

Maria Paola Giobbi - Rossana Barbieri  
Translated by Roberta Catalano Pallotta

# Looking at Her



*The Life of Francesco Antonio Marcucci*

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*The Life of Francesco Antonio Marcucci*

Manila, Philippines – July 2008

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- 28 Highland Drive Street, Blue Ridge A Subd.  
1100 Quezon City, Manila, Philippines  
Tel. No. 647-1116 / 09204253477

- St. Raphael Archangel Parochial School  
4212 Calaca, Batangas, Philippines  
Tel. No. 043-223-7208

General House  
Via Cosimo Tornabuoni, 12 – 00166 Rome - Italy  
**[www.francescoantoniomarcucci.com](http://www.francescoantoniomarcucci.com)**



**Msgr. Francesco Antonio Marcucci  
of the Immaculate Conception**

painting by Nicola Monti, August 15, 1770  
on the occasion of his Episcopal Consecration in Rome, Italy.

Texts: **Maria Paola Giobbi**  
Drawings: **Rossana Barbieri**  
Traslation: **Roberta Catalano Pallotta**

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# Introduction

*Dear boys and girls,*

*You admire beautiful, good and true things. That is why I thought of telling you the story of a man who exemplified these three qualities.*

*To succeed in this attempt I asked help from the good Lord, the Holy Virgin and from many friends. They have all answered me with love: I got helpful suggestions and other comments.*

*The illustrations that accompany the story were done by Rossana Barbieri, a ceramics decorator in Rome and a mother of two children.*

*I hope you will be inspired by our work, and will enjoy reading it.*

*Sister Maria. Paola. Giobbi  
Pious Workers Sisters of the  
Immaculate Conception*

## Map of Italy





## *The birth in Force*



On the morning of the 27th of November 1717, at sunrise, Francesco Antonio Marcucci was born, to a noble family in the small town of Force, 24 kilometers from the city of Ascoli Piceno in Italy.



It was Saturday, the day dedicated  
to the devotion  
of the Holy Virgin.

Dad Leopold was bursting with joy for the  
family had finally a descendant!  
He called the coachmen at once

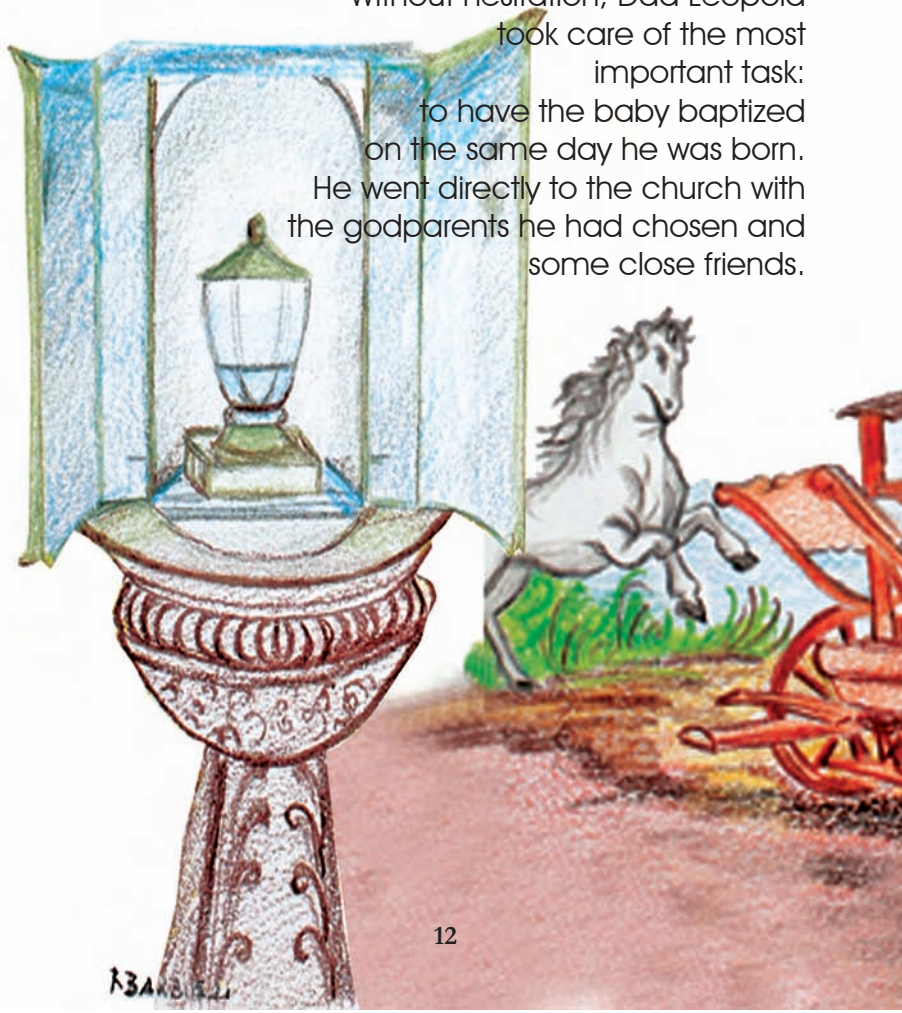


and charged them to  
give the news to  
the elderly grandmother  
Dioclezia Soderini, to the  
uncles and to his friends  
in Ascoli Piceno.



# The Baptism

Without hesitation, Dad Leopold took care of the most important task: to have the baby baptized on the same day he was born. He went directly to the church with the godparents he had chosen and some close friends.



There, at the Apostle  
Saint Paul's Church, was  
Father Angelo Acciaoli waiting  
for them by the door.  
The child was named after his  
grandfather, Francesco Antonio.





Afterwards, as it was customary at that time,  
the priest laid him down the altar  
of the Saint Crucifix and the Virgin Mary,  
to entrust him to their care.

It was dark when they  
arrived home.

Dad Leopold placed  
Francesco Antonio  
in his mother's arms:  
a new christian had  
entered their family  
that of God's People!



# Francesco Antonio's Childhood

In the spring of 1718 the family moved to their house in Ascoli, where the little one was received with great affection by his grandmother Dioclezia, from his uncle Domenico-Antonio and aunt Francesca Gastaldi who all lived with them.

