CONTENTS

3 The “little furrows” of the Holy House - by Fr. Giuseppe Santarelli
4 Elisha, the widow and the jug of oil - by Msgr. Giovanni Tonucci
5 Letters to “The Shrine of the Holy House”
6 “The door of faith is always open for us” - by Brother Stefano Vita
7 H as in Humility - by Sr. Maria Elisabetta Patrizi
8 St. Joseph in focus - Husband of Mary and Guardian of Jesus - by Brother John M. Samaha, S.M.
11 Saint Luigi Guanella (1842-1915) - by Fr. Marcello Montanari
15 Youth and Europe. What can the new generations do? - by Msgr. Aldo Giordano
16 Spiritual Pilgrimage - 19 European Youth
17 To be volunteers: a daily way of life!
18 Witness of Sr. Teresa, who has arrived at the Center
19 “The Shrine of the Holy House” interviews Olivier Pieczonka - by Vito Punzi
20 The «School of the virgins» - by Fr. Giuseppe Santarelli
22 Great success of the display “Rome at the time of Caravaggio”
23 Books in foreign languages about the Sanctuary of Loreto
25 Loreto in the world
27 Cardinal Koch visits Loreto
28 Russian pilgrimage from Siberia
29 A delegation of the Palestinian Police in Loreto
30 Visit of a minister of the United Arab Emirates
A recent letter dated last August 15th, addressed to the rectors of Shrines from the Congregation of Clergy, and signed by the respective Prefect, Cardinal Mauro Piacenza, gives us new considerations, precise indications and illuminating ideas on the level of pastoral care in Shrines. Among other things one reads: « Popular devotion is of great importance for faith, culture and the Christian identity of many people ».

The expressions of popular devotions in the sanctuary of Loreto are many and antique and they were enumerated in some books, like the Italian one entitled Tradizioni e leggende lauretane, already in its third edition. Among the various gestures, one merits our attention, for the significance and the widespread knowledge of it: the “trip” on their knees made by the pilgrims around the marble encasement on the step that is there. It is essentially a penitential act. The first news about this singular popular devotion date back to the XVI century. Riera, a renowned historian of the Lauretan Shrine, writes that he saw in 1559 a group of pilgrims coming from Croatia « go around the Holy House on their knees » and repeating, through their tears: « Return, return to Fiume, oh Mary! ».

The gesture made an impression also on Johann Gasper Goethe, father of the celebrity Wolfang, who emphasizes how women, elderly people and youth would go around on their knees, reciting the rosary or other prayers. Madame de Stäel, in the romance Corinne, bringing the protagonist to Loreto, writes: « all around the chapel the pavement was consumed by pilgrims who went around it on their knees ». And she imagines that Corinne too got on her knees, intimately moved by this sight, so much to arouse wonder in her skeptical company. Even illustrious people did this devout practice. One can read that Maria Casimira, queen of Poland, a pilgrim in Loreto in 1689, having set aside the royal garments, « did not blush » to do the tour around the Holy House on her knees.

This pious devotion was approved and supported by the ecclesiastical authorities. According to data in the archives, Clement XIII, on October 1, 1766, accorded an indulgence of seven years and (seven times forty days) quarantine « to those who go around on their knees, on the exterior step, around the Holy House ».

The pilgrims did and still do this type of devout practice for two reasons: either as an expression of their own gratitude towards the Virgin of Loreto following the imploration of a grace that was obtained, or in order to intercede from her a special protection in circumstances of physical or moral difficulties. One can read about graces that have been received during this penitential act. An elderly person from San Marino testifies, many years ago, to have been cured immediately from a large hernia at the end of the third go around.

Nowadays the trip around the stair of the marble encasement on ones knees is done frequently and with intense devotion by the groups of orthodox pilgrims, originating mostly from Russia. Men and women, with candid veils covering their faces, advance slowly and with difficulty on their knees, curved over and in deep prayer. Even the most distracted visitor, seeing this, remains in admiration and, often, deeply touched.

What is certain is that these little parallel furrows carved in marble, « in the manner of a railway » – as Antonio Stoppiani writes in the book Il Bel Paese – give witness to the centennial tradition of this unique and moving popular religiosity.
Elijah, the courageous prophet who had fought against the wrongdoings of the King Ahab and his wife Jezebel, one day was taken up into heaven in a flaming chariot. Elisha, his disciple, continued his work, in calling the people of Israel back to fidelity in living God’s laws. The life of Elisha has many beautiful episodes scattered throughout it, which show the special assistance that the Lord has always accorded to him, to support him in his difficult mission.

He too had an occasion with a widow, who, having lost her husband, had fallen into misery (2 Kings 4:1-7). One of his creditors, having seen that she did not have the money to pay his debt, was going to take her two sons as slaves, so that they, with their service, would have evened out the payments. The woman, in her desperation, went to the prophet who, having known her dead husband, was willing to give his help. During those times, according to the law of Moses, a Hebrew could not be reduced to slavery for ever. In a case as this, the two young men would have had to serve their new master for the number of years that separated that year from the jubilee year, which was proclaimed every seven years. It was therefore a temporary condition, but it would have nevertheless ruined the life of the woman, leaving her by herself, and also that of her sons, who would have lost years of their existence doing humble and humiliating services.

Even though this episode has some similar aspects as the one of Elijah and the widow of Zarephath, the differences are much more evident. In this episode, Elisha asks the woman if she has something in her house. The answer is discouraging: “This servant of yours has nothing in the house but a jug of oil”. But even that small amount of oil can give the Lord the possibility to act, with his mercy. In the episode of Elijah, the faith of the widow was placed to the test with a specific request: first give me everything, then you will receive for yourself. Here instead the intervention of the prophet is less demanding: it is only necessary to try and do what he says, following word for word his suggestion.

Elisha says to the woman: “Go out and borrow vessels from all your neighbors - as many empty vessels as you can. Then come back and close the door on yourself and your children; pour the oil into all the vessels, and as each
is filled, set it aside.” Behold therefore the trial of faith: he asks only to accomplish an act that has as its only risk, if it had not worked, that she may have been ridiculed by her neighbors, who had been asked for the vessels for no reason.

