

Our Lady of Quinche

Our Lady of the Presentation of Quinche is a handsome wood sculpture carved in the 16th century by Don Diego de Robles, an extraordinary artist who is also credited with other popular and venerated images of Mary. History tells us that those who had ordered the image couldn't or wouldn't pay the sculptor for it, and he traded it to the "oyacachi" Indians for some large cedar boards he needed. At a later time, popular fancy enriched the facts with the legend that the Virgin had appeared earlier to the Indians in a cave and had promised to deliver them from the dangerous bears which devoured the children. The Indian chiefs were astonished when they saw Diego Robles arrive carrying the image of the Virgin, whom they recognized as having the same features as the Lady who had appeared to them in the cave and had spoken to them.

The statue remained under the care of the Indians fifteen years, until the local bishop ordered that it was moved to the village of Quinche from which it finally took its name in 1604.

The image is a fine carving in cedar wood, measuring 62 centimeters in height. The handsome sculpture is hidden by large brocade garments, covered with jewels, and embroidered with gold and silver threads, which only allow the serene dark face to be seen. The Virgin holds a scepter in her right hand and with the left she holds the Child, who lifts a hand in blessing and in the other hand displays a gold globe crowned with a cross. The pedestal at her feet and the large half-moon, both of pure silver, and the heavy crowns made of gold and precious stones which adorn the heads of Jesus and Mary, evidence the generosity of the people of Ecuador who like to see their patroness resplendent, dressed with the best finery. The face of the Child Jesus has features resembling those of the mestizo children of those mountains. Mestizo is also the color of the mother, synthesis of the Inca and Spaniard souls.

She has a delicate oval face with a slender nose, thin lips and a small mouth; her slanted eyes and her sad gaze with half closed eyelids give her a unique gentleness. This is why she is so popular in Ecuador, specially among the Indians who affectionally refer to their protector in heaven as "La Pequeñita" (the little one).

There are an amazing number of songs in honor of the Virgin of Quinche, in "Quechua", "Jíbaro" and many dialects of the region as well as in Spanish; many have been sung for 300 and even 400 years.

The image was crowned in 1943 and her feast is celebrated each year on November 21.

The present shrine was declared a National Sanctuary in 1985.