



Did you know that Pittsburgh shares something in common with the town of Formicola in Italy where the Madonna del Castello is the patron saint? Yes, both towns have a shrine on the side of a very steep slope dedicated to the Blessed Mother.

Both shrines were dedicated after an apparition of the Blessed Mother. The story of her apparition in Formicola is told on the Madonna Del Castello Church website. Below is the story about the shrine in Pittsburgh:

In 1956 a steelworker named Philip Marraway, a Maronite Catholic of Lebanese descent was walking to his home on Forbes Avenue in up-town from the J&L Steel Mill on Second Avenue as he did every evening for 35 years as a laborer in the mill. On that night he noticed a light glowing on the side of the cliff above the parkway. As he drew closer to the light a vision of the Blessed Mother appeared to him. Startled and inspired by this vision, he walked the next morning to the spot where the vision had appeared the preceding night. When he reached the spot an Oakland housewife named Sophie Toma was standing nearby, a witness to the identical vision Mr. Marraway had experienced the previous night. Believing this was not a coincidence, together they vowed to build a small shrine in the Blessed Mother's honor.

Persons interested in visiting the shrine of the Blessed Mother should travel east from downtown Pittsburgh on the Boulevard of the Allies to Ward Street in South Oakland. After turning right onto Ward visitors to continue to its very end before turning right onto Wakefield Street and proceed down the dead end cobblestone street. (Care must be taken as the terrain is steep). Visitors are asked to be respectful to area residents whose property must be crossed to gain access to the shrine.

Images of both the shrine in Oakland and the one in Formicola are included here. While in great contrast to each other, they both serve a singular purpose and that is to remind us of the constant protection we receive from the Blessed Mother.

