

HISTORY OF THE SORROWFUL MOTHER SHRINE

by
Rev. Anthony N. Teolis, C.P.P.S.

The Sorrowful Mother Shrine has its roots in the eternal city of Rome. There, was born, worked and died St. Gaspar del Bufalo, the Founder of the Society of the Precious Blood.

The central theme of the Society of the Precious Blood is to foster a greater appreciation and love for the price that Jesus paid for our salvation. St. Peter expressed its value long ago when he wrote: "You were not redeemed with corruptible things such as gold or silver, but by the Precious Blood of Christ, as a lamb unspotted and undefiled." Naturally, Mary, who gave Jesus His life's blood, played a very important part in our redemption. Devotion to the Precious Blood was always closely linked to devotion to the Sorrowful Mother, since Mary suffered so much with her Son especially during those final hours beneath the cross. She suffered in her soul what Jesus suffered in His body and in union with Him offered up herself as a victim for sins.

In 1838, hardly a year after the death of St. Gaspar, a Swiss priest, by the name of Francis Brunner joined the Society of the Precious Blood. He had been a Trappist in France, but was forced into exile by the French revolutionists. He heard of St. Gaspar's Society and decided to join it at once.

An outstanding trait of Father Brunner was his strong devotion to the Mother of God. He had been reared in that part of Europe which was noted for its many famous shrines dedicated to Our Lady.

Like many a devout Swiss Catholic, his mother loved to go on pilgrimages to such Shrines as the one at Einsiedeln and at Mariastein. These visits instilled a tremendous devo-

tion to Our Lady in the heart of young Francis. Later, Father Brunner took the name "Mary" as part of his religious name. After his ordination he continued to visit Marian Shrines, and it is said, that a miracle occurred at the ancient Shrine of the Mother of Sorrows at Seewis, when Father Brunner called upon the intercession of the Mother of Sorrows to call back to life an unbaptized child. A painting hangs there to commemorate the event.

When Father Brunner established his seminary to educate students for the Society of the Precious Blood at Loewenberg in Switzerland, he sought to fill the hearts of those young men with zeal for the Precious Blood and with a deep devotion to the Mother of God. He made many pilgrimages with them to Mary's Shrines. There, prayers were offered for the conversion of sinners and for blessings. He also took charge of a Shrine of Our Lady near Colmar in Alsace, France.

In 1843, Bishop Purcell of Cincinnati, Ohio, invited Father Brunner to come to America and help the German Catholics in the mission territory of his diocese. Later that year, Father Brunner with a group of his followers, set sail for America. They landed at New Orleans and made their way by boat to Cincinnati. The Bishop assigned them to the north central and western parts of the state, to such places as Peru and Thompson (Frank). On the trip across the Atlantic Father Brunner expressed his great desire to found a Shrine in America honoring Mary: "Through the Precious Blood, we pray for that place which pleases the Queen of Heaven the most to give us; then we are most surely where God wants us."

About a year later, some twenty miles southwest of Peru, Father Brunner spotted a beautiful wooded area in Thompson Township. The place reminded him of a Marian Shrine which he had often visited on a road running along the slopes of a valley in the Black Forest of Germany. References to this Thompson Township woods as a possibility of a shrine are found in his letters and documents.

Six years later, Father Brunner had to make a business trip to Europe. Before leaving, he purchased this beautiful woodland. On May 9, 1849, he bought twenty-five acres from

a John Simons and three months later, on August 15, he paid a John Lang for another fifty-one acres.

While in Europe, Father Brunner had many social and business visits with an Andrew Spiegelhalter, who was caretaker of a roadside Shrine in honor of St. Oswald. Father Brunner's deep desire to have a similar shrine in honor of Mary in America so impressed his friend that he offered the financial assistance to build the Shrine. Mr. Spiegelhalter's generosity had one condition, which pleased Father Brunner very much; namely that the Ohio roadside Chapel be built in honor of the Mother of God. Father Brunner at once wrote to Father Wittmer, pastor of St. Michael's Church at Thompson, to make the necessary preparations for the construction of the Shrine.



