

A Theotokan talks about Pontmain France

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A Theotokan reflects on Pontmain

by “Sister Anne” Farran — March 1, 2017

Episode #7: Mary Speaks to the World

May Jesus and Mary be loved by all hearts!

We are gathered again to pay heed to Mary’s messages to the world. Like the shepherds at Bethlehem and the Magi in the east, we have to go in search of these blessings from heaven because they don’t always come to us like a newspaper tossed at our door, or an email advertisement that arrives at our Inbox. And we cannot expect to find news in our parish bulletin. The Magi inquired at the Temple in Jerusalem, and Herod called in the priests to ask about prophecies concerning the birth of the Messiah. They found the right answer in the Book of Micah and sent the Magi on their way, but they themselves did not bother to make the journey to behold the *Word made Flesh*.

We will speak today about another approved Apparition in France. In my opinion, it’s one of the most beautiful and most precious in Mary’s mosaic but, astonishingly, very few people, even among the French, know about it.

It occurred on a Tuesday evening, January 17, 1871, in the little farm village of Pontmain. In French, the name refers to a type of bridge. In English, it looks like “Main Point.” I think both meanings are appropriate. This January night was a critical moment during the Franko-Prussian war. The Prussians were very close. Nearly thirty local boys had just left to try to boost the French troops stationed nearby. But because of what happened this night, the Prussians retreated instead of advancing. So, you can say that were stopped at this “bridge,” and thus the nation was spared. The war ended in ten days. As for the “main point” we must first unfold the story.

I’ll upload to the website a 70-page PDF. This is an English translation of the official version of the story, written just a few days after the Apparition by Father Aimable-Marie Richard. He was the chaplain of the Sisters of Hope, whose motherhouse was in Laval, a town close to Pontmain. This booklet was published by John Haffert and the Ave Maria Press of the Blue Army, probably in the 1950s, but there is no date. It’s in the public domain.

I encourage you to meditate on the story at your leisure. Today I’ll give a synopsis and discuss its place in Mary’s mosaic. LaSalette is in southeast France. Pontmain is directly opposite, in northwest France. LaSalette was high in the alps and the dialect was a mixture of Italian and Spanish in the 1800s. Pontmain was a farm village in Brittany where for many centuries the people spoke the Celtic language of their Breton founders who had escaped to France when fleeing Saxon invaders. After WWII, it was mandated that French be taught in the schools because Breton soldiers had not been able to understand orders given in French. Father Richard wrote down the account in French, but with frequent quotes from the original dialect.

More directly opposing is the religious situation. In LaSalette, hardly anyone went to Mass or prayed. In Brittany, on the contrary, there was a vibrant Catholicism. Today it remains one of the most devoutly Catholic regions in France.

This is the land of Saint Anne. She had appeared in Auray, and every parish in Brittany had a fervent devotion to the Mother of the Mother of God. Brittany numbers more than 300 “local saints.” Only a few are actually canonized in the Catholic Church but statues and stained glass are everywhere. During the emigration to Brittany in the 4th and 5th centuries, several missionaries, mostly Welsh, came into the region and founded dioceses. Since the local dialect was retained, there was a strong sense of connection to their roots. The modern decadent French philosophies of Voltaire and Freemasons had little influence on these people.

I mention all this to help us move into a world so different from our own. We live in a global village. We receive news and pictures instantly from many nations besides our own. But in the 1800s everything outside one’s village was an unknown world. Can we imagine the fright they were experiencing? We are in January, 1871. Paris was besieged by the Prussian army; two-thirds of the country was in the enemy’s power; the battle of Le Mans had laid Mayenne and Brittany open to the invaders. Brittany as yet remained intact; but the irruption of the invaders into the neighboring town of Mayenne made the movement westward appear imminent. France was about to be swept by German soldiers from the Rhine to the ocean.

Heaven was Listening to Prayers, and this is the Main Point of PontMain!

