

□ Reading time: 5 min.

In Genazzano, a small village in Lazio, an extraordinary Marian icon has been venerated for over five centuries: Our Lady of Good Counsel. The image, which miraculously arrived from Albania in 1467, is kept by the Augustinian fathers and has become a universal symbol of guidance and discernment, so much so that it is invoked in the Litany of Loreto. Saints, popes, and millions of faithful have found comfort and light in her during difficult choices.

Even Pope Leo XIV, on his first outing from Rome, wished to kneel before this icon, recalling that “just as the Mother never abandons her children, so we cannot abandon Her.”

On his first outing from Rome, on 10 Saturday May 2025, two days after his election, Pope Leo XIV chose a surprising destination: the [Sanctuary of the Mother of Good Counsel in Genazzano](#).

Genazzano is a medieval village at the foot of the Prenestini mountains, about 45 km from the capital. Once a fiefdom of the Colonna family, it preserves a spiritual treasure in a church among its narrow streets that attracts pilgrims from all over the world.

The Pope went there in the afternoon, recalling the many times that, as a priest and cardinal, he had paused in prayer before that image. “The presence of Our Lady,” he said, “is a great gift for the people of Genazzano, but also a responsibility. Just as the Mother never abandons her children, you must remain faithful to the Mother.” An invitation that applies to the entire Church.

A legend that crosses the Adriatic

To understand the history of this image, one must go back to the fifteenth century, in Albania.

At that time, the Country heroically resisted the Ottoman invasion, led by George Castriota Scanderbeg (1405-1468), a famous defender of Christianity. Scanderbeg was devoted to an ancient Marian icon venerated in Scutari, a city in the north of the Country. With her help, tradition says, he managed to repel much larger armies several times.

Upon his death in 1468, Scutari fell to the Turks. Shortly before, however, a mysterious event occurred. Two faithful, Giorgio and De Sclavis, dreamed of Our Lady announcing that she wanted to leave the city before faith was suffocated there.

According to legend, while the two were praying before the icon, the image

detached itself from the wall, enveloped in a white cloud, and rose into the sky, heading towards the sea. The two men followed it, supported – so it is said – by angelic hands, until they reached the other side of the Adriatic.

Meanwhile, in Genazzano lived Petruccia de' Nocera, a pious woman belonging to the Augustinian Third Order. The Virgin had appeared to her, asking her to restore a small church dedicated precisely to "Holy Mary of Good Counsel." Despite having few resources, Petruccia had begun the work with unwavering faith.

On 25 April 1467, the feast of Saint Mark, at sunset, the population gathered in the streets. Suddenly, the bells of the church, still under construction, began to ring by themselves. Everyone rushed there and saw a small white cloud descend from the sky and settle on the unfinished wall. Above it appeared the icon of Our Lady with the Child, the same one venerated in Scutari.

Shortly after, the two Albanian soldiers also arrived, who recounted having followed the image there. From that day on, Genazzano became a destination for pilgrimages and a place of miracles, documented by notaries of the time, confirmed by envoys of Pope Paul II. These were then transcribed into a special register (the so-called Bombacino Code). Between 27 April and 14 August 1467, 161 miracles were recorded.

A fragile and mysterious image

The fresco, still visible today in the left side chapel of the sanctuary, is small: 31 cm by 42.5 cm. It is painted on a very thin layer of plaster, so fragile that it seems impossible that it could have endured such a journey.

One detail strikes pilgrims; the icon does not adhere completely to the wall, but remains suspended a finger's distance away, without visible support. It does not rest on a solid support, but is as if miraculously placed on a thin, very light and fragile stucco frame, which alone could not support the weight of the fresco. A mystery that has left those who contemplate it speechless for centuries.

After the prodigy, the chapel was enlarged and transformed into the current Sanctuary of the Mother of Good Counsel, entrusted to the Augustinians. Devotion spread rapidly, even among Albanians who had fled their homeland. In 1682, Pope Innocent XI proclaimed Our Lady of Good Counsel patroness of Genazzano, and in 1753, Benedict XIV officially inserted the invocation *Mater Boni Consilii, ora pro nobis* into the Litany of Loreto.

The title "Mother of Good Counsel" has biblical roots. Mary is the woman who keeps the Word, the seat of Wisdom, the guide to God's will. In the Middle Ages, "good counsel" was considered an essential virtue for governing and living in peace.

Invoking Mary meant asking not only for protection, but also for light to discern in daily decisions.

Even today, in a world marked by uncertainties, Our Lady of Good Counsel is invoked by those seeking guidance: young people seeking a vocation, families in difficulty, peoples on their way to peace.

Devoted Popes and Saints

Many popes have had a special connection with Genazzano. Saint Pius V, the Pope of the Rosary, entrusted himself to her. Leo XIII wrote a prayer in her honour and wanted her to be invoked in the Litanies. John XXIII visited the sanctuary; John Paul II often cited her as a counsellor in times of crisis.

Saint John Bosco wished to go and pray at the feet of Our Lady of Good Counsel. While he had come to Rome on his first journey in 1858, he went to celebrate Holy Mass imploring maternal assistance for the nascent Salesian Congregation.

Fr. Lemoyne recounts, *"The Holy Father, meanwhile, had expressed the desire that Don Bosco attend in the Vatican the devout and magnificent spectacle of all the functions of Holy Week. He had then instructed Monsignor Borromeo to invite him in his name, and to procure him a place from which he could comfortably be a spectator of the sacred rites. Monsignor had him sought everywhere; but the messenger could not find him all day, as he was in Genazzano"* (MB V,899).



Among other saints devoted to Our Lady of Good Counsel, we also find Saint Alphonsus Liguori and Saint Paul of the Cross, Saint Gaspare del Bufalo, Saint Luigi Orione, Saint Teresa of Calcutta. In the twentieth century, the Brazilian thinker Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira also recounted having received from her the grace of an inner certainty about his mission in the Church.

Many devotees report that the icon at times, seems to change expression or tone, as if it were dialoguing with the viewer. It is a sign of her living and maternal

closeness, which makes the sanctuary a refuge for those seeking consolation, strength, or a word of light.

The Feast of the “Coming”

Every 25 April, Genazzano fills with pilgrims for the feast of the “Coming,” which commemorates the day of the miracle. Processions, celebrations, and moments of fraternity unite faith and popular tradition in the small “Loreto” of Lazio.

Pope Leo XIV, already as a cardinal, had celebrated Mass several times on that occasion. Returning now as Pontiff, he wished to reiterate that the presence of Our Lady is not only a gift for Genazzano, but a message for the entire Church.

The story of Our Lady of Good Counsel of Genazzano unites legend and documents, miracles and devotion, popular faith and recognition by the Church. It is the story of an image that came from afar to say that Mary is always near, especially in the most difficult moments.

Her counsel is simple and decisive, “Do whatever he tells you” (John 2:5).

And the Church, from Genazzano to the whole world, continues to pray with confidence:

“Mother of Good Counsel, pray for us!”