 Reading time: 13 min.

(continuation from previous article)

Chapter XIX. Funds by which this Church was built.

Those who have spoken or heard about this sacred edifice will want to know where the funds were obtained, which in total already exceed half a million. I find myself in great difficulty in answering, therefore less able to satisfy others. I will say, therefore, that the legal bodies gave high hopes at first; but in practice they decided not to contribute. Some wealthy citizens, seeing the need for this building, promised conspicuous largesse, but for the most part they changed their minds and judged it better to direct their charity elsewhere.

It is true that some well-to-do devotees had promised donations, but at an opportune time, that is, they would make donations when they were certain of the work and had seen the work in progress.

With the offerings of the Holy Father and a few other pious people, the land could be purchased and nothing else; so that when it came to starting the work, I did not have a penny to spend on it. Here, on the one hand, there was the certainty that this building was for the greater glory of God; on the other hand, there was the absolute lack of means. Then it became clear that the Queen of Heaven wanted not the moral bodies, but the real bodies, that is, the true devotees of Mary, to take part in the holy endeavour, and Mary herself wanted to put her hand to it and make it known that it was her own work that she wanted to build it: *Aedificavit sibi domum Maria*.

I therefore undertake the account of things as they happened, and I conscientiously recount the truth, and I commend myself to the benevolent reader to give me benign pity if he finds anything that does not please him. Here it is. The digging had begun, and the fortnight was approaching when the diggers had to be paid, and there was no money whatsoever; when a fortunate event opened an unexpected way to charity. Because of the sacred ministry, I was called to the bedside of a gravely ill person. She had been lying motionless for three months, racked with coughs and fever with severe stomach exhaustion. “If ever” she said, “I could regain a little health, I would be willing to make any prayer, any sacrifice; it would be a great favour to me if I could even get out of bed.”

“What do you intend to do?”

“Whatever you tell me.”

“Make a novena to Mary Help of Christians.”

“What should I say?”

“For nine days recite three Our Fathers, Hail Marys and Glory Be’s to the Blessed Sacrament with three Hail Marys to the Blessed Virgin.”

“This I will do; and what work of charity?”

“If you judge well and if you get a real improvement to your health, you will make some offerings for the Church of Mary Help of Christians which is being started in Valdocco.”

“Yes, yes: gladly. If in the course of this novena I only get to get out of bed and take a few steps around this room, I will make an offering for the church you mention in honour of the Blessed Virgin Mary.”

The novena began and we were already on the last day; I was to give no less than a thousand francs to the terrazzo workers that evening. I therefore went to visit our sick person in whose recovery all my resources were invested, and not without anxiety and agitation I rang the bell of her house. The janitor opens the door and joyfully announces to me that her mistress was perfectly recovered, had already taken two walks and had already gone to church to thank the Lord.

As the maid hurriedly recounted these things, the same mistress came forward, jubilant, saying “I am healed, I have already gone to thank Our Blessed Lady; come, here is the parcel I have prepared for you; this is the first offering, but it will certainly not be the last.” I took the parcel, went home, checked it, and found fifty gold napoleons in it, which were precisely the thousand francs we needed.

This fact, the first of its kind, I kept jealously hidden; nevertheless it spread like an electric spark. Others and then others still recommended themselves to Mary Help of Christians by making the novena and promising some donationf they obtained the implored grace. And here, if I wanted to set out the multitude of facts, I would have to make not a small booklet, but large volumes.

Headaches ceased, fevers were vanquished, sores and cancerous ulcers healed, rheumatism ceased, convulsions healed, eye, ear, tooth and kidney ailments instantly healed; such are the means that the Lord’s mercy used to provide us with what was necessary to bring this church to completion.

Turin, Genoa, Bologna, Naples, but more than any other city, Milan, Florence, and Rome were the cities that, having specially experienced the beneficial influence of the Mother of Graces invoked under the name of Help of Christians, also showed their gratitude with donations Even more remote countries like Palermo, Vienna, Paris, London and Berlin turned to Mary Help of Christians with the usual prayers and promises. I am not aware of anyone having had recourse in vain. A spiritual or temporal favour more or less marked was always the fruit of the petition and recourse made to the pitiful Mother, to the powerful help of Christians. They

resorted, they obtained the heavenly favour, they made their offering without being asked for it in any way.

If you, O reader, enter this church, you will see an elegantly built pulpit; it was a gravely ill person who made a promise to Mary Help of Christians; she recovered and fulfilled her vow. The elegant altar in the chapel on the right belongs to a Roman matron who offered it to Mary for grace received.

If serious reasons, which everyone can lightly surmise, did not prevent me from its publication, I could tell you the country and the names of the people who appealed to Mary from all sides. Indeed, it could be said that every nook and cranny, every brick of this sacred edifice recalls a benefit, a grace obtained from this august Queen of Heaven.

An impartial person will collect these facts, which in due course will serve to make known to posterity the wonders of Mary Help of Christians.

In these last times poverty was making itself felt in an exceptional way, we were also slowing down the work to await better times for its continuation; when other providential means came to the rescue. The deadly cholera that raged among us and in the neighbouring countries moved the most insensitive and unscrupulous hearts.

