

MADONNA DEI MARTIRI ~ Our Lady of the Martyrs

The tradition of the Madonna Dei Martiri goes back many years. It was in the year 1399, on the orders of the King of Naples, Ladislao di Durazzo, commanded that the Street Festival and the Religious celebration be combined to celebrate the “Miracle” and blessings of the Madonna. This celebration is traditionally held on September 8, which is the Universal Feast of the Nativity of Mary. The actual “Miracle” of the Madonna occurred many years before this date.

Molfetta, situated as a port town on the Adriatic Sea, has historically been a maritime community. In 1188 a boatload of Crusaders returning from the Holy Land found the Icon of the Madonna floating on the water. They brought it to the Hospice in Molfetta which was constructed in 1162 on the orders of the Norman King, William II. The Crusaders would return to Molfetta, many of whom were wounded and dying. It is for this reason that Molfetta had built the Hospice. Those who were returned to health went on their way, while some died in Molfetta as Martyrs of the Faith. Everyone prayed to the Madonna of Martyrs who was symbolized as a Mother and Child with Angels, in a Byzantine style Icon. The Madonna in 1840 became the town’s patron along side San Corrado. Especially devoted were the fisherman who asked for her protection. Annually, the Molfettese people, where ever they are in the world, take time to celebrate this Miracle. Traditionally, there is Novena with a Mass and procession through the streets. At some point the Icon (now statue) is placed on the fishing boats for veneration. A plenary indulgence is granted by the Pope to anyone who attends the Mass of the Madonna Dei Martiri and the Mass the Sunday following Easter.