One never sees work on Sunday in Pontmain; it is indeed rare ever to hear the Lord’s name in vain. Children, raised in the fear of God, respect and obey their parents. That Tuesday morning the two brothers, Eugene aged 12 and Joseph aged 10, prayed a Rosary for their elder soldier-brother Auguste, and then they did their chores. Afterwards, they went to Mass. But before Mass they prayed the Morning Offering and the Way of the Cross, their daily routine. After Mass, they joined in public prayers for the soldiers, and then went to school. Three Sisters (Sisters Adorers of the Justice of God) instructed the boys and girls.

After school, in the early evening, already it was quite dark at 5:30 because it was winter. They went to the barn to do more chores. Eugene peeked outside the door to see the snow and the stars. Suddenly, at about twenty feet above the center of the roof, he saw a tall, beautiful lady. Her robe, seeded with golden stars, fell from the neck to her feet without belt or cincture. The sleeves were wide and flowing. She was wearing slippers which were as blue as the dress, and at the center of each was a golden ribbon which formed a knot-like rosette. Her hair and ears were completely hidden by a black veil which also covered about a third of her forehead, falling to her shoulders to the middle of her back. The veil did not hide the face. On her head, She wore a simple golden crown. She had her hands spread out and lowered as one normally represents Mary Immaculate. Eugene feared She had come to announce the death of his brother, but She smiled at him and he felt calm.

Eugene asked his father and little brother if they could see anything in the sky. Joseph cried out a description of the lady. They called their mother, but the parents could see nothing. The mother suggested that they pray *5 paters* and *5 aves* in honor of the Blessed Virgin. After a while, Joseph was clapping his hands and exclaiming, and this caught the curiosity of the nearby neighbors.

Someone called one of the school Sisters. She was in her classroom, praying the Divine Office. Since none of the adults could see anything, and the boys seemed so sincere, Sister went to call some children. She found Francoise Richer, eleven years old, and Jeanne-Marie Lebosse, nine years old. The latter was afraid of the dark and wasn’t sure She wanted to go outside, but when the children looked up in the sky they immediately began crying out: “O beautiful lady!”

Only Children can See Her

The wife of Boitin, the bootmaker, drawn by the noise, ran up with her little daughter, two years and one month, wrapped in her arms. This child also cast her eyes at once towards the Apparition, and waving her innocent hands, cried out several times the words taught to her by her mother: “THE JESUS, THE JESUS!” Her mother tried in vain to distract her by showing her other objects, but always the eyes and the arms of the baby turned back to the Apparition.

The pastor is called to the scene, a holy priest who had labored thirty-five years for the five hundred members of his pious flock.

“If only the children see,” he said, “it is because they are more worthy than we.”

“But, Father,” said Sister Mary Edward, “what if you would speak to the Blessed Virgin?”

“Alas,” said the good old man, his voice deeply moved and with profound humility: “I do not see her, what would I say to her? Let us pray.”

“What Happened at Pontmain?” by the pastor, Father Aimable-Marie Richard, 1st edition in French 1871

Everybody knelt down; some in the barn, others at the entrance. Sister Mary Edward began the rosary to which everyone answered. During this prayer, the Lady seemed to go upwards, and increase in size in a manner clearly perceived by the children

As the rosary continued the stars of the atmosphere began to arrange themselves into rows beneath the Lady, coming two by two beneath her feet, while the stars on her dress multiplied. “It is,” said the children, “like a hill becoming covered with ants, soon She will be nearly golden.”

“What Happened at Pontmain?” by the pastor, Father Aimable-Marie Richard, 1st edition in French 1871

Then the Magnificat was intoned, and letters began to form in the sky. The children were deliberately separated but they all saw the same thing as the vision continued

Just then a townsman arrived to tell them to pray because the Prussians were on their way to Laval. This should have caused great fear, but instead the man was pulled into the circle and he too experienced the joy of the Apparition.

The beautiful Lady smiled constantly. Letters began to form on a banner in the sky:

“But pray my children!”