He grew up in serenity surrounded by the affection of his family, especially from his aunt Francesca who did not have any children.

During summer, as it was a custom among the nobles in Ascoli, the family moved to the countryside, where the Marcucci family owned property.



Here, at the age of five,  
Francesco Antonio met Tecla Relucenti,  
a girl older than he, who lived near his  
house and whom he greatly admired  
for her modesty and goodness.  
Together with his parents and  
Tecla, here for the first time he  
heard a missionary's lecture.  
This childhood experience  
remained in his memory.



Once, when he was more or  
less seven years old, he  
swallowed a needle  
which he found  
lying around.



He was spitting blood and after several attempts to save him, the doctors gave up. The relatives who were very devoted to Saint Anthony, interceded with the saint, after whom the child was named, and he was saved.



At the age of seven and a half he received the Confirmation and his First Communion at the Saint Lorenzo Martire Church in Montedinove, an old little village not far from Ascoli Piceno.



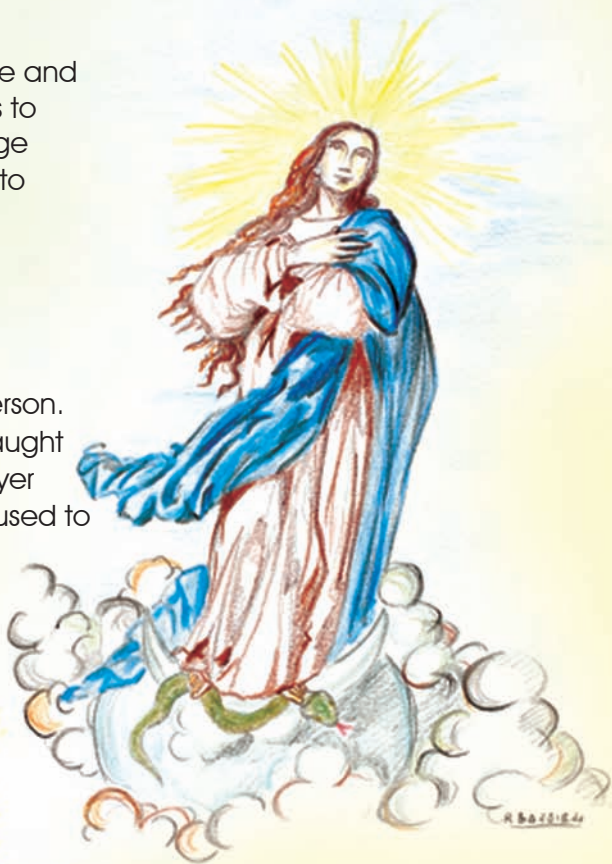
## *The first cultural and religious education*

At that time there were no public schools. Only the boys belonging to noble families who could afford private teachers, had a chance to study.

Francesco Antonio recalls that his tutor was very strict. He always had a cane in his hands, but everytime he tried using it, Francesco Antonio succeeded in evading it by escaping.



His intelligence and receptiveness to new knowledge enabled him to make quick progress in his studies. He was also an excellent self-taught person. His relatives taught him faith, prayer and got him used to frequent the sacraments.



Since childhood, his father inculcated in him the love for the Immaculate Mother of God.

## *The mother's death*

While he was growing up,  
at the age of 13 and a half,  
his mother died at the age  
of 37 and was buried  
in the Saint Mary Intervineas'  
Parish Church.

The boy suffered a lot for her loss.  
His Aunt Francesca took care of him,  
but only the love for the Holy Virgin,  
from whom the boy felt  
a real protection, filled  
the empty space left by his mother.





## *The calling*

In Ascoli Piceno the carnival was a much awaited revelry. Francesco Antonio looked forward to it as all the other boys of his age did. In 1735, when he was almost eighteen years old, he had more fun than usual with his masked friends, but in the evening, in the silence of his bedroom, he felt a great emptiness and sadness.



It seemed to him that he was  
wasting his life, so he made the greatest  
decision of his life to place himself in  
the service of God.





## *Towards priesthood*

In September of that same year Francesco Antonio, together with some companions, made a pilgrimage on foot to the Shrine of the Blessed Virgin Mary at Loreto about 130 kilometers from Ascoli Piceno.

His purpose for making this devotion was to entrust to the Blessed Mother his decision to become a priest.

He had been prepared by the examples and teachings of his relatives and a life dedicated to prayer.





However his family was not altogether happy about his plan. Their dream was for Francesco Antonio to continue the family line. It was only his Aunt Francesca who encouraged him and helped him get his family permission. One day he made him dress as a priest and presented him to his father and uncle, who finally gave their blessing.

With enthusiasm Francesco Antonio started studying the disciplines which prepared him for the great sacerdotal mission:



Theology, the Sacred Scriptures and the Church's Fathers. This study opened new horizons for him.

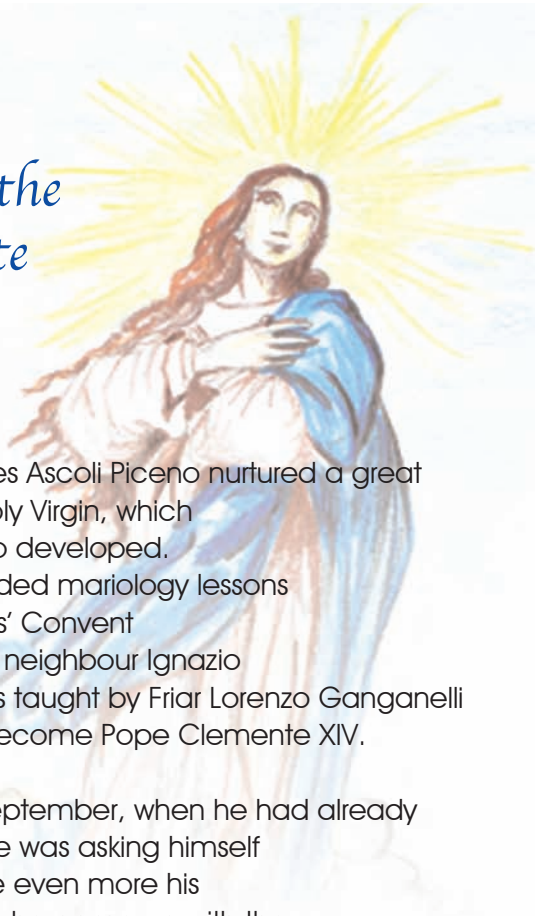
His heart and his mind overflowed with enthusiasm and joy. He soon realized that the people were ignorant of these teachings and therefore he decided to teach them what he was learning.