Among others, a mother, seeing her only son choked by the violence of the disease, urged him to turn to Mary Most Holy for help. In the excess of grief he uttered these words: *Maria Auxilium Christianorum, ora pro nobis.* With the warmest affection of heart, his mother repeated the same prayer. At that moment, the violence of the illness was mitigated, the sick man perspired profusely, so that in a few hours he was out of danger and almost completely cured. The news of this fact spread, and then others recommended themselves with faith in Almighty God and in the power of Mary Help of Christians with the promise to make some offering to continue the construction of her church. No one is known to have had recourse to Mary in this way without being heard. St Bernard’s saying is thus fulfilled, that **it has never been heard of anyone who has confidently had recourse to Mary in vain**. While I was writing (May 1868) I received an offer with a report from a person of great authority, who announced to me how an entire town was in an extraordinary way freed from the cholera infestation thanks to the medal, the recourse and the prayer made to Mary Help of Christians. In this way there were donations from all sides, oblations, it is true, of small entity, but which together were sufficient for the need.

Nor should another means of charity for this church be passed over in silence, such as the offering of a part of the profit from trade, or the fruit of the countryside. Many, who for many years had received no more fruit from silkworms

and harvests, promised to give a tenth of the produce they would receive. They were extraordinarily favoured; content therefore to show their heavenly benefactress special signs of gratitude with their offerings.

Thus we have conducted this majestic edifice for us with an astonishing dispensation without anyone ever making a collection of any kind. Who would believe it? One sixth of the expenditure was covered by donations from devout people; the rest were all donations made for graces received.

Now there are still some details to be settled, some work to be completed, many ornaments and furnishings to be provided, but we have great confidence in this august Queen of Heaven, who will not cease to bless her devotees and grant them special graces, so that out of devotion to her and out of gratitude for the graces received they will continue to lend their beneficent hand to bring the holy undertaking to a complete completion. And so, as the supreme Hierarch of the Church says, may the devotees of Mary increase above the earth and may the number of her fortunate children be greater, who will one day make her glorious crown in the kingdom of heaven to praise, bless and thank her for ever.

Hymn for Vespers of the Feast of Mary Help

Te Redemptoris, Dominique nostri
Dicimus Matrem, speciosa virgo,
Christianorum decus et levamen
Rebus in arctis.

Saeviant portae licet inferorum,
Hostis antiquus fremat, et minaces,
Ut Deo sacrum populetur agmen,
Suscitet iras.

Nil truces possunt furiae nocere
Mentibus castis, prece, quas vocata
Annuens Virgo fovet, et superno
Robore firmat.

Tanta si nobis faveat Patrona
Bellici cessat sceleris tumultus,
Mille sternuntur, fugiuntque turmae,
Mille cohortes.

Tollit ut sancta caput in Sione
Turris, arx firmo fabricata muro,
Civitas David, clypeis, et acri
Milite tuta.

Virgo sic fortis Domini potenti
Dextera, caeli cumulata donis,
A piis longe famulis repellit
Daemonis ictus.
Te per aeternos veneremur annos,
Trinitas, summo celebrando plausu,
Te fide mentes resonoque linguae
Carmine laudent. Amen.

Hymn for Vespers of the Feast of Mary Help. – *TRANSLATION*
Virgin Mother of the Lord,
Our daughter and our pride,
From the valley of tears
We implore you with faith and love.
From the gates of hell
Frema the host threatening,
Thou pitifully watchest
With thy supernal gaze.
His furies unleashed
Will pass without shame and harm,
If of chaste hearts on the vain
Are the prayers raised to Thee.
Thee Patroness, in every war
We become the heroes of the field;
The lightning of your might
A thousand hosts flee and land.
Thou art the bulwark that surrounds
Of Zion the holy houses;
You are David’s sling
That smites the proud giant.
You are the shield that repels
Satan’s ignorant swords,
You are the staff that drives him back
Into the abyss from whence it came.
[…]

Hymn for praise
Saepe dum Christi populus cruentis

Hostis infensis premeretur armis,
Venit adiutrix pia Virgo coelo
Lapsa sereno.
Prisca sic Patrum monumenta narrant,
Templa testantur spoliis opimis
Clara, votivo repetita cultu
Festa quotannis.
En novi grates liceat Mariae
Cantici laetis modulis referre
Pro novis donis, resonante plausu,
Urbis et orbis.
O dies felix memoranda fastis,
Qua Petri Sedes fidei Magistrum
Triste post lustrum reducem beata
Sorte recepit!
Virgines castae, puerique puri,
Gestiens Clerus, populusque grato
Corde Reginae celebrare caeli
Munera certent.
Virginum Virgo, benedicta Iesu
Mater, haec auge bona: fac, precamur,
Ut gregem Pastor Pius ad salutis
Pascua ducat.
Te per aeternos veneremur annos,
Trinitas, summo celebrando plausu,
Te fide mentes, resonoque linguae
Carmine laudent. Amen.

Hymn for praise – *TRANSLATION.*
When the bitter enemy
To assault was seen
With the most terrible weapons
The people of Christ,
Often to the defences
Mary from heaven descended.
Columns altars and domes
With trophies adorned,
And rites and feasts and canticles

Were dedicated to her.
Oh how many are the memories
Of her many victories!
But new graces be given
To her new favours;
Let all nations unite
And the supernal choirs
In divine harmony
With the Queen City.
The inconsolable Church
Her eyelids are calmed;
On the day that dawned
From long sad exile
Of Peter to the supreme See
The Supreme Heir returned.
The virginal youths
The chaste adolescents
With clergy and people
Cantin such auspicious events:
Gareggino in homage
Of affection and language.
O Virgin of virgins
Mother of the God of peace,
May the Pastor of souls
With lip so true
And her high virtue
Guide us to health.
[…]

Fr PAGNONE

(continued)