It was about 7:30 pm. “We must sing the litanies of the Blessed Virgin,” said the venerable pastor, and pray that She manifests her will.” Sister Mary Edward began the litanies. At the first invocation, the children quickly cried out:

“Look, again something is happening. They are letters. It is a D.” And they named one after another the letters of the following words which were completely written by the end of the litanies.

God will hear you in a short time.

“Look, She smiles,” they cried, and laughing themselves with joy repeated again, “Look, She laughs!

Next, they sang the hymn “*Inviolata!*” Immediately, the children announced that new letters were forming on the white writing space, but on a second line. At the moment they finished singing *O Mater Alma Christi, Carissima!* (O Sweet and Beloved Mother of Christ!)

The children had spelled out, letter by letter these words: my Son . . . An indescribable emotion seized the crowd, “it is indeed the Blessed Virgin,” said the children. “It is She!” repeated the crowd.

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Next, they sing hymns to Mary

Before the end of the “Salve Regina” the text had formed in the sky:

my Son permits Himself to be moved. (or touched)

“What Happened at Pontmain?” by the pastor, Father Aimable-Marie Richard, 1st edition in French 1871

Sister Mary Edward intoned the song: “Mother of Hope, of name so sweet, protect our country, pray for us, pray for us!”

She seems to be Playing a Musical Instrument

During this singing, the Blessed Virgin lifted her hands to the height of her shoulders (hands which formerly had been lowered and spread out) and moved her fingers lightly as if She were accompanying the singing of the hymn with a stringed instrument. She kept looking at the children with a smile of infinite sweetness.

“Look She’s laughing!” they cried out. And they jumped joyously, clapping their hands, repeating a hundred times “Oh, how beautiful She is! Oh! How beautiful She is!”

The crowd laughed and cried at the same time, in transports of joy. Then they sang: “My sweet Jesus, finally now is the time to forgive our penitent hearts: We will no longer offend your Supreme Goodness, O sweet Jesus!”

Suddenly, the faces of the children took on an expression of deep sadness.

“Look, She becomes sad,” they said.

All the children at the same time saw a red cross about sixty centimeters high bearing a Christ of the same color.

The cross seemed to them to be about a foot in front of the beautiful Lady. And at once lowering her hands (which, during the singing of “Mother of Hope” had remained at the level of her shoulders) she took the crucifix and held it with her two hands slightly inclined towards the children, as though presenting it to them. At the top of the cross, on a long white background, were written in red letters: **JESUS CHRIST**.

Then they sang *Parce Domine* (Forgive me Lord, Forgive your people, Do not be angry with us forever...)

The most Blessed Virgin, sad and recollected, seemed to pray with the crowd.

Suddenly a star left from beneath her feet and, riding towards the left, went through the blue circle and lit the candle, which was at the height of her knees, and up to the second at shoulder height. The same star, crossing over the head of the Blessed Virgin, passed to the right side and lit the other two candles. Then, it climbed back up again, again crossed through the blue circle and took a position above the head of the Lady, remaining suspended there.

The silent and recollected crowd prayed constantly.

Sister Mary Edward intoned the hymn *Ave, Maris Stella!* As She did so, the red crucifix disappeared. The Lady, extending her arms, again took the pose of the Immaculate Conception. On each of her shoulders appeared a little white cross.

“These crosses,” said the children, “were planted on the shoulders of the Blessed Virgin.”

The Mother of God smiled again at the children who cried out again in a fullness of joy:

“Look, She is smiling... Look, She is smiling!”

It was about 8:30 p.m.

“My dear friends,” said the pastor, “we are going to say together our evening prayer.”

Everybody knelt down. During the examination of conscience, the children announced that a great white veil beginning from beneath her feet was slowly rising up and covering her to the waist. Then, it rose little by little until it enveloped her to the throat. The children now saw only the face—of a completely celestial beauty—of the Lady who continued to smile upon them. Soon her face, too, became veiled; only the crown remained visible with the stars about it. Finally, everything disappeared including the great blue circle. The four candles remained burning around it to the end.

The pastor called the children: "Do you still see?" he asked them.

And all together: "No, Father, all has disappeared. It is over."