From the Bishop he obtained the permission to preach to his parishioners and to other parishioners in the city. People listened to him with admiration and great interest because he spoke with inspired clarity, warmth and wisdom. He often included in his teachings songs that he composed on purpose, in order to make the contents easy and pleasant.



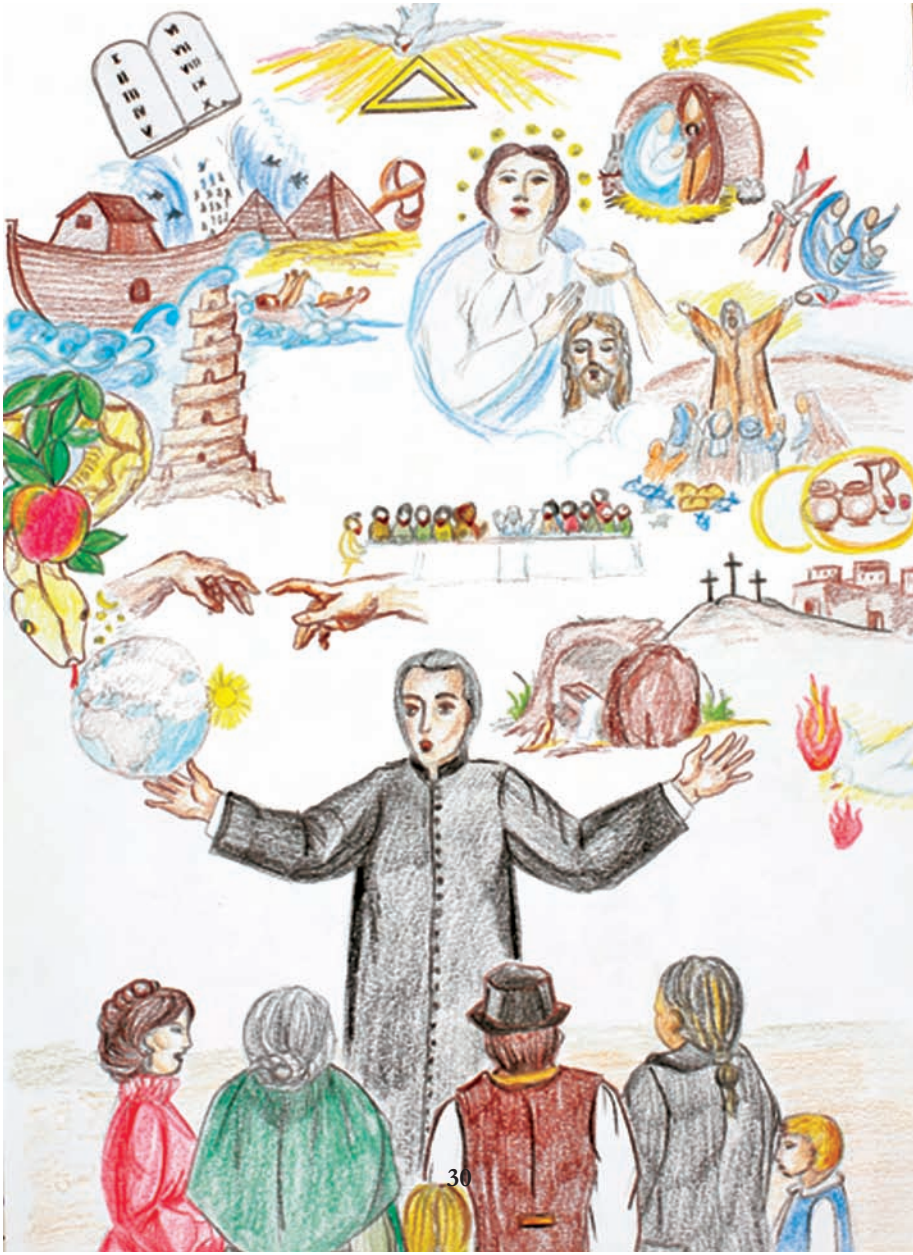
# *Repaying the love of the Immaculate Virgin*



Since ancient times Ascoli Piceno nurtured a great devotion to the holy Virgin, which Francesco Antonio developed. As a boy he attended mariology lessons in Franciscan Friars' Convent with his friend and neighbour Ignazio Matteucci. He was taught by Friar Lorenzo Ganganelli who would later become Pope Clemente XIV.

One evening in September, when he had already turned 21, while he was asking himself how he could love even more his Immaculate Lady, he came up with the idea of founding a sisters' congregation so that after his death the sisters would keep on loving the Blessed Mother and making other people love her.





He asked the Bishop for permission, but he was advised to wait because he was too young. Francesco Antonio did not give up and did not waste time either.

He prayed, he asked for prayers and started evangelizing

people in the villages spread around the Picena province: Appignano, Montepandone, Monsampolo, Ripaberarda and Acquaviva.

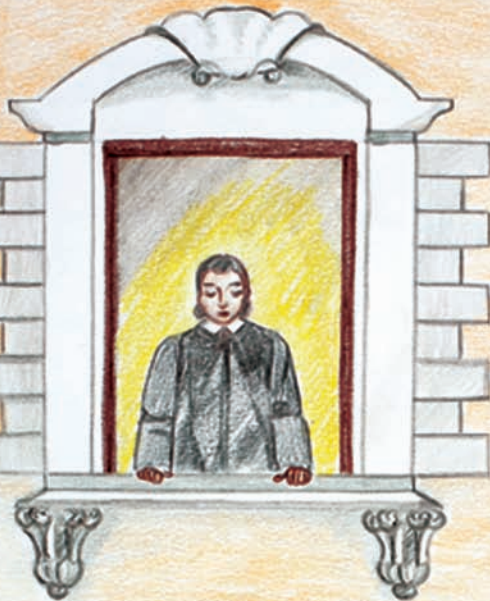
In the meantime some young girls were enthusiastic about the new foundation proposal.





