

Venerable Margaret Occhiena

1788 - 1856

PARADISE

Margaret Occhiena, the mother of St. John Bosco, appeared to him after her death. In August of 1860, the saint observed her near the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Consolation in Turin. “He cries out: How is this possible? – Aren’t you dead?” Margaret replied: “I am dead, but I live!” “Then he asked: Are you happy? – she: extremely happy!” He asked among other things, if she had entered Paradise soon after her death. Margaret replied: No! He even inquired if Louis Comollo, Dominic Savio and some of the young men are enjoying their heavenly reward. And she replied: Yes! Finally, he requested that she give him a sign of her happiness so as to alleviate any doubt. Margaret then appeared in a shining light and vested in an ornate robe, with a majestic countenance and surrounded by a choir of angels. She began to sing. Her hymn of love to God was of such an indescribable sweetness and so soulful that it actually transported her. It sounded like the harmony of a thousand voices, from the bases so profound to the highest tones of tenors. This all was so harmonious, artistic and delicate that it produced sounds of indescribable beauty.

When the Saint heard that heavenly sound, he entered into such a state of ecstasy that he was bereft of his senses and was unable to ask his mother anything further. But before she disappeared from his sight, she told him: “I await you in Paradise!”

Margaret Occhiena was born on April 1, 1788 in Capriglio, Province of Asti. She was baptized on the same day in the parish church. She remained in her town until her marriage to Francis Bosco when she moved to Becchi. With the sudden death of her husband, the twenty-nine year old Margaret was faced with the care of her family in extreme poverty and raising her two sons, Joseph and John. But she was a strong woman with basic convictions and her upright living resulted in a true upbringing that was Christian, disciplined and compassionate. She was constrained at times to make some dramatic decisions (as when she compelled her younger son to leave home so as to maintain peace in the family and to allow him to pursue his studies).

All this coupled with faith, wisdom and courage enabled her to raise her children with independence and freedom. She guided her son, John, with particular



love to the priesthood after which she left her small house in the hills and she accompanied him in his ministry to the poor and abandoned young boys in Turin. For ten years, her life was with her son and the beginning of the Salesian Order; she was the first and primary auxiliary of Don Bosco; with her maternal presence she safeguarded the work of the Institute; she was unknowingly the “co-founder” of the Salesian family. She was illiterate but gifted with a wisdom that only comes from above; she helped so many of the abandoned boys of the streets. Her motives were primarily for God – offering Him a life of poverty, prayer and self-sacrifice. She was 68 years old when she died in Turin on November 25.