The task was accomplished secretly, and behold that, while the woman poured the oil from the one jug, the vessels were filled one by one and the flow of oil never quit. At last all of the vessels that had been borrowed were full. The woman asked for more, but her sons had to tell her that there were no more. Only then did the oil stop flowing from the jug. Finally the poor little family had resolved their situation: they possessed enough oil to sell it, and with the proceeds they had enough to pay the debts and then live tranquilly with the rest.

The lesson that comes from this episode is very effective. We have a desperate situation, that, through the mediation of the prophet Elisha, requests a special intervention of the Providence of God. The prophet, who always acts listening to what the Spirit of God inspires him to do, suggests a simple way to come out of the difficult situation of the widow. But this simple way – the action of pouring oil from one recipient to the other – teaches us something very useful.

Let us look at the scene: the sons pass the vessels and the woman pours the oil; at the end the woman asks for more vessels, but there were no more, and only then was the abundance of oil interrupted. Which means, very clearly, that it is not Providence that places a limit on its intervention, rather it is our availability that places limits on the intervention of Providence. If there had been other vessels, the oil would have continued to come forth from the jug. The miracle of Providence was interrupted because the human means, that were necessary to collaborate with Providence, were now finished.

Therefore this widow, of whom we do not know neither her name nor her origin, offers us a wonderful lesson of trust in Providence, that has no other limits than those which we place on it.

Protected during a difficult pregnancy

We continue to receive in our office many witnesses from married women who, after years of waiting and after having worn the blue ribbon – devotion spread by the Passionist nuns of Loreto and promulgated by the Universal Congregation – have obtained through the intercession of Our Lady of Loreto a child. Often the parents, after some time has passed from the birth, come to Loreto bringing their children to the Holy House and placing them under the protection of Our Lady. The ribbon sometimes is worn also by the wives who have a difficult pregnancy and the Virgin of Loreto places over them as well her maternal intercession. This is what two of our readers from Istrana communicate to us.

Dear Universal Congregation of the Holy House,

We are a married couple with 37 years of matrimony behind us. Since our daughter Marianna had a very difficult pregnancy, with doubts, fears and many complications, last May we asked with great devotion to our Dear Virgin of Loreto Her protection over us and especially for our daughter Marianna during the pregnancy and delivery.

We turned to « The Virgin of waiting » and our daughter wore the blue ribbon of the Passionist nuns sent to us by your Congregation. On December 18, 2010 little Leonard came into the world and, thanks to the intercession of the Most Holy Virgin of Loreto, Marianna received the gift of becoming a mother. On Sunday, May 29, 2011 was celebrated the Baptism of our little one. We ask you with great devotion to enroll Leonard in the Universal Congregation of the Holy House, consecrating him to Our Lady.

P.G. and C.C. from Istrana (Treviso-Italy)
“On the other hand, we must not forget that in our cultural context, very many people, while not claiming to have the gift of faith, are nevertheless sincerely searching for the ultimate meaning and definitive truth of their lives and of the world. This search is an authentic “preamble” to the faith, because it guides people onto the path that leads to the mystery of God. Human reason, in fact, bears within itself a demand for “what is perennially valid and lasting”. This demand constitutes a permanent summons, indelibly written into the human heart, to set out to find the One whom we would not be seeking had he not already set out to meet us. To this encounter, faith invites us and it opens us in fullness.”

These words come from the Motu Proprio Porta fidei (n. 10), by which Benedict XVI has indicted the Year of Faith. In order to prepare ourselves for this important event, in these months that separate us from its official beginning, that will be on October 11, 2012, we will share some reflections about the relationship between faith and reason, having as “Teacher” and companion along this path the Virgin Mary.

Faith and reason: a decisive relationship

The reflection on the relationship between faith and reason, as John Paul II reminded us in his Encyclical Letter Fides et ratio and more recently, with the same emphasis, Pope Benedict XVI, is decisive because mankind can find the answer to the great questions of life: why do I exist, what is the sense of my life, who am I, where do I come from, where am I going.

The warning “Know thyself”, even before being carved on the crossbeam of the temple in Delphi, was carved in the heart of man. It is a warning that necessitates a true response free from compromises. Only in this manner mankind is able to be a true man and promoter of humanity. Therefore, actualizing the reciprocity and complementary aspects between faith and reason, the ecclesial community will be able to fully live the diakonia to Truth, that is Jesus of Nazareth; Truth in which finds light the mystery of mankind. “Only in the mystery of the Incarnate Word – affirms indeed Gaudium et spes at n. 22 - does the mystery of man take on light”. Loreto has the extraordinary gift to withhold, in its international pontifical Sanctuary of the Holy House, the three walls of the House of Mary, that the holy monks of early Christianity would often call with the title of “intellectual table of faith”. In Her they saw the coherent image of true philosophy and were convinced of having to philosophy in Mary. During the event of the Annunciation, Mary indeed managed to unite faith and reason. She believed in the words of the angel and this act of faith illuminated her reason, which in turn helped her to believe even more profoundly and radically in God, who called her with a project of extraordinary love: to become the Mother of the Savior. Mary, therefore, pronouncing her “Here I am” to the plan of
God, did not lose anything of her true humanity and liberty, rather this brought them to their maximum realization. In the same way reason, while welcoming the interpellation that comes from the Gospel, does not lose its autonomy, rather it discovers through this to be encouraged to reach the highest realization. The episode of the Annunciation, that took place amidst the three walls of the House of Mary, then becomes for us the school in order to learn how to unite faith and reason, in a perspective of reciprocity and complimentarity. It is a decisive journey of discovering true humanity and reaching its full realization.

### Mary: a reassuring word for contemporary man

On 2 February 1974, Pope Paul VI addressed to the whole Catholic Church the Apostolic Exhortation *Marialis cultus*. At n. 57 the Pope expresses some concepts of great theological-anthropological relevance, that indicate the Virgin of Nazareth as a decisive light for the great questions of mankind. He states: “Mary offers a calm vision and a reassuring word to modern man, torn as he often is between anguish and hope, defeated by the sense of his own limitations and assailed by limitless aspirations, troubled in his mind and divided in his heart, uncertain before the riddle of death, oppressed by loneliness while yearning for fellowship, a prey to boredom and disgust. She shows forth the victory of hope over anguish, of fellowship over solitude, of peace over anxiety, of joy and beauty over boredom and disgust, of eternal visions over earthly ones, of life over death.”