Tecla Relucenti was the first one to be invited by the young Marcucci to share his big project. Thirteen years older than he and with a more sedate and mature character, she refused but afterwards, when she realized that the young man was divinely inspired, she consented and became his first collaborator.

In his first mission, when Francesco Antonio was still a bit embarrassed to dress as a missionary before his relatives, she allowed him to change into the habit in her house and afterwards change to his elegant clothes before going back home to his relatives.



Some years later coming back from a successful mission in Torano, he suffered from severe rheumatic pain that prevented him from walking. Tecla advised him to ask relief from St. Anthony.

In The morning of his feast day, on the 13th of June, she wrote Francesco Antonio a note suggesting that he get up from bed in order to watch the procession of the Saint's sacred relic, passing beneath his window. Marcucci obeyed, he invoked the Saint with faith and he found himself cured instantly.

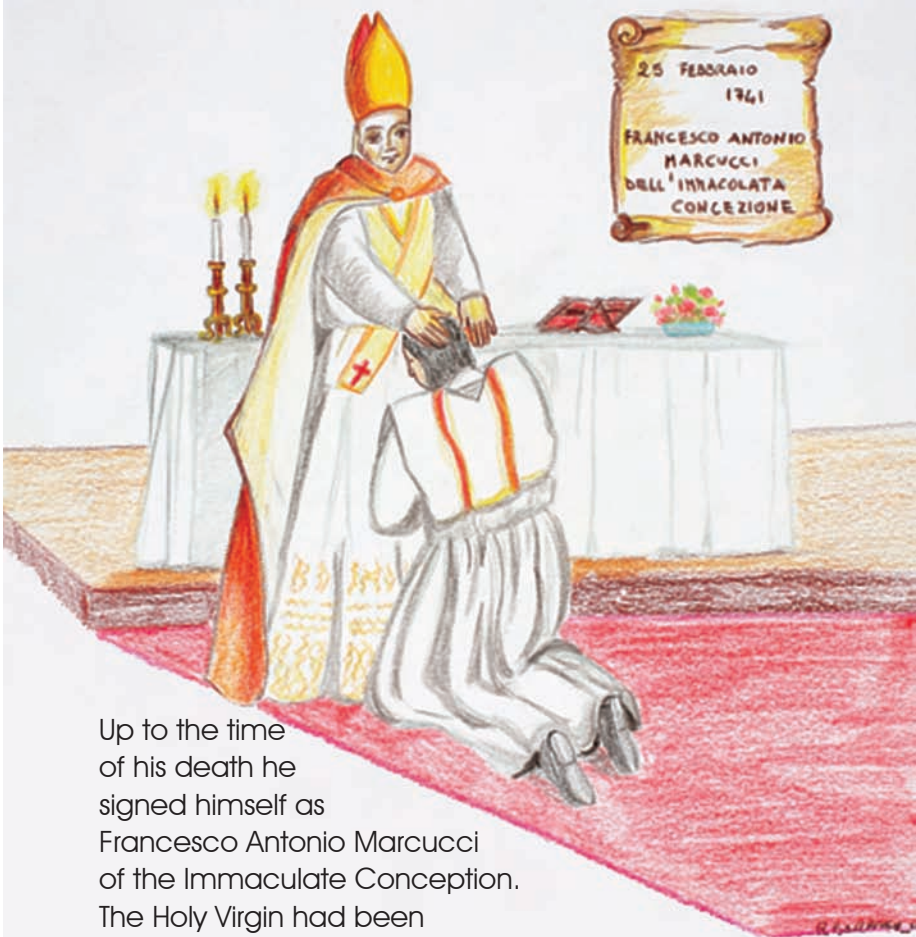






The day of the Sacerdotal Ordination finally came. The bishop of Ascoli Piceno, Monsignor Tommaso Marana, ordained him in his Episcopal chapel, on the 25th of February 1741.

From that time on he considered himself belonging entirely to the Lord and relied completely on the blessed Virgin Mary's protection. He added the name of the Immaculate to his family name.



Up to the time of his death he signed himself as Francesco Antonio Marcucci of the Immaculate Conception. The Holy Virgin had been "the delight of his heart and the ladder leading up to the sky".

## *The founding of the Pious Worker Sisters of the Immaculate Conception*



Ascertained of the fervor and seriousness of the young priest, on the 17th of August 1744 the Bishop finally granted Francesco Antonio the permission for establishing the new Congregation. The first sisters started meeting in Tecla's house in order to get ready. They sewed the white dresses and the blue cloak chosen by the Founder, so that the Holy Virgin could be present even visually, and they learned the chant of the Marian psalms, by using a zither or "spinet", that Tecla brought to the convent from her house.

