

Angelo Comastri



OUR LADY OF THE GUARD

What Message Does She Bring Us?



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© Shrine-Basilica of Our Lady of the Guard (Ceranese–Genoa)

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Traditional depiction of the *Apparition of the Virgin Mary to Benedetto Pareto*, based on the 1895 painting by Giovanni Battista Torriglia.

FOREWORD



Why this publication?

This publication was born from the desire to respond to a request made to me some time ago by the Archbishop of Genoa, Father Marco Tasca. He asked me to highlight the unique identity of our Shrine dedicated to Our Lady of the Guard.

Many people have certainly heard of this holy place and know that the Virgin Mary appeared here to a farmer named Benedetto Pareto. However, we feel the need to make better known the message that Our Lady entrusted to this simple and humble man—a husband and father.

It seemed only natural to ask for the help of Cardinal Angelo Comastri, a great devotee of the Virgin Mary. Thanks to the collaboration of the



Immacolatine Sisters, I was able to get in touch with him. I sincerely thank him for his generosity and commitment. The text that has resulted is a precious source of inspiration for all of us, and I am confident that it will be of great benefit to the many pilgrims who visit the Shrine throughout the year.

As Cardinal Comastri reminds us, “*Without prayer, we cannot live.*” These words invite each of us to reflect on how important it is to cultivate a genuine and deep relationship with the Lord. If our relationship with God is neglected, where will we find the strength “*to face the challenges of history and the difficulties of our own lives*”? How will we treat our neighbour? How can we “*remain deeply human*” (Leo XIV, *Magnifica Humanitas*, 15)?

Prayer does not distance us from other people; rather, it brings them directly into the heart of God.

My hope for everyone who reads this book is that they may hear, as if addressed personally to

them, the words the Virgin Mary spoke to Benedetto Pareto on 29 August 1490: *“Come close to me and do not be afraid, for I am the Mother of Jesus Christ.”* They are an invitation not to be afraid and to place ourselves under her protection. They are an invitation to trust in her and in her Son, Jesus Christ.

They are also an invitation to come to this Shrine, to listen to the Lord and to the Virgin Mary, and to become builders of a new world.

Fr. Andrea Robotti

Rector of the Shrine-Basilica
of Our Lady of the Guard
(Cerano—Genoa)



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I would like to let Pope Leo XIV speak first. In his first greeting from the balcony of St. Peter's Basilica on 8 May 2025, he shared a beautiful reflection on Our Lady.

The Pope said: *"Today is the day of the Supplication to Our Lady of Pompeii. Our Mother Mary always wants to walk with us, to remain close to us, and to help us through her intercession and her love. So I would like to pray together with you. Let us pray together for this new mission, for the whole Church, and for peace in the world. Let us ask Mary, our Mother, for this special grace."*



Then, in something unprecedented for a Pope's first public greeting, he prayed the Hail Mary together with the people gathered in St. Peter's Square. The words of this Marian prayer echoed throughout the square.

The pontificate of Pope Leo XIV is entrusted to the hands of Our Lady. There are no safer hands.

Let us now listen to the account of an apparition of the Virgin Mary that took place near Genoa.

In 1490, the Virgin Mary appeared to a humble farmer, Benedetto Pareto, on Mount Figogna, near Genoa.

The traditional account tells the story as follows:

Around the Year of Our Lord 1490, Benedetto Pareto, from the village of Livellato on Mount Figogna in the Polcevera Valley, was cutting hay. While he was waiting for someone from home to bring him his meal, he saw a woman approaching and thought she was his wife. As she came closer, he noticed a brilliant light surrounding

her and became frightened. When she drew near, the Lady said to him: “Benedetto, come close to me and do not be afraid, for I am the Mother of Jesus Christ.” Benedetto regained his courage, and the Lady continued: “Do you know what I want? I want you to build a chapel in my honour on this place.” Benedetto replied: “I am ready to do whatever you ask, but I am very poor. I cannot accomplish what you ask because it will require much work and expense, and this place is far from where people live.” The Virgin answered: “Do not be afraid. I will make sure that you receive help and support from every side. Do as I tell you. Begin laying the foundation at once, and nothing necessary for the building will be lacking.” Realising that she was the Virgin Mary, Benedetto promised to begin immediately. He returned home and told his wife everything that had happened. She reproached him and tried to dissuade him, saying: “People have always thought you were simple-minded. Now they will think you are foolish and crazy.” As a result, Benedetto decided not to fulfil the promise he had made.



The following morning, before returning to the mountain to cut hay, he climbed a fig tree to pick some fruit. He fell from the tree and was so badly injured—his arms, legs, and head—that he could not move. He was carried home, and a barber-surgeon (who at that time also provided medical care) was called. After examining him, the man treated his injuries as best he could, but considered his condition hopeless and advised the family to call another barber-surgeon. During the night, while Benedetto was suffering greatly and could hardly breathe, he heard a voice saying: “Benedetto, do you think you have kept the promise you made to begin building the chapel?” He recognised the voice of the Virgin Mary, repented, and prayed: “Most Holy Virgin Mary, if you grant me healing, I will do everything I have promised.” The Blessed Virgin replied: “Rise, and you will be healed. Carry out what I have asked of you, and you will receive help and support from everyone for this work.” At once he was healed. He got up, began the construction of the chapel, and many people came to help.

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In 1490, on Mount Figogna near Genoa, the Virgin Mary appeared to the farmer Benedetto Pareto and asked him to build a chapel in her honour.

From this extraordinary event arose the Sanctuary of Our Lady of the Guard, which today welcomes pilgrims from all over the world.

Through the account of the apparition and a profound spiritual reflection, this book invites readers to rediscover the value of prayer, Mary's maternal role, and the power of faith in everyday life.



**Visit the Sanctuary website
for more information**

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