With these words Pope Montini tells us that Mary is the revelation of true humanity, humanity that has reached fulfillment, in that she found in the Word of God the answer to the great existential questions of mankind.

We ask ourselves a question: what brought the Mother of the Lord to become a “calm vision and reassuring word” for the supreme questions of man? The answer is found in Her “Here I am” that she said to the Angel Gabriel and which continued to resound with all of its freshness throughout her whole life, up to the tremendous mystery of the death on the Cross of her Son and then until her Assumption into Heaven in soul and body. The life of the Virgin was in fact a continuous “Annunciation”, in which she pronounced a “Yes” that was free, courageous and trusting in the will of God. In this “Yes” we can discover the secret of the fulfillment of her humanity, a secret that has its origin in the relationship between faith and reason, that she knew how to coherently live day after day.

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**Humility**: a word that is rather common but of difficult comprehension. It comes from “*humus*”, earth… but it has nothing to do with “depression” or feeling that we are low! And it isn’t even the low esteem of oneself. Rather, Humility is, in the first place, a human capacity, or natural virtue, that calls for much equilibrium, reasoning and truth… It is part of realism and modesty.

### HUMAN HUMILITY

It would suffice to reflect a little on one’s own finitude as a creature or on the natural limitedness in space and time, on one’s humble biological “beginning” and on one’s “end” when “sister death” will come, in order to avoid falling into an absurd sense of “omnipotence”! Yet? How many times we think and we plan “tomorrow” as if everything depended on us… vaunting an excessive sureness! « I will do… I will do… I will do!». I still remember that small white house on the curve of a hill close by Montiglio d’Asti in Italy: it was brand new but no one lived in it. Why? The owner died the evening before the inauguration. I remembered the parable of Jesus and the “foolish rich man” (Lk 12:16-21)... foolish not because he had built a house, but because of the “certitude”, or presumption, that he had, of living «for many more years» (Lk 12:19) and for having placed too much trust in the «many goods that he had at his disposition» (Lk 12:19). I didn’t judge that poor man of Montiglio, rather I learnt a lesson for myself... the Lord guides history.

Human humility must keep in mind that – besides the chronological and space-time limitations – there is also
the cultural one: I do not know everything and I can not know everything! I can only deceive myself thinking that I know everything... and the less I know the more I deceive myself... but this is ridiculous! Yet still, today, the illusion of all-knowledge is more widespread than ever before, nourished constantly by the electronic “subsidies” that should remain such: “subsidies” and not “substitutes” of my real person, splendid but limited, great but not omnipotent! And, above all, these subsidies must remain “at the service of” and not become the “owners”, capturing us, always more and more, in a pseudo-reality that is indefinite and very illusory.

HUMILITY IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

« Biblical humility » – especially in the Old Testament – « is first of all modesty as opposed to vanity. Without unreasonable pretexts, modesty does not trust in one’s own feelings (Prov 3:7) » (1). We can see this very well in the Psalms. For example, Psalm 131(130) recites: « LORD, my heart is not proud; (...) I do not busy myself with great matters (...) Rather, I have stilled my soul, like a weaned child to its mother » (Ps 131:1-2).

Yes, the person who is humble and a believer entrusts himself/herself to God and recognizes their own limits, one’s nature contaminated by sin (cf. Is 6:5) and knows well that only from God comes salvation.

The Psalms are overflowing with this humility that leads to docility, to trusting abandonment and total dependence on God, fruit of the free consignment of self to the Omnipotent and all Merciful (2).

With the prophet Sophonia there is “a step further” towards what will be the evangelical humility. In fact, in Sophonia, “poverty” and “humility” almost coincide, opening the path to the concept of “the poor in spirit” of the Beatitudes (Mt 5:3), where Jesus will reveal who are « those who find themselves in the best situation for receiving the kingdom of God » (3). Those, that is, who are preferred by God, because they trust completely in Him, they depend on Him and, therefore, they will never be deluded. They already have one of the necessary conditions for entering the kingdom of God, humility (4), and they are already the chosen ones by God. Among these will be prominent Myriam (= the Virgin Mary) at whose humility God will look upon with indescribable complacency, as Mary herself will sing in the “Magnificat” of Luke (Lk 1:46-55), especially in verse 48, where littleness, poverty and humility coincide.

Anyhow, it is certain, that for the post-exile prophets – for example Isaiah – the Almighty dwells « on high, and in holiness » and at the same time « with the crushed and dejected in spirit » to revive their spirits and to « revive the hearts of the crushed » (Is 57:15). This will be accomplished, to the letter, with the Incarnation of the Word... humble among the humble, « lying in a manger » (Lk 2:12)... derided while he dies on the cross (Lk 23:35-36), yet the giver of salvation and the true king of the Jews and of all Christians.

EVANGELICAL HUMILITY

The primary example of humility is Jesus, the Word, the second Person of the Most Holy Trinity, who became man, or “flesh”, while remaining God... who « made his dwelling among us » (Jn 1:14b)... And came not only in the “appearance”, but with the reality of our human nature, except for sin. It is good to mention that the word “flesh”, in the writings of John, indicates « the whole of the weak man that is destined to die » (5).

For about thirty-three years, Jesus lived in the ordinary daily life of Galilee, putative son of Joseph the carpenter and of Mary, even though He was completely «
full of grace and truth» (Jn 1:14). Filled, that is, with all of the qualities that God himself proclaimed to be his own in Exodus 34:6: mercy, rich in love and fidelity. He is a God who «continues his kindness for a thousand generations, forgiving wickedness and crime and sin» (Ex 34:7). This is completely manifest, or rather, even more, it has become tangible in Jesus, true God, who became man for our salvation.