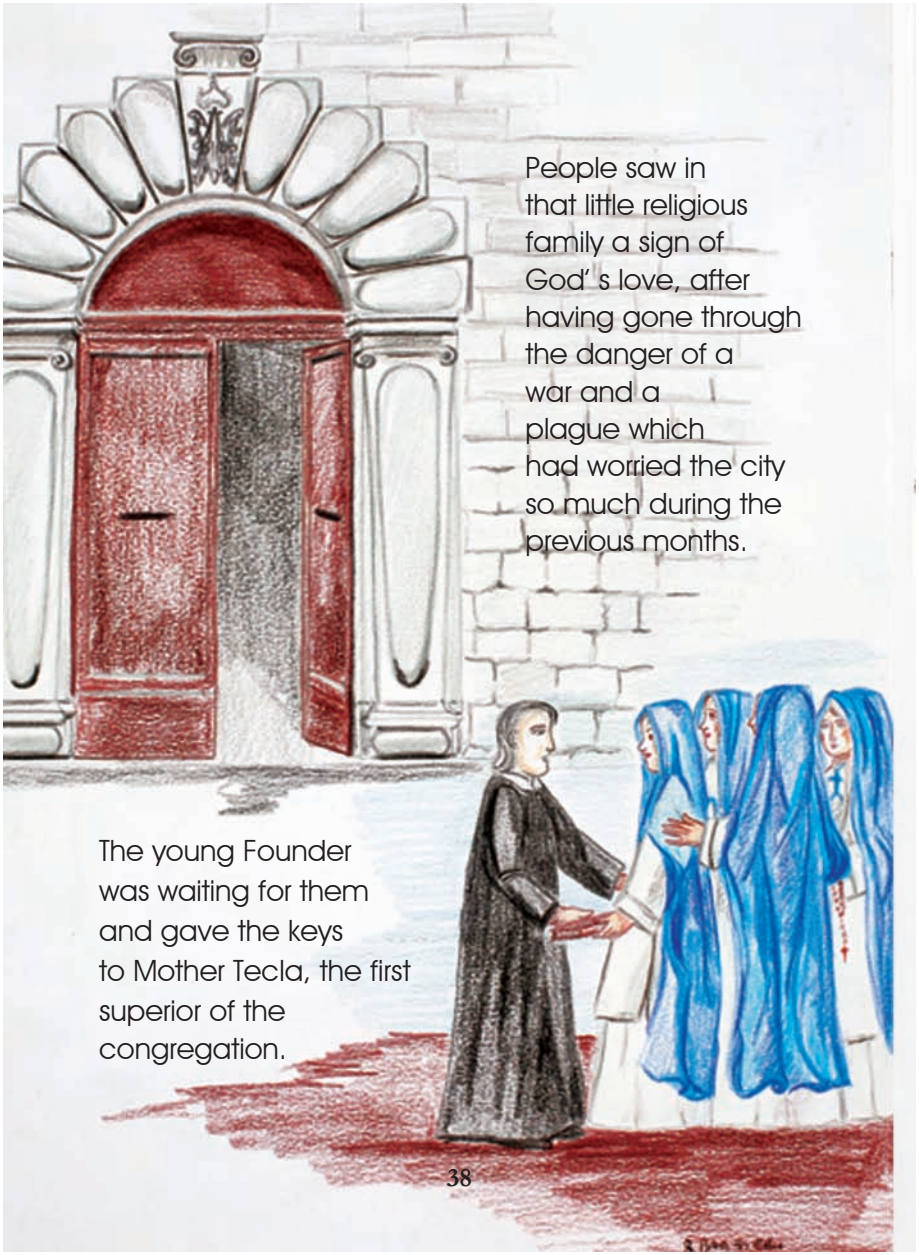
During this year  
Father Francesco  
Antonio chose  
the 8th of December,  
the liturgical  
solemnity of the  
Immaculate Conception,  
in order to start the  
Congregation.

The new  
community  
consisted of four  
sisters: Mother  
Tecla Relucenti,  
Sister Maria  
Dionisia Paci,  
Sister Maria  
Giacoma Aloisi and  
Sister Maria Caterina  
Silvestri.

The Founder blessed them in the church of the saints  
Vincenzo and Anastasio in Ascoli Piceno followed by  
the procession of the founding members of the Pious  
Worker Sisters and the people.

They arrived at the house which had been prepared for  
them in San Giacomo street.





People saw in that little religious family a sign of God's love, after having gone through the danger of a war and a plague which had worried the city so much during the previous months.

The young Founder was waiting for them and gave the keys to Mother Tecla, the first superior of the congregation.





## *The First School*

During that time neither the rich nor the poor girls could study. Father Marcucci, convinced that educated women could renew society, he patiently prepared the sisters to become teachers and wrote books for them. On the 6th of March 1745, he opened the school for the poor and noble young girls.

It was the first school for female in the city.



The civilian and religious authorities and all the citizens landed the project and were proud of it.

A week later the Sunday catechism started for all those female students and women of the city who wished it.



The Founder entrusted this task to Mother Tecla.

Aware of the sacrifice that he asked of her, he committed himself to prepare the lesson for her



every week, encouraging her to cooperate with him in saving souls.

## *Election to the Bishopric*

After 33 years of patient work at the Institute of the Pious Worker Sisters of the Immaculate Conception and at the local church, Pope Clemente XIV appointed Francesco Antonio bishop of Montalto Marche, a diocese near Ascoli Piceno, on May 1770.

The Founder, surprised and confused at the honor of his election, wrote to the Pope telling him that he did not feel capable of the task.

The Pope, who has held Marcucci in high esteem since the time he was his pupil in the Saint Francesco of Ascoli's convent, did not accept his refusal.

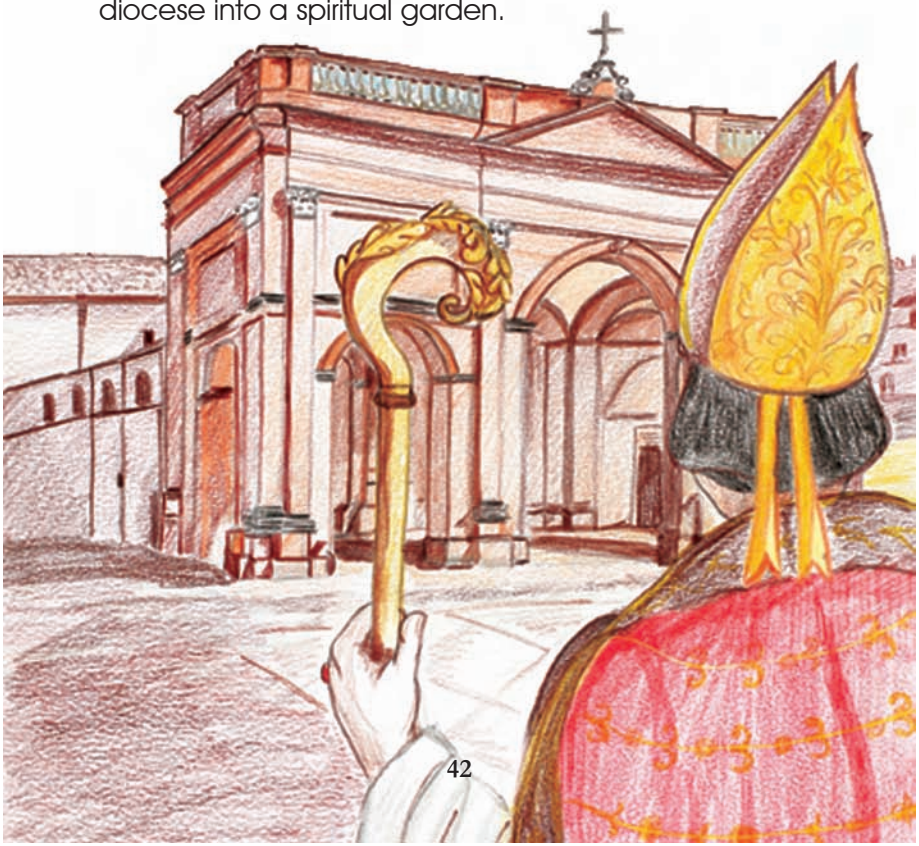
And so Msgr. Marcucci travelled to Rome, where the Pope received him with great joy and introduced him to his friend Saint Paul of the cross.

