THE APPEALS OF OUR LADY

APPARITIONS AND MARIAN SHRINES IN THE WORLD

The Holy House of Nazareth at LORETO

ITALY, 1310 and other relics

"**The Holy House of Loreto is the first Shrine of international importance dedicated to the Virgin and true Marian heart of Christianity"** (John Paul II). The shrine of Loreto in fact preserves the Nazareth house of the Virgin Mary, according to an ancient tradition today proven by historical and archeological research. The earthly dwelling of Mary in Nazareth was composed by two parts: by a grotto dug into the rock, still venerated in the Basilica of the Annunciation in Nazareth, and by a stone room in front of it, made up of three stone walls positioned to enclose the grotto. According to tradition, in 1291, when the crusaders were definitively expelled from Palestine, the brick walls of the house of Our Lady were transported "through angelic ministry", first to Illyria (at Trsat, in present Croatia) and then to the territory of Loreto (December 10, 1294). Today, based on new documented information, the results of archeological excavations in Nazareth and in the subsoil of the Holy House (1962-1965) and from philological and iconographic studies, the hypothesis according to which the stones of the Holy House have been transported to Loreto on a ship by the initiative of the noble Angeli family that ruled on the Epirus, is confirmed forever more. In fact, a recently discovered document of September 1294, testifies that Niceforo Angeli, despot of Epirus, in giving his own daughter Ithamar in marriage to Philip of Taranto, fourth born of Charles II of Anjou, King of Naples, passed to him a series of dowry goods, among them appear with great prominence: "The holy stones carried away from the House of Our Lady, the Virgin Mother of God". Embedded among the stones of the Holy House were found five red cloth crosses of crusaders, or more likely, of knights of a military order who in the Middle Ages were defending the holy places and the relics. There were also found some remains of an ostrich egg, which immediately recalls Palestine and a symbolism referring to the mystery of the Incarnation. Moreover the Holy House, due to its structure and its stone material not available in the area, is an artifact foreign to the culture and to the construction styles of the Marche region. On the other hand the technical comparisons of the Holy House with the Grotto of Nazareth have highlighted the coexistence and the continuity of the two parts. Of great importance in confirming the tradition is a recent study about the way in which stones are processed, namely according to the procedure of the Nabateans, common in Galilee at the time of Jesus. Of great interest are also the numerous graffiti engraved on the stones of the Holy House, judged by the experts as being of definite Judeo-Christian origin and very similar to those encountered in Nazareth. The Holy House, in its original nucleus is composed just by three walls because the eastern wall, where the altar is located, was open towards the Grotto. The three original walls - without their own foundations and standing on an ancient road - rise from the ground to only three meters. The material above them, composed of locals bricks, has been added later, including the vault (1536) to render the environment more suitable for veneration. The marble covering, surrounding the walls of the Holy House, was requested by Julius II and built with the design of Bramante (1507) and other renowned artists of the Italian Renaissance. The statue of the Virgin with the Baby, in wood of Lebanese cedar, replaces the one of the XIV century, destroyed by a fire in 1921. Famous artists continued through the centuries to embellish the Shrine whose fame has rapidly spread in the whole world becoming a privileged destination for millions of pilgrims. The distinguished relic of the Holy House of Mary is an occasion and invitation for the pilgrim to meditate the great theological and spiritual messages linked to the mystery of the Incarnation and to the message of Salvation. Of the three original walls, the lower sections, to almost three meters in height, are composed mostly of stone rows, principally sandstone retraceable to Nazareth, and the upper sections added subsequently, and thus spurious, are in local bricks, the only building materials used in the area.

Numerous Popes have gone on pilgrimage to Loreto and their devotion has always been strong; Popes Pius II and Paul II turned to the Virgin to heal miraculously from their serious illnesses; Pope Benedict XV (1914-1922) in consideration of the translation of her house, from Palestine to Loreto, proclaimed Our Lady of Loreto patron of aviators. Loreto is considered the Italian Lourdes and many pilgrimages of the sick are organized every year, with group ceremonies like those that occur at Lourdes.

The miracles that have taken place through the years are truly numerous, recognized and examined by the medical office of the Shrine. We recall the healing in 1986 of Gerry De Angelis, an 11 year-old of San Benedetto. Upon returning from a school trip, Gerry, already of poor health, contracted a severe pneumonia treated with an expectorant that provoked in him an anaphylactic shock. The young boy was hospitalized in coma at the Salesi Hospital of Ancona. His parents made the explicit request to the doctors to alert them when something bad had occurred, in which case they wanted to take him back home. A phone call arrived to them a few days later, in which the doctors told them to go immediately because there was nothing more to do for Gerry. It is Gerry's father himself to tell what happened: **"In proximity of Loreto it manifested like a force that guided me. I exited the highway and went to the Shrine. I knelt in front of the Virgin Mary and in my heart I heard a voice repeating to me that Gerry was healing. It was so convincing that it made me overcome the pain and the anguish of those moments. When I entered the hospital I saw that they were removing the machine from Gerry. Since half an hour, in fact, he had come out of the coma and was improving. The doctors had told us that only a miracle could have saved him."** While for Lorenzo Rossi, of 9 months, who was testified as dead in 1959: after being anointed with the oil of the lamp that burned in the Holy House, he had recovered rapidly. Finally an elderly woman healed from a miotic macular hole in the retina, who during prayer in front of the image of Our Lady of Loreto felt "healed". In fact she regained prefect sight (it must be noted that one does not heal from the pathologies to the retina because the retina does not regenerate).