It was a quarter to nine.

The crowd left little by little, preoccupied by happenings so extraordinary and which had brought to them an impression full of sweetness, profound and unforgettable.

"What Happened at Pontmain?" by the pastor, Father Aimable-Marie Richard, 1st edition in French 1871

The Great Miracle at Pontmain

Before the evening of January 17th, the Prussians wished absolutely to march upon Laval. It has been proved beyond doubt that the German Commander-in-Chief spoke the following words to the Bishop of LeMans precisely on the evening of January 17th: "This evening, my troops are in Laval."

Official records of the German high-command state that something happened that night:

"The advance upon Laval of the 20th Division was not carried out because on the night of January 17-18, the Supreme Commander made it known that it was not planned to proceed further towards the west with the Second Army."

Then, on the date of the 18th, we read:

"The pursuit of the adversary (that is to say of the French) by the detachment of General Schmidt thus came to an end because of these proscriptions."

Following the orders of the commanding general of the 10th Corps, General Schmidt had to draw back on January 18th upon Vaiges and its surroundings. As a result, after having reassembled his detachment on the main road, General Schmidt returned to Vaiges and established his troops there.

"General Schmidt regretted very much that he was not permitted to take Laval which would have given him possession of the Mayenne line."

This account is taken from the pursuit after the battle of Mans by the detachment of General Schmidt, from the 13th to the 17th of January 1871. German account edited under the auspices and according to the archives of the German high-command, published by E. Moreau. (Appendix to "What Happened at Pontmain?")

So, during the very night which followed the Apparition, a formal and unexpected order prevented General Schmidt from taking Laval. The Prussian troops were at the pool of Barbe, only a mile from Laval, and the next day they were at Vaiges, twelve miles back from Laval!

Humanly speaking, this fact is inexplicable. No fort defends Laval. Divinely speaking, it is explicable. What happened?

So sure did the German general feel of success, that he had already fixed the sum to be levied on the conquered town at 3,000,000 francs. Laval, the capital of the Mayenne, at this juncture, was not altogether without defense. The remnant of the army of Le Mans, under General Chanzy, was within it preparing to repel an attack, although his soldiers were weakened and discouraged by defeat and privation. Moreover, the town was unprotected by forts. In short, the taking of Laval by the enemy seemed certain.

The Prussian general is reported to have said on the morning of the 18th: "We cannot go farther. Yonder, in the direction of Brittany, there is an invisible Madonna barring the way."

Their sudden retreat meant, together with the saving of Brittany, the turning back of the tide of conquering soldiery from that part of France. The war was virtually over. Twelve days later the armistice was signed at Versailles.

On the evening before, January 17th, the Blessed Virgin had smiled upon France from the heaven of Pontmain, promising that God would hear the prayers, and “in a short time”.

Prayers

It wasn't only the prayers of this parish of Pontmain that moved heaven. At Saint-Brieux in Brittany not far from Pontmain was the well-known chapel of Notre-Dame d'Esperance (Our Lady of Hope), the seat of the Archconfraternity founded under that name. Devotion to Mary under that title was popular in the area. This is why the official title of Our Lady at Pontmain is Our Lady of Hope. A National Vow, to which France attributes its preservation was made in the old sanctuary of Avenieres on the 20th of January (a year before?) by the bishop surrounded by a large number of the clergy and an immense crowd of the faithful. I couldn't find details on this, but people were praying.

News of this marvelous Apparition spread like lightning. Although only 60 some persons were present, in all the parish of some 500 persons not one was incredulous. “We believe the children,” they said.

Pilgrims start arriving from all directions. The diocese of Laval, so profoundly religious, considers itself fortunate in the thought that the Blessed Virgin chose it for this manifestation of her maternal goodness,

But

Several days after the happening, the Sisters of Pontmain took the children to Fougères, to the mother house of their congregation.

The superior questioned the little children.

“The Blessed Virgin,” she said to them, “knows grammar. She could not have begun a sentence with the word “but”.