In Jesus the omnipotence of God is placed primarily at the service of mercy. He dies for us, so that men and women may reach the fullness of “divinization” and be “Christ-like”, so that Christ may truly be the Firstborn among many brethren.

Made “like” Him, then also our humility will not be anymore—as it already should be—the fruit of reasoning, but rather of sincere and charitable “condescension”: a love that tends to “descend” to the level of whoever may be “less” than me. Love that is capable of “being close” and of “being a neighbor”, without experiencing an effort because the charity of Christ has formed us, now, to be truly sensitive to the limits and sufferings of our brothers and sisters. Thus, all the more that we exert ourselves in charitable humility, or in the humble charity, of the Son of man, all the more that capacity, constantly bestowed, of welcoming the gift of God, will grow in us, because from His fullness, «we have all received grace upon grace» (Jn 1:16). In Jesus himself we find true “condescension”, the capacity of being neighbor, or close (cf. Lk 10:34) to all mankind out of love, without ever intermitting “barriers”, or influences, of social-religious, racial or census prejudices.

And now, this humble condescension, is lived by the Lord in the sublime “abasement” of the Eucharist, and towards all brethren through our collaboration. We are called to be witnesses of his love and of his humility. Only in this way we can truly be brothers!

(This was the specific ideal of St. Francis of Assisi for himself and for his Friars “minor”).

**HUMILITY SUSTAINED BY TRUTH**

Humility is also essential for a relationship of truth between us and between us and God, who knows our hearts and often is sorrowful for «what is of human esteem» (Lk 16:15) but is only an illusion and contrary to his plan of love for humanity.

Therefore, it is necessary to remind ourselves often that even if we had done all of our duties towards God and towards our neighbor, we are always «useless servants» (cf. Lk, 17:21), because we have done all that was our duty… but none of us are “indispensable” in the service of God. Being that we are small creatures, it is all an honor for us and the occasion of gratitude if He calls us to serve Him directly or in our brothers! Even more, it is not rare that our actions have a value that we ourselves have not seen, but it is clear in God’s sight; therefore, at the final judgment, we will be surprised by the good effects that were enclosed therein and how He was “hidden” in all those who suffered, as well as the pilgrims and the poor that we sheltered and helped or for whom we interceded graces and mercy.

**A KEY FOR THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN**

There is no doubt: humility is the “card”, and today we could say the “pin code”, or the access key, to the kingdom of God. Do not exalt yourself! Indeed, Jesus, picking up in His arms some little children and blessing them, told us explicitly: «for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these» (Mk 10:14). He also admonished us: «If anyone wishes to be first, he shall be the last of all and the servant of all» (Mk 9:35), just like Him, «the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many» (Mt 20:28).

Yet Jesus, besides having indicated to us His own example, also revealed to us His intimate nature, or His interior depths, saying: «learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart» (Mt 11:29). By saying this, Jesus does not make reference only to his human nature but also to His divine nature, in the unity of His Person. In fact, already in the Old Testament this is evident, and it is often recalled by the prophets, that the «Lord is waiting to show you favor, and he rises to pity you; For the Lord is a God of justice» (Is 30:18). And here, the justice that is spoken about consists in using grace and mercy... Therefore, our strength (cf. Is 30:15) lies in trusting abandonment in God, in that abandonment to his heart that Jesus too asks us to have. Jesus, in fact, far from seeking for
His own glory, humbled Himself, He became a servant, He freely accepted to die on the cross for our salvation (cf. Mk 10:45)… and desires that we welcome Him with trust!

In Jesus, humility is the hinge, or the bridge, between « the divine power without which we would not exist and the divine charity without which we would be lost (Lk 19:10) »(n).

CONCLUSION

Evangelical humility, besides being the “key” of access to the kingdom of God, is necessary in order to live well the “new commandment”. Therefore it is necessary to walk the journey of the “new humility”, that of Jesus Christ, in order to fully live in charity and to share in the joy of heaven that is greater for « one sinner who repents than for ninety-nine righteous people » (Lk 15:7)... And Luke here seems to make an allusion to the “false just” who should recognize the need to convert themselves but, as they are not humble, they think they « have no need of repentance » (Lk 15:7)!

Notes

(b) This image / interior comportment will return, after almost three thousand years, in Saint Theresa of the Child Jesus. We mentioned this, talking about humility as a condition to reach Christian fullness, in the article last month (in the Italian magazine): T come Totalità, in “Il Messaggio della Santa Casa”, January 2012, n. 1, pp. 12ss.
(c) See for example, Psalms 25; 106; 130; 131.
(d) The BIBBIA-TOB, footnote “d”, p. 2189.
(e) Concerning humility as a condition for Beatitude confront here footnote 2 and the reference made therein.
(g) The BIBBIA-TOB, footnote “r”, p. 2419.
(j) This “justice” «... expresses contemporaneously the action of God as judge (cf. Ex 5:16) and his benevolence towards his people (cf. Hos 2:21; Psalms 36:6-7; 48:10-12, etc.) » (The BIBBIA-TOB, footnote “s”, p. 795).
(k) X. LÉON DUFOUR, o.c., col. 456.
How much do we know about and appreciate the man who was the husband of the Mother of Jesus and the guardian of our Redeemer? How do we honor him? St. Joseph is often overlooked. Scripture says little of him. We seem to give him scant attention.

Yet devotion to St. Joseph has deep roots in Christian tradition. Joseph is often the overlooked member of the Holy Family. Do you remember as children when we wrote “J.M.J.” at the top of our papers in Catholic school? We did that to remind ourselves to have the intention that Jesus, Mary, and Joseph had in life as we did our own work. We pictured the members of the Holy Family side by side.

**Husband of Mary**

Remember that Mary and Joseph are a couple. And Jesus is their child. They belong together. When separated, their significance in God’s plan of salvation is clouded, because their importance lies in their relationship to each other. While honoring the perpetual virginity of Mary, we cannot disregard Joseph’s privilege and happiness of being Mary’s husband. In past centuries many works of art depicted

Joseph as an old man. Most likely this was done to disallow any threat to Mary’s virginity. This tended to undervalue the loving relationship of Mary and Joseph as husband and wife. Despite the tendencies of her times, St. Teresa of Avila always insisted that Joseph was a young man when he married Mary. The Divine Liturgy reinforces this positive approach regarding Joseph: “With a husband’s love he cherished Mary, the Virgin Mother of God.”