The latter encouraged him to accept the position and predicted that his preaching would do a lot of good and that he would become a saint someday.





Francesco Antonio was ordained Bishop at the Piceni Church of Saint Salvatore in Lauro in Rome, on the feast of the Assumption, on August 15, 1770. On the 15th of September he made his entrance into the diocese of Montalto, where he was received with enthusiasm by everyone. Msgr. Marcucci started carrying out at once the pastoral ministry with exemplary commitment, in order to transform his diocese into a spiritual garden.



## *The Pope's direct collaborator*

On the occasion of the Holy Year 1775 Rome had to prepare to receive pilgrims from all over the world. Pope Clement XIV's physical strength was declining and he needed someone to help him with the ecclesiastical matter of the whole world. The Pope considered Bishop Marcucci as the most capable person to be his vice regent.

On the 19th of January 1774, while preparing for the decision Synod, Msgr. Marcucci received his appointment. With his usual graciousness and ready service, he left for Rome and placed himself at the Pope's disposal.

From Rome he directed the construction work for the expansion of the convent of the Pious Worker Sisters of the Immaculate Conception which he wanted to be beautiful, welcoming and functional.

Even though his work was very tiring in Rome, he continued guiding with wisdom and fatherly love the diocese and his congregation.

# Meeting with the Emperor in Vienna

On the eve of the French Revolution the European sovereigns were isolating the Church to limit its powers. Pope Pio VI, Clemente XIV' s successor, took the extraordinary decision to go to Vienna and to personally deal with the Emperor Joseph II. He chose Msgr. Marcucci as his travelling companion for this delicate diplomatic mission.

The bishop accepted the invitation even though he was tired and sick. They left Rome on the 27th of February 1782. The papal delegation consisted of 18 people riding in four carriages and two gigs. Msgr. Marcucci sat next to the Pope during the whole trip and was a wise adviser and confessor to him.



During the trip many people were consoled by the Pope's word and blessing. The Emperor remained hostile to the Pope's invitations, nevertheless he dismissed Him and his party by giving them rich gifts. Msgr. Marcucci received a precious ring which he offered to Saint Emidio, his city's patron saint in Ascoli Piceno.







Meanwhile, the years passed by and his health worsened.

He suffered from rheumatism, convulsions and circulatory problems.

The Pope, reluctantly accepted his resignation as vice regent on the 25th of April 1786.

His return to the diocese was initially good for his health but later it deteriorated.

On the 9th of December 1789 Msgr. Marcucci obtained from the Pope the permission to reside in Ascoli Piceno, in a convent' s wing of the Pious Worker Sisters of the Immaculate Conception which he had prepared for himself.





From there he continued guiding  
the diocese, where he returned for  
the most important functions,  
during the mildest months  
of the year.



*His last years near to the sisters*



Msgr. Marcucci urged the sisters to live simply and to put their trust in God and to the Immaculate protection.

He encouraged the teachers to honor the Immaculate Mother in their work of educating the girls and the women. He admonished them to treat their pupils lovingly and to adapt to their individual differences. He emphasized character education to develop in their students modesty, industry, sincerity, punctuality, courage, courtesy and graciousness in speech.



# *The building of the church of the Immaculate Conception*

On the 13th of September 1795 Msgr. Marcucci blessed the Immaculate Conception's Church, so that it could be a faith shelter for everyone during the Napoleonic invasion of Italy in 1996.

The French soldiers sacked Loreto's Sanctuary and profaned many churches.

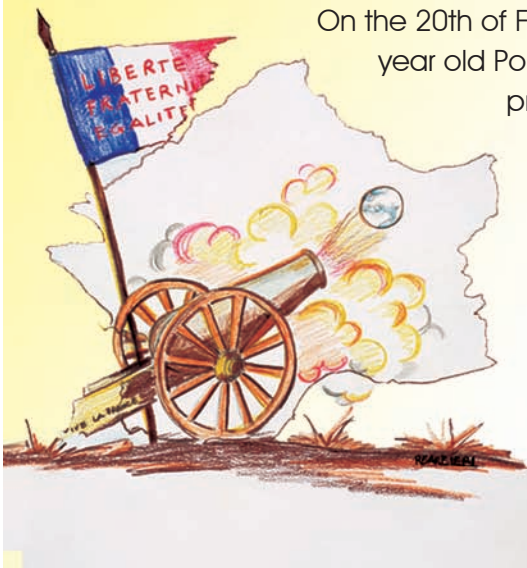
The Pope had to consign to Napoleon millions of shields and numerous works of art.

Even Rome was occupied and the Vatican's art treasures plundered.

On the 20th of February 1798, the 82-year old Pope Pio VI, was made prisoner in Italy and

then locked up in the fortress of Valence in France.

There he passed away on the 29th of August 1799, worn out by the physical and moral sufferings.



On Easter 1797,s  
Francesco Antonio went  
back to his diocese to  
celebrate with his  
faithful the joy of Jesus'  
Resurrection.  
This was his last time to  
be with them.



