

Nuestra Señora de Regla

The Black Virgin of Opon

Foundation of the Church

The date of its foundation has not been established. Some authors place it at 1630 while others put it at 1711. The earliest date found in the registry books of the parish is 1713.

During 1737, the parish in Boljoon was proposed to be abandoned for lack of religious. It was during this time that Opon (called Mactan) was annexed to Boljoon. Thus when the Father provincial proposed to get them back in 1742, the two names were set together. - Boljoon and Mactan. A friar named Fr. Aballe was the first Augustinian assigned to the parish after the Jesuits turned it over.

The Nuestra Señora de Regla, the image of the blessed Virgin in black holding a black Sto. Niño in her arms, is the patron saint of Opon. The two-and-half-feet high icon has a black face with curly, black hair flowing down her shoulders. The Lady is enshrined in the sacristy of the Virgin of the Rule church which was built by the Mission of the Sacred Heart in 1890. On her feast day in November, many devotees and pilgrims from all over the country come to pay their respects to her, ask for favors, seek for her blessings. During her procession on the feast day, the fresh flowers at her feet are said to be miraculous, healing any wound and able to bring luck.

The original icon of the Black Virgin is in the church of Chipiona. It was the one ordered to be made by St. Augustine, the Bishop of Hippo who died in 430 AD. The choice of the icon's color is to liken it to the black skin of the Bishop's parishioners, the people of Tagaste in Africa.

The Black Virgin's fame was already widespread in Europe when Fr. Francisco Avelle, a Spanish friar during the Spanish rule in the country, showed her picture to the natives of Opon. And soon enough, Opon natives began to tell their own tale of the Virgin's healing and miracles. And so, from one generation to another, tales of the miracles of the Black Virgin have increased. The native's faith in the Lady grew all the more especially when a drought (sparing only Opon) visited the other islands, and when a huge swarm of insects refrained from attacking their crops when a novena was said to her. These events led the natives of Opon to make an icon of the Virgin, like the original one enshrined in the church of Chipiona.

Construction of the Church

The original church built during the Spanish times was constructed somewhere between the years 1735-1744. The church, made of stone cut in square blocks, was slightly damaged during the WW II.

Unfortunately, the Dutch priests later assigned to the parish bypassed 200 years of history. Instead of repairing the damages, they had the church bulldozed and built a totally new one made of concrete. The walls of the old church were so solid that, during the architectural massacre, the Dutch priest who ordered to have it demolished was said to have regretted having started the operation.

However, there is still a remainder of the old church, as proof of its solidity - the still existing convent built by Fr. Simon Aguirre in 1855. It is a beautiful example of the Spanish colonial mission complex and is spacious and solid.

Style of the Church

The old church was baroque in style. Semi-circular arched openings added drama to the softly undulating line of the pediment. The symmetrical arrangement of voids and columns suggested a calm, peaceful set up.

Excerpts from: Angels in Stone
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