



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

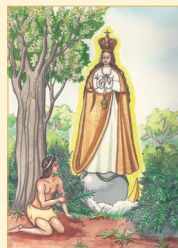
Apparition of the Virgin Mary in CAACUPÉ

PARAGUAY, 17th century

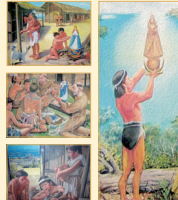
In Paraguay natural beauty abounds; among the many gifts that Providence, out of kindness, bestowed to this land, Caacupé assumes a role of primary importance - in the city of miracles surrounded by hills, brooks, and lush vegetation - here rises the most important Shrine of Paraguay, a Marian center of paramount importance even for the nations nearby. The statue, sculpted in the beginning of the 17th century by an indigenous artist, is an *ex voto* given to the Blessed Mother by a survivor of danger. In a bus, car, cart, by horse or on foot, all Paraguaians have visited at least once in their life the Virgin of Caacupé to seek comfort or to give thanks for her numerous favors.

The first inhabitants settled in that area around 1600. History narrates that a Christian native by the name of José was heading towards the forest of the Ytu valley in search of food and wood. There was a native Indian of Paraguay, converted by the Franciscan order of Tobati, who found himself in danger of death, surrounded by the ferocious Mbayas, a tribe that has rejected the Christian faith and who had declared itself a bitter enemy of the converts. In that moment, the Virgin Mary appeared to him and said: "Caaguy Cupe-pe" - which translated means "Go behind the bushes of grass!" (alluding to the yerba mate, with which an infusion is made to which are attributed many medicinal qualities and which represents one of the principal products exported from the country). There he found a wide tree trunk behind which he could hide himself; huddled and trembling, begging protection from the Mother of Heaven, the Immaculate, who the monks had taught him to deeply love. In that moment he promised to carve, with the wood of the protective tree, a graceful image of the Virgin, if he were able to come out alive from that situation. His persecutors went past without noticing his presence, and the Indian sculptor, grateful, as soon as he returned to that place, took from the tree the wood he needed for his work. It is said that in this precise spot of the apparition bubbles forth water, and this water has helped the people of Paraguay to endure the heat of the month of December. From the tree trunk were created two wooden sculptures: the larger one for the Church of Tobati and the smaller one for the Indian himself, which he keeps for personal devotion. Consequently, the missionaries gave testimony that in the spot of the apparition sprung forth a font whose water helped the Guaraní to survive the extreme summer heat.

Years later, the great flood created by the Lake of Ypacaray threatened to destroy the neighboring villages; the Franciscan friars, together with the inhabitants of the region, organized intense moments of prayer to ask that the waters would calm. It is recounted that Fr. Luis de Bolaños blessed the waters and that they began to retreat to their present boundary. With the calm having returned, upon the water there appeared a closed floating suitcase, that held inside it an image of the Virgin, recognized by those present as the one carved by the Indian many years ago. According to the opinion of art critics specialized in the wooden objects, the statue is a stupendous artistic creation of otherworldly beauty. From that moment on, the people called her the "Virgin of the Miracles." Later, the Indian sculptor moved with his family to that valley, confident that the Virgin Mary would always protect him. He built a humble oratory that, like a magnet, attracted many inhabitants and finally gave life to a village in which the natives initially were known by the name of the Ytuensi. In 1765, the area was already famous as the Valley of Caacupé and that habit was reinforced further until the day of the founding of Caacupé, on the 4th of April 1770. In historical documents, no information was found regarding the larger statue, which is considered to have been ransacked by the savage Mbayas, in this way the sort of Guaraní Indian who was Christian was revealed to not act. However, regardless that nothing is known about the person to which the Church and the faith should render homage for this work of divine inspiration, the faith tells us that already for some time he is together with Our Heavenly Mother. And who knows, maybe he is interceding for all those who are united today in offering him this tribute.



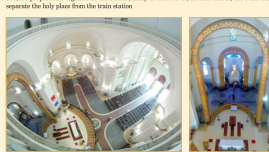
The Virgin appears to José and tells him to hide himself behind the bushes.



The indigenous people who created the new Caacupé quickly began to have a new devotion of their own to the Virgin who had always granted to them numerous graces and blessings.



In 1840 began the construction of the grandiose Shrine with five naves. Every year, on the occasion of the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, which is also a national feast, more than 100,000 people come together at the Shrine, many of them cover, on their knees, the 1.5 km that separate the holy place from the town square.



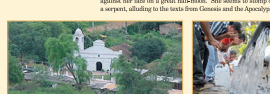
View of the interior of the Shrine.



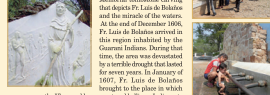
Stained glass window showing the young Indian who cut the two statues.



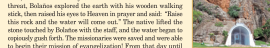
In Paraguay, the Virgin most feared beyond or Mother, Protector of the Most Humble. She is invoked as "Virgin of the Miracles of Caacupé," "Little Virgin of Caacupé," "Queen of the Miracles of Paraguay" or, more simply, "Mary of Caacupé".



Our Lady of Caacupé is a precious wooden sculpture with a delicate oval face and blue crown like the Immaculate Mary. Her hands are united in prayer at her chest and her blonde hair cascades past her shoulders. The little statue has a height of only 50 cm. The Virgin of the Miracles is dressed in luxurious white tulle and upon her shoulders is a magnificent jewel of gold and precious stones. The image stands upon a support that rests against her feet on a great half-moon. She seems to sleep on a support, alluding to the fact that she came from Guaraní and the Apuriteque.



Material testimonies narrating that Caacupé Fr. Luis de Bolaños and the miracle of the water. At the end of December 1696, Fr. Luis de Bolaños arrived in Caacupé to replace the Guaraní Indians. During that time, the area was devastated by a terrible drought that lasted the entire year. In January of 1697, Fr. Luis de Bolaños brought to Caacupé the Virgin of the Miracles, in which he interceded to evangelize in the name of God. The Indian surrounded him and in a threatening tone, asked Bolaños to give the power of God in the name of whom he spoke, using in their native Guaraní language: "If God truly exists we want to see his miracle, let us see if it will make water push from here, or we will murder you with our arrows." In front of the threat, Bolaños explained the case with his words, including stick, then raised his eyes to Heaven in prayer and said: "Blessed be the God who made the water and the water began to appear push forth. The missionaries were used and were able to begin their mission of evangelization! From that day until today the water has continued to emerge from the bosom of the earth, even during periods of extreme drought."



She shows the first oratory was built.