On the 29th of April he  
suffered another  
paralytic attack that affected his speech.  
In spite of it his mental faculty remained sharp.  
It was a big challenge through which the Lord wanted  
to refine him as gold in the furnace.  
He was taken back to Ascoli Piceno at once,  
where far a year and a half, he bore his painful  
sickness with some improvements in between.  
On fair days he would ask to go out to some  
church in the city to pray, preferably into the  
Cathedral's crypt and on Saturdays into  
St. Augustine's, were he paused before  
Our Lady of Peace to pray the rosary.



## *The holy death*

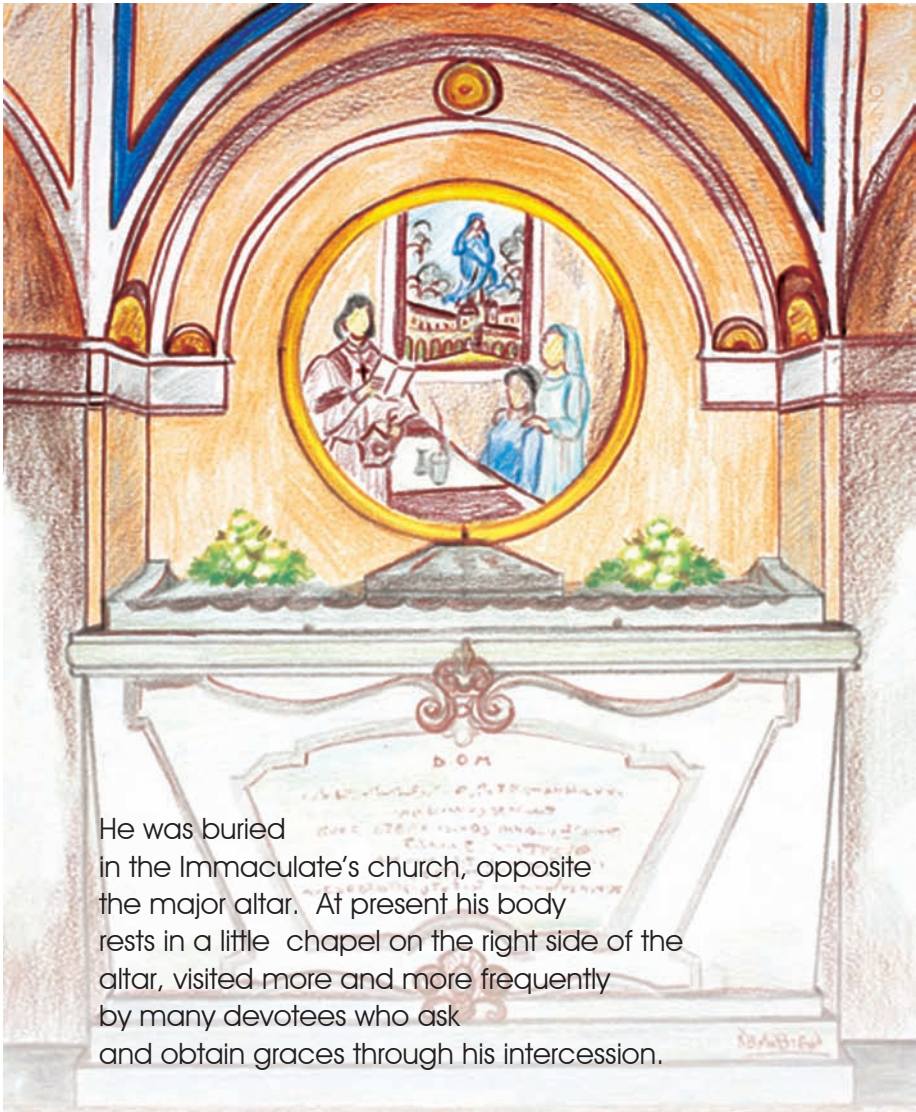
He accepted his immobility and his frequent pains as gifts from Heaven, with the serenity that distinguished him.

On the 10th of July, he was struck by a very high fever. Conscious that death was almost near, he wished to have beside him his dear sisters. He blessed them, thinking also of those who would follow and asked for their prayers.

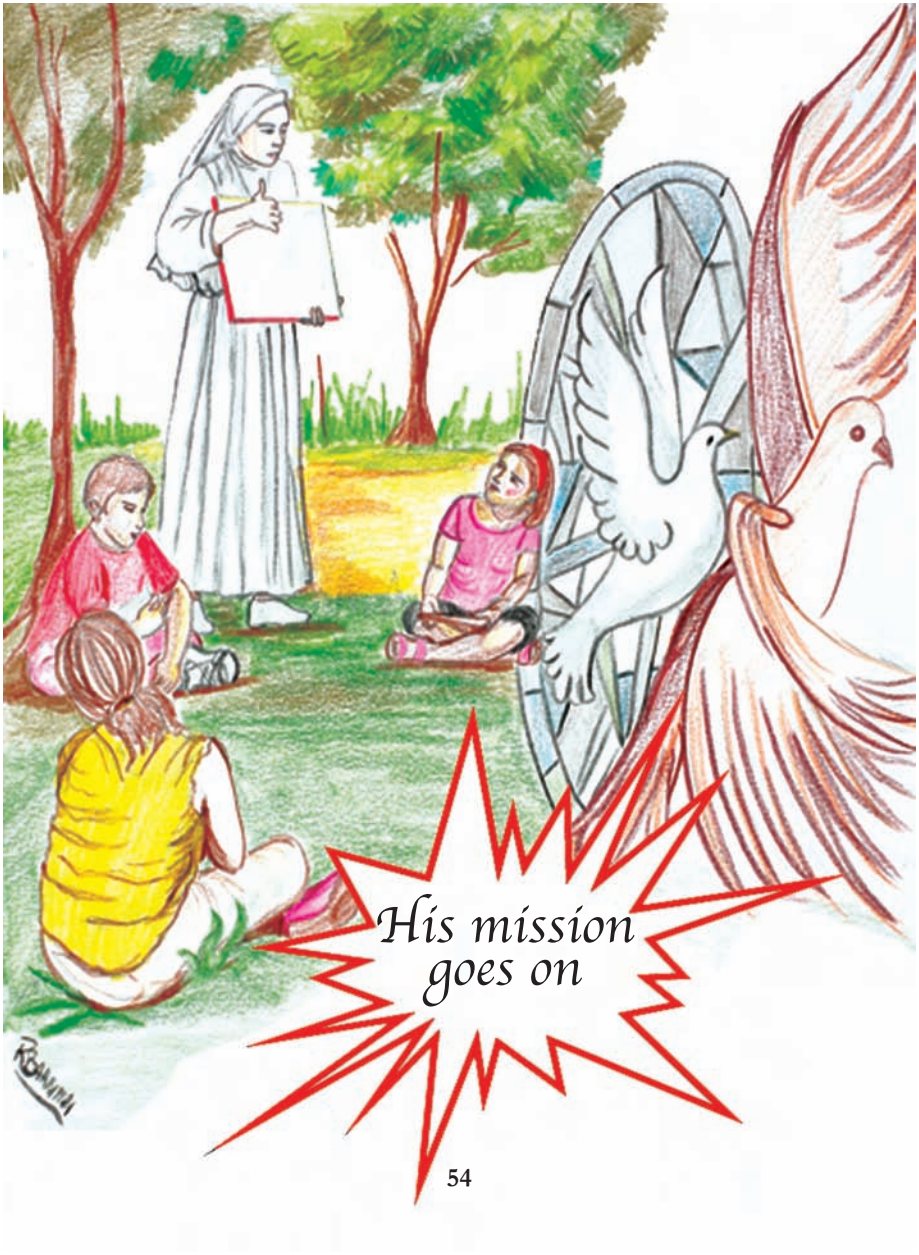
On a Thursday, on the 12th of July 1798 at 6 o' clock in the morning his beautiful soul ascended towards God.