Sorrowful Mother

The Shrine was soon to be a reality, but a jewel for the heart of the Shrine was missing. However, this was taken care of on November 15, that same year, as Father Brunner's diary attests: "I was back in Hinterzarten to say Mass. The weather was bad, rain, snow and wind, but still I was able to make the way all right. There was given to me an old image of the Mother of God, who holds the Lord sorrowfully on her lap." Father Brunner, who had obtained such wonderful graces through the intercession of the Sorrowful Mother at her shrines, now was to have on his American mission his own image of the Sorrowful Mother to respect and honor. Since business duties prevented him from bringing the beautiful gift to America himself, he had Father John Van den Broeck bring the statue across earlier. The treasured image arrived in the United States in the spring of 1850.

Father Brunner's dream came true when he returned from Europe in October of 1850. At once he oversaw the construction of the Pilgrim Church of the Sorrowful Mother on the wooded area south of Thompson. It was first called Maria Steig. In the Seneca County records the shrine is referred to under the title: "Mater Dolorosa," meaning "Sorrowful Mother."

The Shrine was constructed entirely of red brick. The image of the Sorrowful Mother was placed above the main altar. Behind the altar there was a little stairway arranged so that pilgrims could climb the stairs to touch the wondrous image of the Virgin and her Son.

1850-1912

The little Chapel began to attract visitors — people looking to pray to the Mother of God for peace and consolation. A "hermitess," Francesca or Frances Bauer by name, lived in a small hut near the shrine, where she became its caretaker until her death. Up to 1912 various Sisters of the Precious Blood took turns in caring for the Chapel. About

seventy-five people could attend Mass there. Even in the winter they used to come when there was no heat nor stove. But the pilgrims were not looking for conveniences, but for a place of grace, where they could find consolation and help.

The power of Mary was soon felt by many people. For example, on May 16, 1865, a little boy by the name of Louis Martin who was suffering from tuberculosis of the bones of his right leg, came to the Shrine. There, he limped up to the altar rail, while the school children prayed for his recovery. Suddenly, Louis got up, left his crutch at the rail, and walked out of the Chapel. He never needed his crutch again. Other extraordinary happenings took place. Canes, crutches and braces which people left behind at the Shrine testify to the conviction of the pilgrims that the Mother of Sorrows through her intercession with God granted them unique favors in this quiet place where she is honored.



Evening processions began around this time. They would start at St. Michael's parish and continue through the woods with people holding lighted bark in their hands. An increased number of visitors prompted the Director, to build a second and larger chapel in 1870. Father Erhard Glueck was the priest in charge of the project. A spire was added along with beautiful bells.

During these years many favors were granted to the pilgrims through the intercession of Mary, as is attested to in the popular pamphlet published by Father Kilian Schill, in which he lists nineteen special favors. But most gifts and favors given were never publicized and are known to God alone.

In 1909, an extraordinary event took place in the chapel. A young man, Henry Youkel of Cleveland, made a pilgrimage to the Shrine. For eighteen years he had been severely bothered with osteomyelitis in his left leg. He had been under the care of eminent doctors. A decision was made to amputate the leg below the knee. After Youkel's pilgrimage to the Sorrowful Mother Shrine, witnesses attested that he was completely cured and there was no further need for amputation.

When the pilgrims arrived on August 15, 1912, they were not prepared for the shock which awaited them; the Chapel had burned. The Shrine had been destroyed by fire early in the morning on the eve of the great feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin. How the fire started was not known. The greatest loss from the fire was the image of the Mother of God which Father Brunner had brought from Europe. Even though it is said that the statue did not burn up, no one seems to know exactly what happened to it.

