

Eucharistic Miracle of HERENTALS

BELGIUM, 1412



In the Eucharistic Miracle of Herentals, some Hosts that had been previously stolen were found after eight days perfectly intact, in spite of the rain. The Hosts were found in a field near a rabbit burrow, surrounded by a bright light and arranged in the form of a cross. Every year, two paintings of the Antoon van Ysendyck, depicting the miracle, are taken in procession to the field where a small shrine was built – *De Hegge*. Here a commemorative Mass is celebrated before numerous people. The two paintings are presently kept in the Cathedral of Sint-Waltrudiskerk ad Herentals.



Church of San-Waltrudis, Herentals



A. Van Ysendyck (1801-1875). A series of paintings by "Het wonder van de Hegge" – *The Holy Miracle of the Fence*, Church of San Waltrudis



Painting of Van Ysendyck depicting the miracle



Interior of the Church of San-Waltrudis



The "De Hegge" chapel built at the place where the miracle took place



In 1412, a certain Jan van Langerstede went for lodging to a hotel not far from the little city of Herentals. This professional man was stealing sacred objects from churches and selling them all over Europe. The day after his arrival at Herentals, he went to the nearby village of Poederlee. He entered the parish church and, without being noticed, stole the chalice and the ciborium containing five consecrated Hosts. As he was returning to Herentals, in the place known as "De Hegge" ("the fence"), he felt as if pulled by a mysterious force that was keeping him from continuing his journey. So he tried to get rid of the Hosts by throwing them into the river, but his every attempt to do so was useless. Jan was on the verge of despair when he saw a field not very far away with a big rabbit burrow where he straightaway hid the Hosts. The task

took place without any trouble, and the man was able to peacefully return to Herentals. In the meantime, the city judge, Gilbert De Pape, began an investigation to discover the author of the theft in the church of Porderlee. Among the suspects was also our Jan. The police searched his luggage and found the chalice and the ciborium.

Jan then confessed everything except the fact that he had thrown away the Hosts. He was to be immediately hanged, and Jan had already climbed the scaffold when, encouraged by the priest to cleanse his soul before dying, completely confessed his guilt. The judge then suspended the execution and ordered Jan to indicate the exact place where he had left the Hosts. A large crowd followed them. As soon as

they arrived at the field, they saw the Hosts all radiant, arranged in the form of a cross. Strangely, the Hosts remained intact, notwithstanding the weather, and they were at once brought back in procession, some to Herentals and some to Poederlee, where they remained until the 16th century. On January 2, 1441, the miracle was declared authentic by the magistrate of Herentals. At the place where the Hosts were found, a small chapel was built, which was visited by numerous prelates, such as Jean Malderus, Bishop of Anvers in 1620, and Pope Benedict XIV in 1749. The daughter of John of Lussembourg, Elizabeth Van Görlitz, paid for the enlargement of the chapel, which later on was transformed into a shrine.