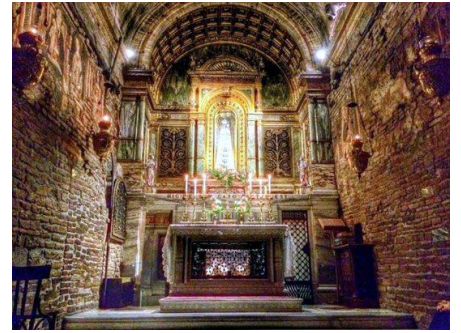


Marian Pilgrimage: Day Five: Monday 11 May 2020

The Shrine of Our Lady of Loreto, Italy



Basilica della Santa Casa (Basilica of the Holy House) is a shrine of Marian pilgrimage in Loreto, Italy. The Basilica is known for enshrining the house in which the Blessed Virgin Mary might have lived.

A pious legend claims that the same house was flown by angelic beings from Nazareth to Tersatto (Trsat in Croatia), then to Recanati, before arriving at the current site.*[Probably the Angeli Family- see below].*

The splendid City of Loreto, in the countryside of the Marches Region, owes its fame to the Basilica where the **Santa Casa della Vergine Maria (Shrine of the Holy House of the Virgin Mary)** is preserved and venerated. It is a holy place defined by **Pope John Paul II** as **“the true Marian heart of Christianity.”** The sanctuary has been for many centuries one of the most important Catholic **Shrines of Our Lady.**

According to ancient tradition, and today substantiated by historical and archaeological research, the Santa Casa is the house from Nazareth where the Virgin Mary was born, educated, and where she received the Annunciation, in the angelic salutation from Gabriel.

It is conjectured that the house was composed of one room in masonry, with three walls in stone placed so as to enclose a rock cavern. This cavern is worshipped by pilgrims who flock to **Nazareth in the Holy Land**, that is to the **Basilica of the Annunciation**, while the three stone walls, according to the narrative, were brought to Italy (first passing through Illyria) by crusaders expelled from Palestine in 1291. The walls arrived in Loreto in 1294. Documents and archaeological excavations reinforce the hypothesis that the walls of the Santa Casa were transported to Loreto by ship, an initiative undertaken by the **Angeli Family**, nobles who ruled over Epirus at the time.

One document dating back to 1294 (recently discovered), testifies that Niceforo Angeli, despot of Epirus, in offering his daughter Ithamar's hand in marriage to Philip of Taranto (son of the King of Naples, Charles II of Anjou), gave the Prince a dowry that included such treasures as the "*holy stones taken from the Home of our Lady the Virgin Mother of God.*"

In order to protect these humble stone walls, for the ever-larger numbers of pilgrims visiting to see these sacred relics, construction work on the Sanctuary of Loreto was begun in the mid-15th Century.

Some of the most prized works here are the marble panelling of the Santa Casa's walls, commissioned by Pope Julius II and constructed on the design of Donato Bramante [1507]. It is considered one of the greatest sculptural masterpieces from the Renaissance by one of its leading architects [see also St Peter's, Rome and the Duomo in Milan].

Great artists have adorned the Sanctuary through the centuries.

As the works drew to their conclusion **Carlo Maderno** created the fountain in the Piazza del Santuario [1600], while the magnificent bell tower on the Basilica's left side is attributed to **Luigi Vanvitelli** [1700].

The entire City of Loreto is constructed on a hill that offers a spectacular panoramic view extending to both the sea near Monte Conero and the Umbro-Marches with the Apennine Mountain chain.

Today Loreto welcomes thousands of tourists – not just Catholics – for the Santa Casa is important not only an object of pilgrim devotion, but the site as a whole represents an authentic **sacred art** anthology that includes architecture, sculpture, and paintings by some of the most celebrated names in art history.

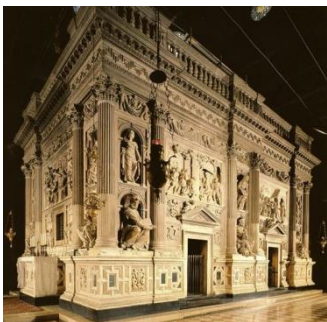
The beautiful, charming borgo [burgh] that developed around the Basilica offers remarkably evocative vistas, externally and internally, e.g. the **Museum-Painting Gallery in Piazza del Santuario** featuring canvases by the masterful Venetian painter Lorenzo Lotto.

