

History of Our Lady of La Vang

Our Lady of La Vang is the central and national shrine of Vietnam, approximately 60 kilometers from the former capital Hue. The name is derived from a type of fern which used to grow in great quantities in the region. During the great persecution (1798-1801) many Catholics took refuge in the jungle situated in proximity of Quang Tri, a village in central Vietnam, where they experienced hunger and sickness, and prepared themselves for martyrdom.

One day, as the community was assembled in prayer, the figure of a lady surrounded by many lights, appeared to them. She presented herself as the Mother of God, encouraged and consoled them, and gave them a special sign of her loving care. She advised the people to use the leaves of the fern to treat their ailments, and promised them to receive their prayers with maternal generosity. All who would congregate on this site to pray would be heard and their petitions granted. Mary appeared on several occasions at the same site. After the persecution in 1802, the Catholics left their jungle hiding place and returned to their villages.

However, the story of the apparition and its message was passed on. In 1820 a chapel was built at the apparition site. From 1820-1885 still another wave of persecution decimated the Catholics population. More than 100,000 Vietnamese Catholics died as martyrs. In 1885 the chapel in honor of Our Lady of La Vang was destroyed by a fanatic. A new chapel was built between 1886 and 1901 (consecration). Soon it was no longer able to hold the many pilgrims to La Vang, and in 1923 a new and bigger church was erected. It was consecrated in 1928 (August 22) in the presence of 20,000 pilgrims. Every three years a national pilgrimage was organized for the whole country which was to have a special meaning even after the separation of South and North. In 1959 La Vang was officially declared a national shrine, marking the 300 years of the Church's presence in Vietnam (AAS 51 (1959) 84-86). The Church of La Vang was made a basilica minor in 1961.

The Holy Father recently said, *“In visiting the shrine of Our Lady of La Vang, who is so loved by the Vietnamese faithful, pilgrims come to entrust to her their joys and sorrows, their hopes and sufferings. In this way, they call on God and become intercessors for their families and nation, asking the Lord to infuse in the heart of all people feelings of peace, fraternity and solidarity, so that all the Vietnamese will be more united every day in the construction of a world based on essential spiritual and moral values, where each one will be recognized because of his dignity as a son of God, and be able go in freedom and as a son toward the Father of Heaven, 'rich in mercy'.”*

*From the Marian Library
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