1912-1926

After the fire, enough of the walls of the Chapel remained standing so that rebuilding on the old foundation was possible. In 1913, the Society of the Precious Blood

voted to rebuild the Shrine in honor of Mary for all the blessings that the Society had obtained through her intercession. The sanctuary was enlarged, an apse was added and a round-topped tower was completed. The old stairway behind the altar was not rebuilt. In place of the lost image there was placed a papier-mache replica fashioned by Sister Mary Anatalia, C.P.P.S. At the present time, a Daprato composition statue holds the place of honor.

In that same year 1913, another extraordinary happening took place. Six years before, a Joseph Boehnlein of Cleveland had lost his foot in a train accident. The leg had failed to heal. One day his grandmother brought Joseph to the Sorrowful Mother Shrine for a novena in her honor. After returning home, some time before the end of that month, the leg stopped festering and the skin grew over the exposed bone. The young boy was able to get around and carry on his daily work.

In 1914, a series of large canvasses in oil, treating of the Sorrows of the Virgin, were attached to the ceiling. These paintings were done by Father Paulinus Trost, C.P.P.S. Colorful windows from Germany were donated. Then in 1915, Father Heitz erected the Stations of the Cross in the Chapel.

In 1917, under the direction of Father Cantius Faist, the first public novenas were held. Many outstanding missionaries of the Society delivered powerful sermons in Mary's honor, stirring the pilgrims toward a greater love of God and neighbor. Present for these novenas were groups of Italians, Polish, Hungarians and Bohemians, who from then on, made them annual events. These groups donated many beautiful things to the Shrine, such as the large memorial crucifix set up in the woods in gratitude for a soldier's safe return from the war and the outdoor Stations which were erected in 1924.

In response to the increased devotion of the pilgrims, services were conducted every Sunday afternoon during the summer. Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, the recitation of the Rosary, the blessing of the sick and the individual blessing with the relic of the true Cross are still the highlights of the Sunday afternoon services.



At the close of the Novena on August 15, 1926, another unique event took place. Henry Schmitt of Lakeside, Ohio, had been afflicted with skin cancer affecting the nerves of his right eye. For three years, he had no vision in his right eye and very little from the other. There was danger to the brain cells. At the Shrine his sisters led him to the altar where Father Faist placed the relic of the True Cross on his forehead and on the bandaged sore. When he was led outside the Shrine, the bandage was removed and he never needed it again. The sore was healed, leaving nothing but a scar.

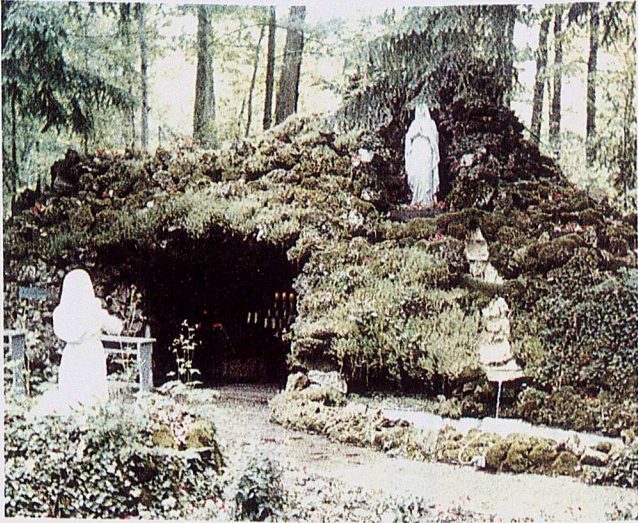
1926-1950

In 1931, the Lourdes Grotto was built in the middle of the Shrine woods. It is a replica of the famous shrine in France where St. Bernadette was visited by the apparitions

of Our Lady. As pilgrims recite the Rosary they march from the Chapel to this stone Grotto and there they pray and sing praises to Our Lady. A red brick path marks the way to the grotto.