Foster Father of Jesus

Since Joseph is the husband of Mary, he is also father to Jesus. We know that he was not the physical father of Jesus. But in the gospel account about Jesus being lost in the temple, Luke has Mary saying to Jesus: “Son, your father and I have been searching for you in sorrow.” And the Divine Liturgy testifies: “With fatherly care he watched over Jesus Christ your son, conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit.”

If one might think that Joseph’s fatherhood was not quite real or effective because he did not physically procreate Jesus, let that person speak with adoptive parents, especially those who have conceived a child of their own and adopted others. They will let you know how real Joseph’s fatherhood is.

Head of the Holy Family

Joseph played a very important role as Jesus “grew in wisdom, age, and grace before God and men.” In the Jewish tradition children were, until the age of five or so, in the special care and tutelage of their mothers. But beyond that age children came under the special guidance of their fathers. Joseph by duty and privilege was the rabbi of the Holy Family to teach Jesus the Jewish faith and practices. Joseph led his family in the worship of God in their home at Nazareth.

At meal times both Mary and Jesus looked to Joseph at the head of the table to offer the prayer of blessing. Each year when the great evening of the Passover was celebrated, the youngster Jesus played his role and addressed the ritual question to Joseph: Father, why is this night different from every other night? Then he listened to his Mother to Joseph’s narration of the glorious events of the Exodus and the explanation of the meaning of the paschal lamb. Later Jesus would hear John the Baptist proclaim him, the Son of Joseph and Mary, the Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world.

When Jesus was of age, Joseph introduced him to synagogue worship. Jesus was faithful to the synagogue rituals throughout his life. Joseph also taught Jesus the skills of a carpenter. Through the practice of this trade Jesus supported himself and his Mother after Joseph’s death.

Jesus’ human experience of fatherhood was drawn from his relationship with Joseph, his own earthly father. When Jesus said, “What father would hand his son a stone when he asks for a loaf or a poisonous snake when he asks for a fish,” surely he had in mind how kind and gentle Joseph was to him as he was growing.

When Jesus told the parable of the prodigal son, Joseph must have been the model of that loving father. As Jesus described how the father hugged and kissed the son who had been lost, perhaps he was recalling how Joseph hugged and kissed him after he had been lost in the temple for three days.

When Jesus taught us how to pray, he began with the same loving title with which he had addressed Joseph all his life, abba.

His deep affection for Joseph is evident in the circumstances of the gospel. Joseph made a profound impression on Jesus.

St. Joseph’s relation to us

Has Joseph made an impression on us? How do we think of St. Joseph, honor him, and pray to him? Do we appreciate the special place he has in Christian spirituality and in our own heritage? Let us revere wholeheartedly the husband of Mary, the foster father of Jesus, the patron of the universal Church. After all, he is the man who is closest to Christ.
Saint Luigi Guanella (1842-1915)

Master of confidence in God

On October 23, 2011, Luigi Guanella was proclaimed Saint. He is the co-patron of Unitalsi. Paul VI, when he declared him Blessed on October 25, 1964, said of him: «From the charity that unites him to God, derives the charity that renders him a prodigious benefactor of those in need. The social aspect of the Blessed would merit its own eulogy; but this... is done with eloquence the facts and numbers, of his various works...».

Pius XI had defined him as “Garibaldi of charity”, for the multiple charitable works that were begun for the advantage of the needy. Fr. Luigi is an example to follow, a witness of authentic charity: for this reason his message is without limits, authentically true and always present.

The ninth of thirteen children, to the formation of his character contributed by the example of Christian fortitude of his father and the gentle piety of his mother. He was a seminarian in Como, where he was ordained a priest on May 26, 1866. He dedicated himself to an intense life of charity for the most needy. He was a friend of great saints: Fr. Bosco, Cottolengo, Fr. Orione, Cabrini and Pius X.

He founded institutes destined to welcome thousands of derelicts and handicapped. He established the congregation of the Daughters of Holy Mary of Providence and that of the Servants of Charity. During these years of prevailing anticlericalism he was looked upon with suspect by the lay authorities and was persecuted and suffered injustices. Fr. Guanella endured them by the strength of his faith and he confronted them with the fire of his charity.

His sisters and his priests work throughout various nations and are active with around 400 charitable and social works.

Sustained by his trust in God the Father and in the Virgin Mother

In order to face such a busy life, St. Luigi drew strength from an intense spiritual life. The idea that sustained him was the thought of the God’s paternity. For him, Jesus Christ is the mediator of the love...
that from the Father descends unto us, his children; and Mary Most Holy is above all mediatrix, “Our Lady of Providence” and the model of our adoptive childhood. He wrote on this theme: “The Blessed Virgin of Divine Providence is our dearest Mother, who rejoices to be called with this title, who is always ready to help us. What a consolation, in the midst of life’s tribulations, to have someone to whom we can turn to, that is to the Mother of Divine Providence!”.

His devotion to Our Lady had some extraordinary connotations. Yet it was a Marian devotion that was robust and strong, fruit of trials and bathed with sweat, and especially soaked in charity. The pious priest honored the Mother of God under all her titles, yet he preferred that of “Mother of Divine Providence” and “Our Lady of work”. In the humble house of Nazareth she took care of all the duties of a faithful wife and honored mother. And now from heaven she labors for our salvation.

The rosary was the strongest weapon that won all difficulties, the secret of all of his marvelous works. He spent the last hours of his life invoking the Queen of Heaven: “Open Paradise for me, oh Mary”.

In Loreto as a pilgrim of Providence

In September 1888, during his first visit to Rome with the pilgrimage from Lombardia, Fr. Guanella also visited Loreto. His biographers attest to this. He returned in 1890 through “an elegant combination” of Providence. The married couple Bernardo and Sofia Calvi di Dongo came to him saying that they longed to go to Rome, but they didn’t have anyone to take them. The problem was resolved immediately: the couple “gave the material aspect and Fr. Luigi put the spirit!”. He celebrated the Eucharist both in Rome and in Loreto.

