

The 125th Anniversary of the Calling of Our Lady of Ta' Pinu

A philatelic tribute to Our Lady of Ta' Pinu and Ta' Pinu Sanctuary

by Joseph Fenech

The 22nd June of this year (2008) marked the 125th anniversary of the calling of Our Lady of Ta' Pinu.

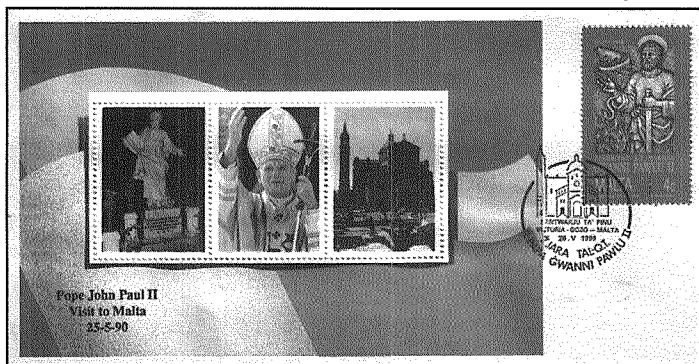
It was exactly 10.10 am on Friday, 22nd June 1883 when Our Lady of Ta' Pinu spoke to 45 year old Carmela Grima, who was going back home from her fields situated close to what was then the small chapel of Ta' Pinu, on the outskirts of Gharb. Since that day, the devotion to Our Lady of Ta' Pinu has grown immensely, and today thousands of devotees from all over Malta and Gozo, and from the four corners of the world, travel to Gharb to pay homage to the Blessed Virgin of Ta' Pinu.

Our Lady of Ta' Pinu and her national shrine in Gharb have, on a number of occasions, been commemorated on stamps or through other philatelic means, to the delight of stamp collectors, and particularly, those specializing in Marian philately.

On the 5th March 1988, the Malta postal authorities issued a set of three stamps featuring religious commemorations. The 12c stamp in this set depicted the main altar piece of Our Lady of Ta' Pinu found in its sanctuary in Gharb. This particular stamp had been issued to commemorate 1988 as a Marian Year, and like the remaining stamps in the set, was designed by Frank Portelli. The altarpiece, depicting the Assumption of Our Lady, was painted by artist Bartolomeo Amadeo Perugino, in 1619.



On the 26th May 1990 a special handstamp was used at Victoria Branch Post Office in Gozo to mark the visit of His Holiness Pope John Paul II to Gozo, and, in particular, the visit to the Sanctuary of Ta' Pinu. In fact, the date-stamp included an outline of the Ta' Pinu Sanctuary. To commemorate the Papal visit to the Maltese Islands, Said International Ltd issued a special Souvenir Sheet. The sanctuary of Ta' Pinu is reproduced in the photo-montage included in this souvenir sheet. On the same occasion, Said International Ltd also issued a set of four commemorative postcards. One of these cards (marked Pope's Visit 1) featured the Ta' Pinu Sanctuary, where the Pope said Mass on the 26th May 1990. After Mass, the Pope placed a halo of golden stars studded with diamonds around the head of the image of Our Lady.



On the 12th October 2005, the Maltese postal authorities issued the set of Christmas stamps for 2005. The set, designed by Gozitan artist Chev. Paul Camilleri Cauchi, consisted of four stamps featuring mosaics housed at Ta' Pinu Sanctuary and showing different episodes from the life of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The mosaic pictures, which were manufactured by Ferrari e Bacci of Pietra Santa, Italy, are copied from the paintings of Maltese artist Chev. Emvin Cremona. The 7c stamp shows the Nativity, the 16c stamp features the Annunciation, the 22c stamp depicts the Adoration of the Magi, while the 50c stamp shows the Flight to Egypt. Chev. Paul Camilleri Cauchi included in each stamp one of the mosaic pictures and a detail from sculptures found in the Sanctuary. In fact, the stone sculptures had been made by Chev. Camilleri Cauchi's father, the renowned artist Agostino Camilleri, better known as Wistin. The special handstamp used by Maltapost to cancel First Day of Issue covers was also designed by Paul Camilleri Cauchi.

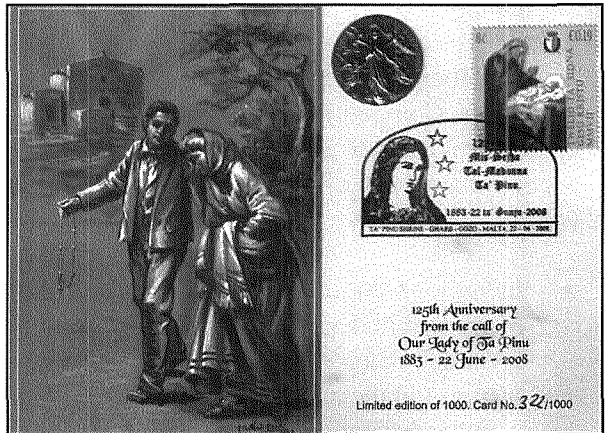
The 7c value stamp and the 16c value stamp were also issued se-tenant with a label as personalized stamps.

It is worth mentioning that the original set of Cremona paintings on which the mosaics were executed, had been left abandoned for years, and, after this set of stamps was issued, on the initiative of Rev Fr Gerard Buhagiar, then vice-Rector (and now Rector) of the Sanctuary, the original paintings were traced



and professionally restored. These masterpieces now form part of a permanent exhibition in the renovated main sacristy of the Sanctuary of Ta' Pinu, for all to enjoy and admire.

This year, philatelists and devotees of Our Lady of Ta' Pinu in general have had the opportunity to add another item to their collection on the subject, because on Sunday, 22nd June 2008 a special commemorative postmark was used by MaltaPost plc at Ta' Pinu to mark the 125th anniversary of the calling of Our Lady of Ta' Pinu. This handstamp was designed by



Gozitan philatelist Anthony Grech. Moreover, the ecclesiastical authorities at Ta' Pinu Sanctuary also issued a special commemorative card to mark this anniversary. This limited edition card (only 1000 have been printed) was designed for the occasion by Chev. Paul Camilleri Cauchi, and was also available from the Ta' Pinu Sanctuary on 22nd June 2008.

Reference

- "Madonna ta' Pinu" periodical – various issues.
- The Philatelic Society (Malta) Journal - Vol. 34/3 – January 2006.
- Gozo Philatelic Society Newsletter – No 30 – 4/2007 (October – December 2007).
- "The Malta Stamp" – No 236 – October 2005.
- "Frenč ta' l-Gharb – God's servant in Gozo" – Joseph Bezzina.
- The Sunday Times, 22nd June 2008 – Feature "Malta's stepping s'one to Heaven", by Rev. Dr. Joseph Bezzina.