

THE STORY OF THE MIRACLE OF NERETO, ITALY AND THE INTERCESSION OF OUR LADY OF CONSOLATION

The Priory of Our Lady of Consolation was built in ancient times by the first seven founding families of Nereto di Guidobaldi, Ippoliti, and five of Ranalli. These families enjoyed special privileges until 1806 when feudalism was abolished. Even without this special status, these families continued to maintain the Priory annually and to venerate their Patron Saint.

In 1798, wounded French soldiers recovering from the Plague were slaughtered as they passed through Nereto. They were en route to join up with the occupying French forces stationed in nearby Giulia-Nova. As soon as their commanders were told of these atrocities, General Plata (who was in charge of the left flank Duheme and stationed in Chieti) directed a column of six hundred men with artillery and a desire for revenge and vengeance. This would be condensed into the verses by Esiodo:

“The idea of conquest always goes hand in hand with vengeance; and whole population is punished for the sins of the few. Often it so happens that just one wicked man acting unjustly among people causes the entire city to suffer. The invariable result was that the cities were sacked and then burned. The consequences, all the innocent citizens knew this full well, so it was no surprise that they all were desolated”.

“With heavy hearts, the last resort was to run away and leave every hope and home behind. The peoples’ last hope was raising a tear-stained face and to pray to the Most Holy Mary of Consolation. Almost all escaped. Only a few stayed, silently waiting for the arrival of the enemy. The old, the women and children resigned to the wrath of the oncoming foreigners. Disaster was close at hand with no way to defend against the blood-thirsty invaders and certain plunder”.

The locals chopped down all the oak trees in vain, to serve as barriers to the advancing cannons. Without the help of the Divine Protectress, it was impossible to even think of fighting the enemy. The peaceful, innocent Neretani had no defense but the intervention Of the Divine Protectress. Amidst this hopeless bewilderment, the townspeople heard the enemy arriving. The enemy drums sounded the imminent attack on December 22nd, 1798. the moon illuminated not only the road to the city, but also the French army and their bayonets.

Only a few citizens had crossbows to defend against the enemy, who were already encircling the city and lobbing incendiary devices. Meanwhile the other helpless citizens turned, shaking to the Church of the Most Holy Mary of Consolation. They prayed imploringly for Her help.

The locals searched for three of the most robust among them to push open the bell tower door, ring the church bells to call for help from the surrounding countryside. (It was commonly held that ringing the church bell in time of need was a call for help.) But this privilege was reserved for Nicola Tonelli, a woman not strong, who limped and already seventy years old. She prostrated herself on the altar of Our Lady praying for strength. She suddenly became stronger than the strong and climbed the bell tower steps with great ardor and finally reached the bell tower.

Animated by the Holy Spirit, she was the first to ring the church bells. Seeing that the enemy was directing their fire at her, more than anyone else, she maneuvered herself up into the bell itself for protection. There she felt she had “divine strength” and no one could “get” her. But this was not Our Lady’s plan – she had another celestial plan to save this poor town.

When the French, reached the open area across from the big square in front of the Church of Our Lady of Sorrow, they didn’t see a discouraged few, but rather a crowd of armed citizens. Were these the Nerertani? Certainly not! The way they looked indicated no one mortal, but rather legions of celestial warriors assembled by the Divine Protectoress. The leaders of the French army considered it prudent to call off their assault and to retreat.

The French were attacked even more viciously from behind. Seeing their retreat divided, they scattered in all directions. The few Neretani inhabitants who witnessed this change of events were so encouraged, their cries of desperation were replaced with cries of joy and grateful to “Her”. Their Lady had eliminated the danger.

Meanwhile the Church bell had been tolling to encourage the scattered townspeople. Hearing the bell echoing in the hidden valleys of nearby communities. The Neretani regrouped to attack the retreating column of French. Not frightened any longer, but reinvigorated, the Neretani caught up to the French and killed a large number of them. The Neretani then returned home boasting of how the French had suffered defeat, how they had slit the throats of the French and massacred them.

All of the Neretani gave thanks to Our Lady of Consolation for her unbelievable miracle. It was felt that the memory of this huge debacle, the slain Neretani and the miraculous intervention of Our Lady should not go forgotten. And so it was suggested by the wisest of the townspeople that in honor of the liberation of the motherland, the church bells should be rung for two hours every evening. This tradition continued until 1806 when it was abandoned and was never reinstated. This was because it was a new century and there was a change in the way people lived.

You readers doubt think you are naïve if you believe this story! Even if all these witnesses aren't enough for you to believe this story, you specifically have to believe the testimony of the French General Plata.

The French came wanting to make peace. They paid a retribution of two thousand ducats and executed the French soldiers who had caused this conflagration. These soldiers had publicly born witness to the mysterious celestial army that they had seen and that had frightened their soldiers and their officers alike.