For the occasion of the Episcopal jubilee of Leo XIII, Fr. Guanella went with a pilgrimage to Rome, delegated by the Bishop to represent the diocese of Como. The pontifical audience was held on 19 February 1893, and on the trip back they went through Assisi and once again through Loreto.

Present also in Loreto with one of his Institutes

Certainly Guanella rejoiced in Heaven when his sisters had the fortune and the possibility to open in Loreto one of their houses of assistance and charity. They were called by Msgr. Aluigi Cossio, Bishop of Loreto and Recanati, in 1927, in order to dedicate themselves to young girls in need of assistance and a special school. The activity is still open and efficient in Loreto, faithful to the charism of the saintly founder who would say: “Nothing of which science proposes should be neglected, so that the weight of suffering be lightened for every person”. And it is always valid the ideal for which this new saint spent every moment of his existence: every life is precious because it is generated from that God, provident Father, who loves each of his children as if he were the only one!

A painting commemorating the visit of Mary Ward to Loreto

Mary Ward, Foundress of the «Congregatio Jesu» - whose sisters are called English Dames and also «Loreto Sisters» - on 21 October 1621, with five companions, a priest and a servant, began a voyage on foot from Liege to Rome. Even though the visit to the Holy House of Loreto meant another 250 miles to the already extremely long voyage, Mary Ward wanted to add it to the program because she intended to ask illumination and comfort from the Virgin of Loreto and to entrust her project to Her. She reached it on 18 December 1621 and spent the whole day in prayer in the Holy House, where she perceived that she would have to suffer a lot for the cause of Christ and that this suffering would have come from some men of the Church. Only much later her project of spiritual life was approved.

Now Sr. Norberta Allegro of the «Congregatio Jesu» has depicted in a delicate polychrome picture the servant of God while she is praying in the Holy House, with another of her sisters. It is a nice and delicate commemoration and iconographical documentation of this visit.
The experience that I lived during the Agora of the Mediterranean Youth in Loreto, at the beginning of the month of September 2011, contains the DNA of the path of dialogue and reconciliation that attends the new generations as its protagonists.

During the encounter, as believers, we wanted above all to encounter He who opens this path for us. There is an Arab proverb that I really like: “If you want to dig a straight furrow, attach your plow to a star”. On the banks of the Mediterranean an event took place that is a star for our journey and our seeking: the birth and the Passover of Jesus of Nazareth. From this event we can go forth “to live” our Mediterranean and European culture. Following Christ we find that we are able to live in any sort of culture, also the one marked by the so-called “death of God” and by its consequences. Christianity indeed has at its heart a “death of God” and a night – that of the Crucified – that have gone far beyond every cultural proclamation of nihilism or of the “death of God”. In the why of Christ from the cross (“My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?”) we find therein all the whys of mankind. Christianity has in its heart the great news of the Resurrection: death has been conquered; the whys and the expectations of humanity have an answer; the Risen One “remains with us until the end of time”.

1. We have lived a laboratory of Catholicism. Catholicism means universality. Faith, hope and charity that stem from Christianity bring forth a unique family, one only Catholic Church among all people, cultures, ethnicities… Catholicism is the possibility of achieving a universal communion, a unity, without any boundaries, so that the differences are not cancelled, rather they are carried out in their identity. It is very urgent to deepen this belonging to the universal family of Christianity in order to correct the nationalistic derives and to answer the demands of globalization and of peace… the WYD in Madrid was a perfect example of this Catholicism.

2. We spoke in Loreto about the division among Christians, also through the presence of some youth who belonged to various Christian traditions and we saw the urgent need to have laboratories of ecumenical reconciliation. Dialogue and love are the true motor of the ecumenical journey. Today among the various Churches and ecclesial communities there is not a sufficient sharing in the same faith that would permit us to celebrate the Eucharist together, but nothing impedes us to live together the Gospel, charity, collaboration, solidarity, the defense of Christian and human values.

3. Dialogue and love are capable of making religions encounter each other. At the Agora even some young friends of other religions participated. The recent events that involve various countries of the Mediterranean area indicate how this theme is very urgent. In the Church the reality of the encounter among religions has been confronted already for decades, but the novelty, now, is that it is addressed also by politics, by governments, by the international institutions, by the civil society. This can have a positive aspect, but there is also the risk that religions find dialogue among themselves as an imposed act, following political criteria, that is, external to the religious fact. The Church must pick up this dialogue in the light of its great experience. In order to accomplish this without equivocal or dangerous superficiality, the moment has come of deepening our awareness. If, among people of different religions, one deepens their own identity while also deepening their reciprocal knowledge, esteem, collaboration and charity, then the Risen One may act.

4. Notwithstanding all of the interrupted, lost or even deviated paths that Europe has taken in the cultural environment, it is obvious that it has also produced enormously in the area of culture, thought, science, and art, beginning from the Mediterranean area, and it has also been the place in which culture allowed itself to be converted and renewed by Christianity. In Europe today, there are ideas that have gone crazy, yet there are still ideas! Our responsibility lies in giving new order, unity and sense to these ideas. Our Youth Pastoral Care can be a laboratory of an educational and cultural work that contributes to generate ideas and to reorder the ideas of Europe.

What can the new generations do?
The John Paul II Center of Loreto, in preparation for the Day of reflection, dialogue and prayer for peace and justice in the world convened by Benedict XVI last October 27 in Assisi which also coincided with the celebration of the XXV Meeting of religions desired by Blessed John Paul II, decided to promote an ecumenical pilgrimage along the old Loreto Road that leads from Loreto to Assisi. 153 Km by foot walked by young Anglicans, Catholics and Orthodox together with their shepherds. The group of 19 pilgrims made up of youth belonging to the different Christian confessions, coming from England, Romania and Italy, walked the old Loreto Road in a week. They encountered ecclesial and civil communities through witnesses, moments of reflection and common prayer.