Tempietto from that illustrates the transferal of the Holy House from Nazareth to Loreto

The Holy House with its marble covering. It protects the humble House of Nazareth. Requested by Julius II, it was designed and built by the great architect Donato Bramante

Interior of the Holy House of Loreto. The three walls that would be the original walls of the house where the Holy Family lived

Graffiti on the wall of the Holy House. Some stones appear to be externally decorated with a technique that recalls the one of the Nabateans, widespread in Palestine and in Galilee back to the time of Jesus. Around sixty graffiti were identified, many of them judged by the experts as attributable to the Judeo-Christian ones of ancient time, existing in the Holy Land, including Nazareth. The upper sections of the walls, of lesser historical and devotional value, were covered in the XIV century by frescoes, while the lower stone sections were left bare, exposed to the veneration of the faithful

Paintings that depict the miracle in which the Holy House where the Holy Family lived was transported by the Angels to Loreto

John Paul II, referring to the Holy House of Loreto, was able to say: "The one of Loreto is a remarkable Shrine. In it is manifest the thirty year experience of sharing that Jesus did with Mary and Joseph. Through this human and divine mystery, in the house of Nazareth it is like written the story of all humanity, since each person is connected to a 'house', where he is born, works, rests, meets others and the story of every person is marked in a particular way by a house: the house of his infancy, of his first steps in life. And it is eloquent and important for everyone that this man unique and extraordinary, Who is the only begotten Son of God, had also wanted to connect his story to a house, that of Nazareth, which according to the Gospel account, housed Jesus of Nazareth over the entire period of his infancy, adolescence and youth, namely of his mysterious human maturation... The house of the Son of Man is therefore the universal house of all the adoptive children of God. The story of every human being, in a certain sense, passes through this house..."

Marble covering of the Holy House. Detail of the Annunciation, work by Sansovino

Our Lady of Loreto, also called the Loretan Virgin, is the icon venerated in the Holy House. It is a Black Madonna: her particularity is the dark face, common to the most ancient icons, often due to the smoke of the oil lamps and the candles. The original statue, dating from the XIV Century, was destroyed in a fire in 1921: the present one dates from 1922, work by Leopoldo Celoni, and it is of Lebanese cedar wood. The devotion of the Black Madonna is replicated in many other shrines in Italy and other countries

Ephesus, Turkey. The house where the Virgin Mary and Saint John the Apostle lived according to tradition

Aerial view of the large Basilica

Façade of the Basilica

Every year, on the occasion of the Feast of the Assumption the Conventual Friars of the Basilica of Saint Francis in Assisi display the relic of a part of a veil that according to tradition belongs to Our Lady

The grotto of the milk in Bethlehem, where is kept the stone on which, according to tradition, some drops of milk fell while Our Lady was nursing Baby Jesus

The crossing of the Po River is often the subject of votive offerings. This is particularly significant because it concerns Gio Pietro Ala who envisioned the Shrine of Santi Abbondio. The tablet, partially repainted in the XVIII Century is about a grace received on the way back from Loreto, "on the day May 19, 1628". At its center, in the Po River, whirling with waters, a barge transports a carriage with two horses and two confirmes, four boatmen and three passengers who invoke the aid of Heaven. On the left, another small boat and in the background the city of Cremona with a pleasant green on the right

Votive offering, a tempera on wood of 1625. The writing at the bottom says: **"Because sailing about half-way, we were almost lost by a violent storm, thirteen people, considered by him as friends, from whom he received eleven wounds including some mortal ones and he is healed, commending himself to this Blessed Virgin and often using the oil of her lamp. On the day November 10, 1625"**

Another beautiful votive offering. It is from the first half of the XVIII Century. The tempera on wood illustrates the battle against the flood of the overflowing Po River that is glimpsed behind the trees

Votive offerings

Votive offerings of healed children

The sacred relic of the Blessed Mother's structure (hole or mark), known as the Holy Belt (Holy Cincture), is in the cupola of the Bourse of Prato, in Italy

Among the sacred relics conserved in the Cathedral of Aachen (Germany), is the dress that clothed the Mother of God on the night in which she goes birth to Jesus, the "Savior of Mankind" —yesterday, today, and forever

In Ivorra, Spain, in the same Monastery in which is preserved the sacred relic of the Eucharistic Miracle of the Corporal (altar cloth stained with Blood, is also conserved a strand of hair of the Virgin Mary, according to tradition

Since 1473, the Wedding Ring of the Virgin Mary is located in Perugia. According to tradition, the Virgin had given it to the apostle John before dying. Then we don't know how it arrived into the hands of a merchant of Jerusalem who sold it to a jeweler of Chiusi

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