



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

Apparitions of the Virgin Mary in FLORENCE



ITALY, 1233



The Order of the Servants of Mary, also called the Servites, in Latin *Ordo Servorum Beatae Virginis Mariae*, is a mendicant order (abbreviated O.S.M.). It was founded, probably in 1233, by a group of seven people, later known as the Seven Holy Founders: Bonfiglioli Monaldi, Manetto dell'Antella, Buonagiunta Manetti, Amadio degli Amidei, Ugucione degli Ugucioni, Sostegno dei Sostegni and Alessandro Falconieri.

They were part of the Confraternity of Laudesi, (Praisers of Mary), typical poets and actors of the Umbrian-Tuscan Region in the late Middle Ages. They were habitual, namely, in gathering themselves in front of the painted image on the wall along the road in order to express in verses, that is to say, indeed, in "praises" – their love to Our Lady, in the same way the troubadours of the day would serenade their astounding admiration to a beloved woman.

On the 15th of August 1233 an image of Mary came to life, appearing to them clothed in mourning and sorrowful because of the fratricidal hate that divided Florence: from 1215 the Florentines were split in two opposing factions, Guelphs and Ghibellines, that never lost an opportunity to clash with each other, even in bloodythirsty behavior. The Virgin said to them: "Take this habit of remorse and wear it in memory of my dolors. Receive the Rule of Saint Augustine. Continue to be faithful servants to me with the exercise of the virtues; propagate everywhere the devotion to my dolors and one day you will obtain this reward of eternal life."

The seven young men decided to do something to bring about a bit of peace: for this reason they established the "Confraternity of the Sorrows of Mary" and they retreated into the solitude of Mount Senario, not far from the City, to dedicate themselves to prayer and penance. One day, while they were descending into town for a peacemaking intervention, a young man turned to his mother exclaiming: "Lo and behold, the Servants of Mary are arriving!" And this was the name they decided to take.

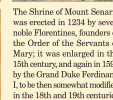
Furthermore, their choice of Mary had become by now definitive; in fact, having abandoned fancy clothes, abandoned and thrown away the short dagger that they used to conceal in them, the men took their solemn vows to dedicate their whole life to the honor of the Blessed Virgin. Frequently, before crossing through the doors of the city, while descending from the mountain that they had chosen as their dwelling, they would pass in front of a little Chapel dedicated to the Annunciation, in the town of Contrada Cafaggio. In 1250 the monks had a new chapel built, consecrated to the Annunciation. The painter who was depicting the portrait of the Virgin had difficulty completing it: he did not know how to portray the face, but one night, awakened from sleep, he found it miraculously painted.



Antonio Balestra (1666-1740)
The Seven Holy Founders



External view of the Shrine of Mount Senario



Inside the Shrine of Mount Senario



The Church of the Most Holy Annunciation in Florence, where the miraculous painting is preserved



The painting of the Annunciation that was miraculously completed by an angelic hand

The Seven Holy Founders made an act of consecration to the Blessed Mother, adopting the title of "Servants," according to a particular statute of life, then ordained priests, those who founded the Order of the Servants of Mary, approved on February 11th, 1234