"To go on pilgrimage to Assisi is a sign of what the religious person is capable of", observed Msgr. Paolo Giulietti, vicar general of the Archdiocese of Perugia-Città della Pieve, remembering that “a pilgrimage is a constant experience of faith that has always contributed to peace among the peoples”. Besides, he explains, “a pilgrim is not a conqueror, instead he is a mendicant”. Therefore, it is easy to understand that an important dimension of a pilgrimage is that “of the encounters, of seeing others as someone whom we need and not as an adversary”. To all of this we add the ecumenical aspect. “To unite in the journey, fatigue and prayer”, explains Giulietti, for whom this initiative “is a specific demonstration that, despite the theological differences, one can walk together to construct something beautiful”. It is “lived ecumenism and not just a theory”. For the young pilgrims it was an occasion to create friendships, to live more intensely (and differently) the spirit of the great appointment in Assisi 25 years after the historical meeting...
To be volunteers: a daily way of life!

Days of reflection, of prayer and of sharing about the meaning of being volunteers were lived at the Center with youth who gave of their service during the WYD in Madrid, during the National Eucharistic Congress in Ancona and with those who live experiences of service here in our Center.

Helping us to develop this theme of service were Sr. Cecilia, of the community of the Oblates of V.M. of Fatima, who lived her experience as a volunteer in the “Casa Italia” during the last WYD in Madrid, Fr. Enrico Giorgini, responsible for the volunteers during the NEC in Ancona, and Fr. Francesco Pierpaoli, director of the JPII Center.

The moment of sharing among the youth about their experiences of service, was very fruitful. They underlined that the importance of a way of life inevitably has repercussions in our daily life, a style that passing even through the big ecclesial events, then takes on the concrete form of gestures and words that place us continually at the service of others, because Someone before us placed Himself at our service: I did not come to be served, but to serve (Mk 10, 45). The pilgrimage to Corinaldo and the house where St. Maria Goretti was born and the parish Church where she was baptized is still kept, was an important moment of this retreat. Through the example of this Saint we deepened the characteristics of service: perseverance, docility and poverty, as was indicated by Fr. David Barazzoni, priest from Senigallia who welcomed us together with the parish priest Fr. Giuseppe Bartera. At the end of this retreat we left each other with the presentation of the next upcoming ecclesial event: the VII World Meeting of Families that will be held in 2012 in Milan. A special thank you to each volunteer for the service that they have rendered and that they continue to offer to the Church.

We hope to continue the journey, always wearing the towel as He did, who was the first to serve his brothers.

Testimonies of some of the participants at the retreat

“T to be here to serve”: this is the admonition from which all began. It was the year 2000, the Jubilee year in Rome, and also my first
It has been a little more than a month ago that I came to the “John Paul II Center”, where we sisters Oblates of the Virgin Mary of Fatima have a community at the service of youth pastoral care. A reality that is certainly different from the one that I just left in the diocese of Castellaneta (TA), where I served in the scholastic system and at the service of the youth program in the diocese and in the Catechetical office. As in every new reality, there is some “fear” in beginning a new journey and “wonder” for the marvels that the Lord accomplishes every day in our life. Ever since the first day here at the Center I had the joy of breathing an atmosphere of grace characterized certainly by the closeness to the place where Mary Most Holy said her “yes”, the Holy House in Loreto. Even though I found myself in a completely new reality, I immediately felt at home thanks to the welcoming, the closeness, the nearness: optimal conditions for a new beginning.

I live my experience here at the Center in the hope that this place may become evermore the place where the young person, following the example of Mary, will know how, through constantly listening to his Word, to search for, to love and to welcome the project of good that the Lord would like to see realized for each one. It is only in the “home” of one’s heart, in a one to one relationship with the Lord, that the young person is able to realize what he desires. In this “home” our duty is to favor the encounter with this Friend, the only One in a one to one relationship with the Lord, that the young person is able to realize what he desires. In this “home” our duty is to favor the encounter with this Friend, the only One in a one to one relationship with the Lord, that the young person is able to realize what he desires. In this “home” our duty is to favor the encounter with this Friend, the only One in a one to one relationship with the Lord, that the young person is able to realize what he desires. In this “home” our duty is to favor the encounter with this Friend, the only One in a one to one relationship with the Lord, that the young person is able to realize what he desires. In this “home” our duty is to favor the encounter with this Friend, the only One in a one to one relationship with the Lord, that the young person is able to realize what he desires. In this “home” our duty is to favor the encounter with this Friend, the only One in a one to one relationship with the Lord, that the young person is able to realize what he desires. In this “home” our duty is to favor the encounter with this Friend, the only One in a one to one relationship with the Lord, that the young person is able to realize what he desires. In this “home” our duty is to favor the encounter with this Friend, the only One in a one to one relationship with the Lord, that the young person is able to realize what he desires. In this “home” our duty is to favor the encounter with this Friend, the only One in a one to one relationship with the Lord, that the young person is able to realize what he desires. In this “home” our duty is to favor the encounter with this Friend, the only One in a one to one relationship with the Lord, that the young person is able to realize what he desires. In this “home” our duty is to favor the encounter with this Friend, the only One in a one to one relationship with the Lord, that the young person is able to realize what he desires. In this “home” our duty is to favor the encounter with this Friend, the only One in a one to one relationship with the Lord, that the young person is able to realize what he desires. In this “home” our duty is to favor the encounter with this Friend, the only One in a one to one relationship with the Lord, that the young person is able to realize what he desires. In this “home” our duty is to favor the encounter with this Friend, the only One in a one to one relationship with the Lord, that the young person is able to realize what he desires. In this “home” our duty is to favor the encounter with this Friend, the only One in a one to one relationship with the Lord, that the young person is able to realize what he desires. In this “home” our duty is to favor the encounter with this Friend, the only One in a one to one relationship with the Lord, that the young person is able to realize what he desires. In this “home” our duty is to favor the encounter with this Friend, the only One in a one to one relationship with the Lord, that the young person is able to realize what he desires. In this “home” our duty is to favor the encounter with this Friend, the only One in a one to one relationship with the Lord, that the young person is able to realize what he desires. In this “home” our duty is to favor the encounter with this Friend, the only One in a one to one relationship with the Lord, that the young person is able to realize what he desires. In this “home” our duty is to favor the encounter with this Friend, the only One in a one to one relationship with the Lord, that the young person is able to realize what he desires. In this “home” our duty is to favor the encounter with this Friend, the only One in a one to one relationship with the Lord, that the young person is able to realize what he desires. In this “home” our duty is to favor the encounter with this Friend, the only One in a one to one relationship with the Lord, that the young person is able to realize what he desires. In this “home” our duty is to favor the encounter with this Friend, the only One in a one to one relationship with the Lord, that the young person is able to realize what he desires. In this “home” our duty is to favor the encounter with this Friend, the only One in a one to one relationship with the Lord, that the young person is able to realize what he desires. In this “hom
A crazy man, a prophet, an adventurer? Olivier Pieczonka, 42 years old, from France with Polish origins, does not deny it. “It may be a little of all of this”. Certainly he is a pilgrim, of the old fashion way. He left two and a half years ago from Le Ruy en Veley, and arrived in these past few days in Loreto after having walked just a little less than 25,000 kilometers through the old continent. An itinerary that led him to various devotional places, shrines but also monasteries, which throughout the centuries formed Europe. “In October 2008 – he shares – after the financial crisis that started in the USA, I found myself within three days without a job and without a house, and therefore I was forced to ask myself what was the true value of life. My answer was to be, not to have. So I left ”. His skin tanned by the sun, dressed of the essentials but with dignity, Olivier travels without money and says proudly that he lives of Providence. “Traveling in this manner, trusting, that is, totally in God, I was able to verify that Providence exists”.