Finally, worth noting is the phenomenon, **The Macerata-Loreto Pilgrimage**. This began in 1978 (when John Paul II became Pope): on this route thousands of

pilgrims travel on foot every year, from Macerata to the Loreto Sanctuary. Approximately half of the pilgrims are from the Region of The Marches itself – the rest arrive in Macerata from all over Italy, and various parts of Europe (particularly Belgium, Spain, Portugal, the republics of the former Yugoslavia, as well as Albania, Switzerland, and Germany).

Approval for the tradition of pilgrimages has been reiterated by many different popes from Julius II in 1511 to the present day. It has been ratified by the deep veneration paid to the shrine by such holy men as St. Charles Borromeo, St. Francis de Sales, St. Ignatius Loyola, St. Alphonsus Liguori, and many other servants of God.

Pope Benedict XV designated the Blessed Virgin Mary under the title of Our Lady of Loreto to be Patroness of air passengers and auspicious travel on 24 March 1920. Piety and humour, perhaps?



Many ask why the features of Our Lady of Loreto are black. The reason would appear to be that the **Our Lady Of Loreto** statue being coloured **black** accords with the religious tradition derived from the Song of Songs: ***The Bride Confesses Her Love in the Song of Solomon***

Take me away with you-let us hurry! May the king bring me to his chambers. We will rejoice and delight in you; we will praise your love more than wine. It is only right that they adore you. ***I am dark yet lovely, O daughters of Jerusalem, like the tents of Kedar,*** like the curtains of Solomon. Do not stare because I am dark, for the sun has gazed upon me.

On the Contemporary Significance of this Devotion, Pope Francis in his decree points out that the Basilica of the Holy House recalls the mystery of the Incarnation. The Holy Father prompts all those who visit the Holy House to consider when in the fullness of time, when God sent his Son, born of a woman' both the words of the angel in the Gospel, and the words of the Virgin who answered the divine call. Overshadowed by the Holy Spirit, the humble servant of the Lord, Mary herself, has become the house of divinity, the most pure image of the holy Church.

The Sanctuary at Loreto, has been able over time, to illustrate in an excellent way, not less than Nazareth in the Holy Land, the evangelical virtues of the Holy Family.

Joseph and Mary, from Nazareth to Bethlehem, then with the baby Jesus as a family they journey to Jerusalem, then to Egypt and in time back to Nazareth. This is a family united in faith, hope and love, who were acquainted with grief and fear, persecution, homelessness. Then a period of suspicions and the perplexing mysteries of unfolding faith. Yet, Joseph, Mary and Jesus are a family to whom we may turn in prayer for the needs of our world.

In "The Holy House of Loreto", Joan Lewis, a Rome based journalist, wrote: "These hallowed walls seem like umbilical cords to our past. Walls which, if they

could talk, would let us hear Mary at prayer, Joseph telling Mary about his work day, Jesus as he cries, talks or walks for the first time, the Holy Family around a table as they eat their nightly meal, perhaps with a guest. This was a family's home – and so you wonder: Were there both tears and laughter? Hot, dusty days? Cold, winter nights? Sleepless nights? Did the Holy Family ever wonder where their next meal would come from? What we know for certain is that this was a home filled with love”.

At the Holy House we pray that God-in-Christ is reconciling the world to himself amidst the travails of the natural world, the maladies of existence and the selfish wilfulness of mankind.

In these prayers we seek the continuing assistance of Our Lady, of Loreto, Mother of Mercies, and Help of Christians.

As the inscription on the Holy House reminds us, *Hic Verbum caro factum est*, this building is honoured by Christians as the real home at Nazareth in which the Holy Family lived, and the Word became incarnate.

An inscription in stone: "Christian pilgrim, you have before your eyes the Holy House of Loreto, venerable throughout the world on account of the Divine mysteries accomplished in it, and the glorious miracles herein wrought. It is here that most holy Mary, Mother of God, was born, here that she was saluted by the Angel, here that the eternal Word of God was made Flesh”.

Pope John Paul once said that “the Holy House of Loreto is not an ‘icon’ of abstract truth, but an event and a mystery: the Incarnation of the Word. It is with deep emotion that, when entering the much revered chapel, one reads the words above the altar: **‘hic verbum caro factum est’ – here the Word was made flesh’.**”

**Queen of heaven, rejoice, alleluia.
The Son you merited to bear, alleluia,
Has risen as he said, alleluia.
ray to God for us, alleluia**