In 1938, at the suggestion of Bishop Karl J. Alter of Toledo, the name of the location of the Shrine of the Sorrowful Mother became known as "Marywood." Father Jerome Hoepf was the Director at the time. During these years many Pilgrims used to spend days and weeks at the nearby Pilgrim House which was in charge of the Sisters of the Precious Blood. From there they would march in procession through the woods to the Shrine for various services.





Lourdes Grotto

*L
a
d
y

o
f

F
a
t
i
m
a*



The year 1950 was a magnificent highpoint for the Sorrowful Mother Shrine when, under the directorship of Father Albin Scheidler, a grand celebration was held to mark the centenary of its founding. On September 15 of that year, Bishop Karl J. Alter offered a Pontifical Mass of Thanksgiving. The Very Reverend Seraphin Oberhauser, Provincial of the Society of the Precious Blood delivered the sermon. A special Solemn Novena in honor of Our Lady ended on the seventeenth of the month with a crowd of about 8,000 pilgrims joining in the commemoration. Father Scheidler also arranged to have the Pilgrim Statue of Fatima brought to the Shrine that year and the Virgin's visit attracted some 25,000 people on that memorable weekend.

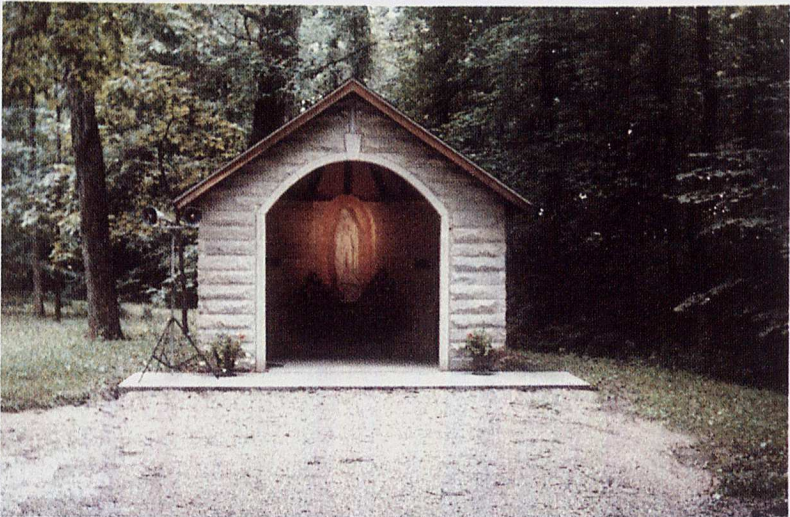
1950-1986

These recent years have seen great progress and many changes in the landscape and buildings of the Sorrowful Mother Shrine. In the early fifties, Father Kilian Dreiling did much to enhance the grounds and had sturdy wooden benches built for the outside area. Under the directorship of Father Joseph Lapinski's sixteen-year tenure new buildings were added for the convenience of the crowds — a modern cafeteria and a religious goods store. But his most outstanding accomplishment was the construction of the grand Outdoor Chapel, named "Pieta" in remembrance of the sufferings of Our Lady beneath the cross. Looking at the front of this majestic structure, one can immediately notice the resemblance of hands, with fingers holding the cross and pointing to heaven folded in prayer. This building was dedicated on July 14, 1968, with Bishop John Donovan of Toledo officiating.

Father Norbert Adelman, former Provincial of the Society of the Precious Blood modernized many things in the physical plant and grounds. He put in a fresh water system, renovated the outdoor Stations, beautified the main entrance and added many other facilities for the convenience of the pilgrims.



Renovated Stations



Our Lady of Guadalupe

Next, came Father Joseph Wherle, who in 1979 oversaw the construction of the Shrine of "Our Lady of Guadalupe," set deep in the woods. The Shrine became necessary to fulfill the desires of the ever-increasing number of Hispanics who have a great love and faith in "Our Lady of the Americas," as she is devotedly called by them.