Little Jeanne-Marie Lebosse quickly answered: “Sister Vitaline also knows grammar. Well! when she has had enough of seeing that one does not work, she gives a good kick on the step and says: “But, study then!”

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1900 The new church was consecrated.

1905 Pope Pius X elevated the Sanctuary to the status of a basilica.

The feast of Our Lady of Pontmain is celebrated on the anniversary, January 17th.

Only one Year Later, Formal Approval

Feb 2, 1872 –Mgr Casimir-Alexis-Joseph Wicart, Bishop of Laval, declares:

“We judge that the Immaculate Mary, Mother of God, has truly appeared on January 17th, 1871, to Eugene Barbedette, Joseph Barbedette, Françoise Richer, and Jeanne-Marie Lebosse, in the hamlet of Pontmain.”

In the same document Bishop Wicart, bishop of Laval, recognized four official seers, but he did not ask them to testify formally because they were minors and nothing would be recognized in court.

Eugene Barbedette was born on November 4, 1858. He was the first to see the Beautiful Lady. He becomes a priest. He was ordained priest in 1883 in several parishes of the Diocese of Laval, he is remembered as a priest “right, zealous, fervent and uncompromising.” He died on 2 May 1927.

Joseph Barbedette was born on November 20, 1860. He wished to become a missionary. He entered the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate. He was ordained a priest in 1884. At the request of his superiors, he wrote a very complete account of the Apparition. He died on November 3, 1930. He is buried in the cemetery of Pontmain.

Françoise Richer was born in 1861. She remained a profoundly Christian soul, just doing his job every day “to please God and the Good Virgin.” She earned her living as a domestic servant and then as a teacher in several

small country schools. Around 1900, she became the housekeeper of Father Eugène Barbedette. She died on 28 March 1915.

Jeanne-Marie Lebosse was born September 12, 1861 at Gosné (Ille-et-Vilaine). Orphaned of father and having her mother paralyzed, she is collected by her aunt Sister Timothée, director of the school of Pontmain. In 1881 she entered the Sisters of the Holy Family of Bordeaux. In 1921 she could no longer remember the Apparition and began to be afflicted with a scrupulous conscience. She felt she had to make a former retraction of the Apparition fifty years after the event. She did this formally before witnesses, but it was not made public for another forty years. Two years later she became paralyzed. She suffered for ten years. From March 1933 to her death on Dec. 12th she was reduced to absolute impotence. She is buried in the central cemetery of Bordeaux, in the section of her religious community. Did she suffer this darkness and disability as a victim soul?

Overview

It's prelude to era of peace (no war in France for 40 years!) This is a marvel because France had been going through one revolution after another. The Catholics in the country will build themselves up. During this time, the great Saint Therese will be influential in bringing the faith to the world.

It's the sweetest, happiest Apparition in all the mosaic that we'll be looking at. Mary has no reproaches. She doesn't make any request except that they continue to pray. Mary is singing with them. She is moving her hands as if She's playing an instrument. She is almost dancing up there. The children are laughing. The people can't see the Apparition but they experience the emotion of it. They are all comforted.

This is a community of prayerful believers. None of the children were mocked or disbelieved by parents, priests or religious. In so many Apparitions the seers go through so many humiliations. They are interrogated and treated badly. But no one did that here.

Three seers became priests or religious. One seer remained chaste and served as priest's housekeeper near the Apparition site. It was an idyllic situation.

Apocalyptic Hints?

I found these thoughts in an "interesting" website, a bit over the edge, I don't want to give the source.

- 3/12 hours 5:30 – 9pm
- The word *Mais* (meaning: but) hung for 10 min. *Mais* adds up to 42 in letter numbering: 3-1/2 years, 42 months
- Periods of silence and prayer
- At night
- In the sky
- Black veil (sorrows)
- Crown (prayers of the devout)
- Mary is the bridge (*pontmain*) to new era. Forty years is not yet a "great era"

Physical healings were few, but-

conversions were significant!

The pastor wanted Mary's title to be "Our Lady of Conversions."

God bless you!