The news about his death spread and grieved everyone, especially the city's poor whom he had often helped.

The funeral was held according to the practice of the poor, as he had asked for.



He was buried in the Immaculate's church, opposite the major altar. At present his body rests in a little chapel on the right side of the altar, visited more and more frequently by many devotees who ask and obtain graces through his intercession.



His mission  
goes on

Msgr. Francesco Antonio Marcucci's life has been a fertile field where Jesus' word sprouted and bore much fruit, the kind that lasts in time.

The Congregation founded by him has spread in Italy and in the world; Brazil, Philippines, Madagascar and keeps on educating thousands of children, youngsters and families towards the Gospel, culture and life.







Among them, the most important task is reserved to educating the woman, who especially in our times play a big role in the society and in the Church. All of these, are proofs of the grace which has always been guiding him and of the confidence which he has placed in Mary, Mother of the new humanity.





# *Your contribution*

After reading about the life  
of Francesco Antonio Marcucci,

- What do you feel?
- What has struck you most about his life?
- Which aspect would you like to have a better knowledge of?
- What questions have been raised in your mind?

Your reflection is important so that  
other people can have a better  
understanding of the life of  
Msgr. Francesco Antonio Marcucci.  
Above all you, can be included  
as one of his friends.

Be a good friend of Francesca Antonio Marccuci!

## *Student's prayer*

Francesco Antonio Marcucci,  
You were a model student in your time.  
You knew the art of learning,  
You considered culture as the  
most effective tool to be free  
and to renew society.  
For this reason you devoted yourself  
to teaching all kinds of people,  
especially the poorest and weakest  
and you used all of your  
resources to institute a girls' school  
that still exists today.  
Help me to use the talents that God  
has given me for the good of humanity.  
Support me when tired and  
inattentive; teach me to deal  
with my companions,  
to respect them and help them;  
teach me to sympathize with them,  
to feel their difficulties and their  
conquests as mine.



Thank you for teaching  
me to live each day with  
courage and joy,  
showing me  
the Holy Mother,  
as my protectress  
who keeps  
me near to Jesus.



## *Prayer to obtain from God, Francesco Antonio Marcucci's glorification*

Most Holy Trinity, you who, from the school of the Immaculate Virgin, have formed your humble Servant, Francesco Antonio Marcucci, making of him a model of total availability and ardent charity in the loving service of others, grant that he may shine in the church and in the world as a sign of your holiness, and trustful of your mercy, I ask through his intercession and for your glory the grace... (State your petition).

Immaculate Mother of the Lord, ardently loved by the Servant of God, comfort the Pastors of the Church, the consecrated persons, the families, the educators, the youth and all those who search for your Son with sincere hearts.  
Amen!

With ecclesiastical approval, March 2003

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# Ascoli Piceno

**Ascoli Piceno** is a town in the **Marche** region, **Italy**, capital of the province of the same name. Its population is 51,630 inhabitants. (ISTAT, 01.2008).

Ascoli was founded by an Italic population (**Piceni**) several centuries before Rome's founding on the important Via Salaria (Salaria Road) which connected Latium with the salt production area on the Adriatic coast. In 268 BC it became a *civitas foederata*, with nominal Independence from Rome. In 91 BC, together with other cities in central Italy, it revolted against Rome, but in 89 BC was reconquered and destroyed by Pompeius Strabo. Its inhabitants acquired Roman citizenship, following the developments and the eventual fall of the Roman Empire.



During the Middle Ages it was ravaged by the Ostrogoths and then by the Lombards of King Faroald (578). After nearly two centuries as part of the Lombard Duchy of Spoleto (593-789), Ascoli was ruled by the Franks through their vicars, but ultimately it was the Roman Catholic Church Bishops to gain influence and power inside the city.

In 1189 a free republican municipality was established but internal strife led dramatically to the demise of civic values and freedom and to unfortunate ventures against neighboring enemies. This uncertain situation opened the path to foreign dictatorships, like those of Galeotto Malatesta (14th century), initially called as a mercenary (*condottiero*) in the war against Fermo, and Francesco Sforza.

The latter was ousted in 1482, but Ascoli was compelled to submit again to the Papal suzerainty. In 1860 it was annexed together with Marche and Umbria in the Kingdom of Italy.

The central historical part of the city is built in marble called travertino, a grey-hued stone extracted from the surrounding mountains. Its central Renaissance square, Piazza del Popolo ("Square of the People") is considered one of the most beautiful in Italy. According to traditional accounts, Ascoli Piceno was home to more than two hundred towers in the Middle Ages: today some fifty can still be seen.

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