beginning of Christianity in Lithuania. The grand duke Jogaila was baptized in 1387 when he married the queen of nearby Poland. Later, he and his successors strived to spread the Christian faith in their territory, which up until then was pagan. They built churches and even taught the catechism to their subjects. The construction of a church in Šiluva was because of the initiative of a nobleman named Petras Gedgaudas, who was working in service to Vytautas the Great. Gedgaudas in 1457 allocated terrain and other resources in honor of Our Lady. The new church assumed the reputation of a Marian Shrine. In the 16th century, a Lutheran pastor lamented that members of his flock journeyed to participate in the Catholic feast with the indulgences of the Nativity of Mary. In fact, the Protestant Reformation hit Lithuania in a rapid and forceful way, beginning with the nobility. In the decades that followed, many Catholic churches were confiscated and closed down. During this period, a parish in Šiluva buried an iron chest with sacred objects and the documents regarding the establishment of the shrine. He probably hid these items to protect the property of the Church and to avoid profane desecration. The Calvinists replaced the Lutherans as a dominant force in Šiluva around 1555. They quickly closed the Catholic shrine and exiled the clergy, then the church was demolished. They were times of religious confusion. Many people of power passed through various Protestant denominations in the course of a few years. Many simple peasants maintained their Catholic convictions without being able to practice them. The Protestant reformation began to lose strength in Lithuania around the beginning of the 17th century since the local Calvinists turned to Arianism, which negates the divinity of Jesus Christ, an unacceptable extremism for many nobles. At the same time, the Jesuits began to arrive in the region, inflamed with zeal and having on their lips the clear teachings of the Council of Trent, and the Catholics began to fight to recover their lost churches. One more factor strongly influenced the change of course and the return to Catholicism: an intervention of the Mother of God which thrust the believers to return to the true religion of worship – her Divine Son. The facts date back to 1608, but the oldest surviving report, written in 1651, describes the event in this way. Several young shepherds were pasturing their flock in the territory of the old shrine. On the top of a large rock in the field, they saw a young woman who held a baby in her arms and that she was weeping sadly: One of the children ran to tell the Calvinist catechist of Šiluva what they had seen. The catechist and the rector of the Calvinist seminary came to the place, saw the young woman, and they asked her: "Young woman, why do you weep?" The young girl replied: "I weep because people used to adore my Son in this place, but now they only till and sow here." Then she vanished. The news of the apparitions diffused quickly. The bishop sent a delegate to investigate the case and to speak with witnesses. This official emissary attempted to locate the exact site of the ancient church, as he did also the documents of its establishment, for legal recourse with the intent to recover the property. The only man who knew where the iron chest was buried was now elderly and blind. When they brought him to the field, he miraculously regained his vision and was able to locate where the chest with the documents and the sacred objects was buried. Thanks to these documents, the Catholic Church won a court lawsuit to reacquire the land in Šiluva. A chapel was built on the rock of the apparition and nearby a church was built on the site of the original shrine of the 15th century. The new church of Šiluva immediately attracted crowds by the thousands, something rather unexpected in an area predominantly Protestant. According to the historical records written at that time, it was famous for being a place of special graces and miracles, where people became more devoted Christians. In the span of a few years, the church had to be enlarged.

A sign of the vitality of the revived Marian Shrine is the historical fact that in 1677 a good 12 priests were residing in Šiluva for the spiritual care of the pilgrims. During the first period of independence of Lithuania, in the 20th century between the two world wars, between 100,000 and 150,000 pilgrims normally visited Šiluva each and every year during the Octave of the Nativity of Mary, regardless of the difficulties and obstacles set by the Communist armies.



Painting which depicts the apparition



The new Chapel of Our Lady. Pope John Paul II proved in the shrine of the humble village of Šiluva in 1991, two years after they regained independence from the Baltic nations. Pope Benedict XVI in 2008 blessed new crosses of gold for a miraculous painting of Mary and of Jesus in Šiluva



The painting of Mary and of the Child Jesus that is venerated above the high altar is a copy of the 16th-century Polish fresco which is venerated in the Basilica of Saint Mary Major in Rome, the oldest Marian church dedicated to the Virgin Mary. The icon portrays the Mother of God with great dignity. Her eyes seem to smile whenever she looks at her to turn their gaze upon her Son Jesus. The Child, sitting in her arms, looks upon His Mother, and resembles with His right hand blessing the people



The present-day chapel of Our Lady. Behind the altar is the site upon the rock of the apparition in the form of a cross 4x meters high. The construction of which goes back to the beginning of the 20th century to commemorate the third centennial anniversary of the apparition, and was completed after World War I in 1924. The destruction of the chapel, however, was completed only in 1990, having been blocked for decades by Soviet religious persecution



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In 1725 the Holy See granted the permission to solemnly crown Mary and Jesus in the miraculous image of Šiluva, but this only took place in 1796, precisely on the 8th of September, the liturgical titular feast day of the Shrine



Altarpiece which illustrates the miracle



Tiberade with the illustration of the apparition



Ceiling vault fresco with the scene of the apparition



The stone chest that was recovered thanks to the help of Our Lady



Pope Paul VI granted the title of Minor Basilica in 1974



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