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Women in the Christian Tradition

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Our Lady of Banneux

 Beginning around the time of Jesus’s death and possibly even earlier, the Virgin Mary has appeared to various people, bringing messages of hope, strength, wisdom and numerous other themes. Accounts of Mary appearing to lowly human beings have been recorded throughout history. Many have been investigated, yet only a portion of them have been approved by the Vatican. One of these is the apparition that took place in Banneux, Belgium. The Virgin Mary appeared several times to a young girl there. In regard to this apparition, Mary has become known as Our Lady of the Poor or Our Lady of Banneux.

 The Virgin Mary first appeared in Banneux, Belgium in the winter of 1933. Mariette Beco was the oldest of seven children, living in a poor household. She had not been attending school or catechism class at the time of the apparition, due to her family’s financial situation (Banneux, Belgium). Mariette was eleven years old when she first saw Mary outside her kitchen window one night. According to an article entitled “Shrine of Our Lady of Banneux”, on January fifteenth, 1933 Mariette saw the woman outside of her window. When she asked to go outside to meet the lady, her mother assumed she had seen a ghost and scolded her. The Beco family was one who had fallen away from the church thus her parents were not convinced she had actually seen Mary the Mother of Jesus (Shrine of Our Lady). Mariette was positive this was who she had just seen and proceeded to look for her every night that followed.

 According to the article “Apparition of Our Lady in Banneux, Belgium” on the Our Lady of the Poor website, Mary appeared to Mariette eight times total. The first was January fifteenth, 1933. After discussing the woman with her mother, Mariette knew it was the Virgin Mary. The next day she decided to go to her Catechism class, which she hadn’t attended in quite some time. She began to take extreme interest in class and became one of the best students. The second apparition came on January eighteenth. That night Mariette felt compelled to go out into the yard where she immediately knelt down. Mary motioned Mariette to follow her. She was taken to the main road where she was told to put her hands into a spring she had come to. Mariette’s father witnessed this and at once declared his conversion. He felt compelled to make a confession and begin going to mass again (“Apparition of Our Lady”).

 The third apparition came just a day later. This time, Mariette had seventeen people with her yet she was the only one to see Mary. The article on the Our Lady of the Poor website goes on to say “She asked her identity to the Lady, who replied: ‘I am the Virgin of the Poor.’ They then went to the spring together. Mary declared: ‘This spring is reserved for all the nations, to bring comfort to the sick.’” Mary’s first request came during the fourth apparition on January twentieth. She asked Mariette for a small chapel to be built. She then traced the sign of the cross on Mariette and once Mary was gone, she lost consciousness. This was the first and so far the only request Mary had made throughout her appearances to Mariette. After this appearance, people began to question Mariette’s truthfulness. They began to make fun of her, calling her Saint Bernadette. This was a somewhat ironic nickname because the next apparition would come on the anniversary of the apparition of Our Lady of Lourdes (Apparition of Our Lady).

 On February eleventh, 1933 Mary appeared a fifth time. Mariette was outside praying the Rosary. Once she reached the fifth decade, Mary appeared. Mariette ran to the spring as she had each time before. Once she arrived, Mary greeted her by saying “I come to alleviate sufferings”. Interestingly, Mariette received her First Communion the very next day. A few days later on February fifteenth, Mary appeared once again. It is in this apparition that Mariette reported Mary had confided a secret. Just before she left, the Virgin Mary told Mariette to “pray very much”. This is exactly what Mariette continued to do (Apparition of Our Lady).

 The apparitions began occurring less often and with more time between each. On February twentieth 1933, Mary made a very short visit to Mariette while she prayed the rosary. Once again Mary informed her that she needed to “pray, pray very much”. That concluded the seventh apparition Mariette witnessed. The eighth and final appearance Mary made to Mariette Beco was on Thursday, March second, 1933. The final statement Mary made to Mariette was “I am the Mother of the Savior, the Mother of God. Pray very much”. Mary then blessed Mariette and bid her farewell. It was reported that Mariette was heartbroken at the thought that this was the last time Mary the Mother of God would appear to her. She broke down in sobs as she realized this was the final visit (Apparition of Our Lady).

 As Mariette continued to have these experiences with the Virgin Mary, people in the surrounding area became evermore skeptical. Mariette was the only one to ever see Mary although she often had crowds of people surrounding her as she prayed. According to the Miracle Hunters website, on January third, 1933, Mary appeared to five children in Beauraing, Belgium. This was just fifty miles away from the place Mariette and her family lived. Many believed she was making these stories up because she wanted to be like the children who had witnessed an apparition of Mary. Because of this, Mariette experienced harsh comments from people who did not believe her (Banneux, Belgium). Although she faced difficulties during this time, Mary’s message to her was very clear.

 In almost every apparition Mariette witnessed, Mary demanded she pray. This was clearly the main message of the appearances she made in Banneux, Belgium. This apparition is often referred to as Our Lady of the Poor. During these eight appearances Mary made it evident that she was there to relieve the suffering of the poor and to bring them peace. She showed Mariette the spring from which healing water flowed. According to an article by Ann Ball on the Holy Spirit Interactive website, “By declaring herself the Virgin of the Poor, she reminds us of her love and concern for all of mankind” (Ball). Mary appeared to a young girl who had not put much effort into her faith life. This gives hope to those who may have strayed away from the church and do not know how to find their way back.

 Many of the miracles that were reported after the apparitions occurred have not been proved and confirmed by the Vatican. One that is often discussed is the fact that almost immediately after witnessing his daughter with the Blessed Mother, Mariette’s father restored his faith and began practicing once again. In most apparition situations, the parents of the child or young adult who is experiencing these things do not often accept what is happening until a lot later on. The fact that Mariette’s father went from being someone who didn’t notice the lack of religion in his life to someone who extremely devout is almost miraculous. Many healings and spiritual awakenings have come forth from the spring Mary brought Mariette to time and time again. Because of the spring and other shrines built, thousands of followers pilgrimage to Banneux each year (Ball).

 After these apparitions, Mariette underwent quite a bit of scrutiny for what she had seen. In her article, Ann Ball states that Mariette endured many tests to determine whether or not she actually experienced the apparitions she did. Doctors looked at many different types of test results and found no evidence of lies or psychological issues. Mariette was thoroughly investigated and had to prove to many people that she did indeed witness the Mother of God appearing to her (Ball.)

 Once a Marian Apparition occurs, there is a process by which it becomes approved by the church. The investigation of the apparitions in Banneux began on March nineteenth, 1935. Files were compiled and sent to Rome for approval. This was around the time of World War Two and according to the Apparition of Our Lady article, this slowed down the process of Mariette’s apparition being approved. Mariette’s state of mind and mental health at the time of the apparitions was under attack constantly. This was the main reason for debate. After a third and final investigation of the apparitions witnessed by Mariette Beco, these events were finally accepted. On August twenty-second, 1949, the apparition of Banneux was officially recognized (Apparition of Our Lady).

 Our Lady of Banneux was a very debated upon apparition for about sixteen years until it was finally accepted. Mariette Beco, a poor Catechism student turned ultimate devotee witnessed Mary the Mother of God eight times over a period of almost two months. Many people in the surrounding community believed she was crazy. These apparitions were cause for conversion and the curing of many people afterwards. Mary brought a message regarding the importance of prayer in the lives of the faithful. She also vowed to be an advocate for the poor and to relieve their suffering. Until 2011 when she died, Mariette continued to tell the story of what she witnessed and the shrine to Our Lady of the Poor still stands today in Banneux Belgium.

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