

History of Our Lady of Perpetual Help Picture

According to ancient documents, the icon was originally enshrined in a church on the island of Crete where it was famous for many miraculous favors. How it arrived in Crete and who painted this picture is uncertain.

What we do know is that, around the year 1450, the miraculous icon was stolen by a merchant of Crete and smuggled in his luggage by ship to Rome.

Some time after the merchant arrived in Rome, he fell seriously ill. On his deathbed he confessed his crime and begged a Roman friend in whose home he was staying to have the stolen picture given to a church where it could be enshrined for public veneration.

The friend agreed. But, after the death of the merchant, his friend's wife refused to surrender the picture. Even after the Blessed Virgin herself appeared to merchant's friend on four different occasions, he was unable to persuade his wife to give up the picture.

Eventually, he also died. Again the Blessed Mother appeared to his young daughter on two occasions and told her that the Blessed Mary of Perpetual Help wanted her picture to be enshrined in the church of St. Matthew on Via Merulana, between the Basilicas of St. Mary Major and St. John Lateran. After the second apparition, the girl's mother relented.

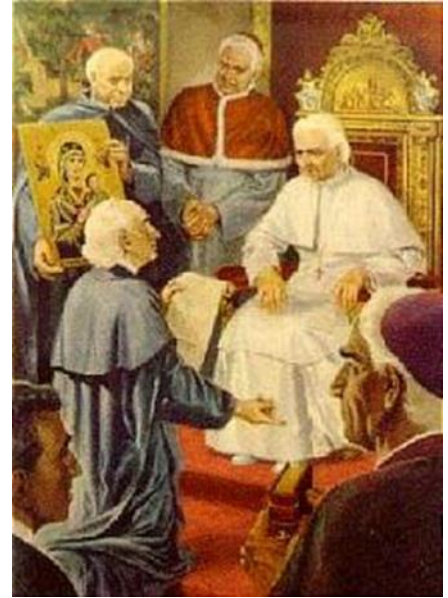
And so it was that on March 27th, 1499, the miraculous icon of Perpetual Help was placed in the Augustinian church of St. Matthew in Rome.

There, it was venerated for the next 300 years until the occupation of Rome by Napoleon's army in 1798. Sometime in the next five years, St. Matthew's church was ordered demolished. The Augustinian monks hid the picture in one of their monasteries.

However, one of the brothers at the monastery used to tell stories about the past glories of the miraculous icon to a young altar boy, named Michael Marchi.

Providentially, Michael later became a Redemptorist, and when he told his fellow priests about the picture that used to be enshrined at St. Matthew's church, they realized that their new church of San Alfonso had been constructed on the same site.

Anxious to return Mary's miraculous picture to the place she had chosen for it, the Redemptorists petitioned the Holy Father, Pope Pius IX for permission to enshrine the picture in the church of San Alfonso. The Pope, who had great devotion to Our Blessed Mother, agreed - with the provision that the Redemptorists make her name known throughout the world.



Pope Pius entrusted icon to the Redemptorists

Consequently the Augustinians and the Redemptorists got together, and a great celebration was planned to welcome the picture home. A festive procession through the streets with a follow-up triduum was planned.

The date was set for April 26, 1866. Newspapers and wall posters throughout the city carried the announcement of the event and invited the faithful to participate.

The day dawned bright and beautiful and the line of march was aglow with flowers and banners and colorful tapestries. As the procession wound its way through the streets, crowds gathered to catch a glimpse of the picture being borne on a carrier lavishly decorated with flowers.

Along the way, many wonderful favors - even miraculous cures - were recorded. And once the picture was enthroned above the High Altar at the church of San Alfonso, the miraculous favors continued.

Almost immediately, the Redemptorist Fathers began sending copies of the picture throughout the world. In 1866, authentic copies were sent to England and Spain. In 1867 the miraculous icon was publically venerated in Limerick, Ireland, Vienna, Austria and, in the next few years, in France, Germany, Holland, Switzerland, Denmark, Belgium, Poland, Portugal.... throughout virtually all of Europe.

On December 6th, 1868, the first copy in the United States was exposed for public veneration in the church of St. James in Baltimore.

The Redemptorists had taken the Holy Father's command to heart, to make her name known throughout the world. And, for the next 126 years that prayer that we say at her novena devotions has been recited countless millions of times in just about every known language of the world;

"O Lord, Jesus Christ who gave us your Mother Mary, whose renowned image we venerate, to be a Mother ever ready to help us, grant we beseech you, that we who constantly implore her motherly aid may merit to enjoy perpetually the fruits of your redemption. Who live and reign forever and ever. Amen.

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