

The Miracle of Lepanto

It was the year 1571. The strong and fearsome Turkish naval fleet of the Ottoman Empire threatened to conquer Europe for Islam. Pope St Pius V called on the Christian nations to send ships and men to defend themselves against these determined Moslem invaders.

Spain, Portugal, Austria, Malta, Savoy, Genoa and Venice sent what ships and fighting men they could to join the small papal forces quickly assembled by the Holy Father. Admiral Andrea Doria of Genoa carried a small painting of Our Lady of Guadalupe loaned to the Christian fleet by the archbishop of Mexico. The fleet assembled in August. The Holy Father named this fleet the Holy League.

The Turkish fleet was the mightiest and most disciplined naval force on earth at the time of the battle. Their war ships were fast and maneuverable, powered by captured Christian slaves. Victory seemed impossible for the inferior Christian fleet. The Holy Father knew that defeating the Turks would preserve religious and political freedom throughout Europe. He called on all Catholics to pray the Rosary continuously, asking Our Lady of Victory to aid the Christian fleet.

On October 7, 1571, the Turkish fleet sailed from the harbor of Lepanto and engaged The Holy League in a battle that should have been a quick defeat. But, aided supernaturally by the hundreds of thousands of Christians praying the Rosary together the mighty Turkish fleet was soundly defeated and the Christian slaves set free!

At the very hour of victory for the Christians, the Holy Father, a thousand miles from the battle, rose from his chair and cried tears of joy and thanksgiving to God, proclaiming that the Catholic fleet was victorious! He made October 7 the feast of Our Lady of Victory. 145 years later, Pope Clement XI canonized Pope St Pius V, and changed the name of the feast to Our Lady of the Rosary, making it a universal feast celebrated every year throughout the Church.