St. Francis of Assisi

Under the present leadership of Father Fred Falce, who became Director of the Shrine in 1980, many improvements have taken place. Due to the tremendous increase of the Director's duties, the Society of the Precious Blood decided in 1981 that he should reside on the Shrine grounds and be free from his other obligations as Pastor of St. Michael's parish.

In order to show the Church's deep interest in the various groups visiting the Shrine, Father Falce has invited outstanding ecclesiastical dignitaries to celebrate with them. For example, Cardinal Bernardin for the Hispanics, Cardinal Krol for the Polish, Archbishop Pilarczyk for the Reli-

gious Women, Archbishop Elko for the Padre Pio Day, Bishop Hoffman for Renew Day, Bishop Pilla for Italian Day and Bishop Griffin for Knights of Columbus Day of Recollection. The appearances of these dignitaries help to make the Pilgrims feel at home, knowing that they have the blessing of the church in their devotions.



Other accomplishments which have taken place in the past three years are: the beautification of the grounds with trees, shrubs and flowers; the renovation of the Shrine Chapel and its complete refurnishing; the setting up of Our Lady of Fatima Shrine in the woods; the large addition of the new religious store; the beautiful marble "Pieta" placed in front of the Outdoor Chapel; the images of St. Lucy and St. Francis of Assisi along the wooded paths and new picnic area southeast of the cafeteria.

During this time, Father Falce has also introduced special pilgrim days — The Rosary Rally, Ephpheta Sunday, Italian-Canadian Day, Black Catholic Sunday, Hispanic Day, Padre Pio Prayer Group Day, Religious Women Day and Chaldean Day.

The Sorrowful Mother Shrine will continue to be a place for people to come find solace and peace. Renewed fervor and love for the Mother of God and a greater confidence in her power of intercession before the throne of God will always be the main purpose of this beautiful wooded area dedicated to Mary.

A THOUGHT FOR OUR PILGRIMS

The miracles of Jesus are repeated in Mary's Shrines, which are the centers not only of bodily cures, but also of many spiritual cures. But, Our Lord did not cure all the sick of His time; in fact, the Gospels mention only three people who were raised from the dead. It's the same now — everyone is not cured of bodily sickness at Mary's Shrines, but everyone receives the greater miracle of placing themselves in union with her suffering Son. When God does not cure, He may be preparing the person for a greater gift — to show forth the cross of Christ in his or her life. Physical well being is not the only good. Just as Mary stood beneath the cross of her suffering Son, so does she stand beside her other children in sickness and death. All who go to Mary's Shrines receive help. Many return with their cross of suffering, but they find a new courage and love in their hearts and they understand the meaning of their suffering. Those who find courage to accept their cross and unite it with the cross of Christ receive a cure more marvelous than a physical cure. The Church calls Mary: "The Health of the Sick." Those who turn to her in sickness find that she never fails them. Sometimes, her intercession brings healing; sometimes it offers courage — but it always teaches the meaning and glory of uniting one's sufferings to the Cross of her Son, Jesus Christ.

SPIRITUAL BENEFITS

Pilgrims to this Sorrowful Mother Shrine can gain a Plenary Indulgence by visiting the Shrine Chapel and there praying the OUR FATHER and the CREED, on the following occasions:

- a) The Feast of Our Lady of Sorrows, September 15;
- b) The Solemnity of the Assumption BVM, August 15;
- c) On any one other day of the year (e.g. the day of one's pilgrimage).

Three other conditions must also be fulfilled to gain the Indulgence, namely:

- a) Sacramental Confession;
- b) Sacramental Communion;
- c) Prayer according to the intention of the Supreme Pontiff.

These three conditions may be fulfilled several days before or after the visit to the Shrine Chapel; it is fitting that the Holy Communion and the Prayer for the intention of the Holy Father be said on the same day as the visit to the Shrine Chapel.

One OUR FATHER and one HAIL MARY suffice for the prayer for the intention of the Holy Father, but one is free to recite any other prayer according to one's piety and devotion.

