

El Santo Niño de Gaucín visto por Ann Ball, escritora americana.

<<Holy Child of Gaucín Santo Niño de Gaucín Gaucín, Spain>>

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<<For nearly five hundred years, the citizens of Gaucín, Spain, have celebrated an image of the Holy Child. The gift of a saint, it was the Holy Child Himself who directed the saint to present it as a remembrance of His appearance there.



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Gau

The traditional story of the Holy Child of Gaucín was written down at the end of the 16th century by Don Ubaldo de Molina Fernández, the official historian of Gaucín. It was on a summer day in 1536, an itinerant Portuguese bookseller, Juan Ciudad, was walking carrying a heavy load of religious books.

The vicissitudes of life had buffeted Juan, who could not decide his true path in life seemed clear; at others his way was obscure. He had worked as a shepherd, a bricklayer, always being charitable and kind, before he began to sell religious books to town. Nearly forty years old, his desire to give his life to God was growing strong but he could not see exactly what God wanted him to do.

The oppressive heat and the heavy load were aggravated by the uneven road from Gibraltar to Gaucín. About halfway on his journey, nearly to an area the local name is Adelfilla, Juan was startled to see someone walking ahead of him on the solitary road. It was a pretty boy in poor clothes; the child had no shoes and was walking along the road barefoot.

Thinking that the little boy was lost, and worried that the rocks would tear the tender little feet to pieces, Juan, with more charity than thought, offered the child his hemp sandals. Thanking him, the boy refused the offering since the man's sandals were much too large for his tiny feet. The innocence and extraordinary beauty of the child fascinated and attracted Juan, who said, "Precious little boy and brother, if my sandals are not acceptable to you, then accept the service of my shoulders. Your value before God is worth much more than these books." Saying this, and in order to prove his words, Juan bent down and lowered his head so the child could climb on. As the young boy climbed onto his shoulders, Juan straightened up and walked proudly on, happy for the rest he was giving such an astonishingly lovely child.



A little while later, Juan began to feel as St. Christopher once had: as if he had the child on his shoulders. His light load began to grow very heavy, and he weakened and began to lean heavily on his walking stick. Just at the Adelfilla, there was a little spring which stopped Juan. Juan said to the child, "precious boy and brother, give me a minute to drink a little water and rest as I have worked up a sweat." Carefully, he set the child down in the shade of a rock. Juan went to the spring and drank thirstily. On his return, he was pleasantly surprised to

calling to him. Suddenly, he saw in the poor boy the Greatness and Majesty of the Christ child handed him an open pomegranate, crowned with his cross, and will be called John of God, and Granada will be your cross, and through it you will have glory. As testimony of my appearance, give to Gaucín an Image that represents my presence. Then the beautiful child disappeared into the pearly clouds.



After this apparition, Juan Ciudad left his doubts behind and followed with his whole heart what the Holy Child directed. In Granada, he dedicated the rest of his life to the needy, and giving succor and protection to the poor. His daily example brought about the creation of a work that today continues the steps of the founder in charity: the Hospitalers of St. John of God. Saint John of God was canonized in 1690.

But what of the image promised by the Christ Child? What is the proof of John's vision?

Following the directive of the Divine Voice, John left the Alhambra to begin his work. One day, in Andalus, he collected funds for the poor. John acquired a little Christ child. On arriving at the city of Ronda, he exchanged his clothes with a poor soldier, and in carrying the carefully wrapped sacred image, he went to the Hermitage of the Incarnation at the Castle of S. Pedro.

On September 8th day in 1546. Silently he entered the church and placed the little statue on the altar, completing the design of Divine Providence.

Since that day, the citizens of Gaucín have been ardent in their service and devotion to the Holy Christ Child. The story of the image has been passed down from generation to generation. Each year since the first anniversary of the gift, the traditional festival in honor of the Holy Child is held on September 8.

All that remains of the original image is a photo made in 1920. The picture confirms the description of the only written document that remains. The child is dressed in a simple tunic. In his left hand it holds a little world globe of crystal and his right hand is raised in blessing. The beautiful image is considered a marvel of Christian art and is most likely from the Seville school of art founded in the middle of the sixteenth century by Pedro Torrigiano.



In 1810, the little image was thrown away during one of the French raids. First, it was stripped of its rich clothing and expensive votive offerings, which were taken and sold. It was then struck in the face with a bayonet and thrown down in the rocks around the castle where it lay for two years. Fortunately, it was found by a pious woman, Mrs. Ana Jimenez-Orozco, who hid it. Once again the little image was venerated during the September fiestas for the remainder of the nineteenth century and the first part of the twentieth.



During the first days of the bloody Spanish Civil War, the image disappeared. Two stories of its fate are given. One holds that it was burned; the other says that a devotee of the Holy Child hid it for its safety. Some people still hope that one day the precious image will return.

In September 1937, the Brothers of St. John of God

donated an image of the Holy Child to the parish of St. Sebastian. They had wooden statue in an antique shop in Granada. This image was used until the 19 pastor, Father Juan Jiménez Higuera, obtained a new statue for the hermitage one in use today.

The festival continues today as one of the most important feasts of the year in Gaucín. On the evening of September 7, the statues of the Christ Child and of St. John of God are taken from the hermitage to the parochial church of San Sebastian where a Mass is held in commemoration of the apparition of the Christ Child to Saint John of God. After the liturgical celebration, the people feast and dance throughout the evening. On the following day, the celebration begins again at dawn. The people attend Mass in pious thanksgiving for all the graces they have received. All day, people come to the church to venerate the Holy Child and the great Portuguese saint. About five in the afternoon, the images leave the church and are carried in procession through nearly all the streets of the town, accompanied by music and large numbers of people, carrying lighted candles and singing to the Holy Child. At eight thirty, after returning to the church of San Sebastian, the procession accompanies the Holy Child back to the hermitage. Five centuries of tradition have held that between those walls of stone and adobe lies the place where the saint of Granada encountered the Holy Child. Since that blessed day, the people of the area have kept the love of the child Jesus in their hearts, considering him their defender and their help in all their needs.

Nota Bibliográfica.- Ann Ball. *From the book The Holy Infant Jesus. Crossroads Publishing, fall 2005.*

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