He carries with himself only that which allows him to remember the places that he has visited: well used maps, crumpled papers where he gathers the ink stamps that attest that he has passed through the religious sites that are most significant. He also has with himself a camera and a small computer. As soon as he finds a way and money to hook up to internet, he does not wait to add pictures to his own Facebook profile, who is represented by an image of the European flag to which Olivier is very attached to, and not just by a coincidence: “The twelve stars with the blue background are a clear homage to the Blessed Virgin Mary, who has been venerated for centuries throughout the whole continent as the Queen of Europe”. When and how will your long pilgrimaging end? “Within 2012, when I return to France. Then I will stop for a while, with the idea of gathering all of my memories and writing a book through which I will be able to share, especially with those who are the littlest, all that I have seen, encountered, known. I want to communicate especially what happened in me after the decision to dedicate myself to my being and no longer to the accumulation of many things and goods”. Yes, a book. Nevertheless, before we say goodbye, Olivier suggests one last provocation: “After Santiago, Fatima, Rome and Loreto, the next pilgrimage could be no other than towards Jerusalem”. 
Those who enter into the atrium of the Treasury, find themselves in a small gallery of Baroque Lauretan art, before a ample canvas (cm 170 x 230), which portrays a young woman in the center, dressed in white with a candid cushion on her knees, and other ten young women, five on each side, with dresses of various colors. The young girl on the right, with a “conocchia” in her hands, is accompanied by an elderly woman, while all of the others seem to be gracious young ladies. Six of them are sitting and are intent on their sewing, while four, two on each side, are standing in various postures. On the floor, there are four baskets where they set aside their work. The art piece is admirable for the chromatic friendliness, the wise composition and the warmth of the domestic surroundings.

The «School of the virgins»

The first problem to resolve is who is the artist of the valuable painting. The canvas is part of a series of paintings donated, in three different moments, by the canonic Pietro Paolo Raffaelli from Cingoli. This one was given on 15 June 1694 and, together with the others, was placed in the Atrium of the Treasury. In the donation act one reads
that « this painting is esteemed to be of the hand of Guido Reni » (1575-1642). The attribution was taken up again by Giovanni Cinelli Calboli, a knowledgeable Florentine doctor, born in 1626 and died in Loreto in 1706, who left a precious manuscript about the artwork in the Sanctuary of Loreto with penetrating critical evaluations. During the following years, the centuries XVIII and XIX, the attribution to Reni was unanimously accepted. One should keep in mind that Reni, as the art historian Malvasia writes (Felsina Pittrice, Bologna 1655), is surely the artist of one painting of this kind and that he duplicated it at least once with some changes. The first painting can be identified with that which is now at the Hermitage in St. Petersburg. During the 1900’s the origin of the canvas that we are examining was placed into discussion. Some think that it is a copy by apprentices, which make reference to the second version (E. Bacchieschi), others think that it is done by Reni or that it is a copy of one of the two original versions. The difference between the painting in Loreto and the one in St. Petersburg consists essentially in the fact that in the latter one there are not eleven women but only nine, it lacks the two who are standing at the two extremes. The composition layout though is identical, except for some slight gestures of a couple of the young women. Given the high quality, it can not be excluded that the Lauretan painting could be identified specifically with that second version painted by Reni, mentioned by Malvasia and not persuasively indicated in any other painting except for this. Indeed, even though in the Loreto painting one can recognize some outside help from his workshop, it does not seem that one can exclude completely that the Maestro from Bologna had some direct contact, at least in some of the especially intricate places, and even more, in the general idea itself. On the other hand, the attribution to Reni that the donator Raffaelli indicated in 1694, about half a century after the death of the painter, should not be undermined. Napoleon’s troops, who usually were wise in stealing artwork, through their expert consultants, robbed the canvas in 1797 given its prestigious attribution and its intrinsic quality. It was returned to the Sanctuary in 1815 by Cardinal Giuseppe Ciferri, who adorned it with a new frame, elaborated in the same style of the preceding one, which was made by the skilled Roman carpenter Giuseppe Ciferri around 1696.

### The title and the subject

Not even for the title of this painting are there converging ideas. Sometimes it is called the School of the virgins, with a generic reference to some girls who are learning the art of sewing from one of them who, in the center, has her right hand raised in a gesture of teaching, as if she is giving a lesson.

Other times it is given the title of Sewing school, with the same significance, mostly, as the preceding one. More frequently it is called the Adolescence of the Virgin, with explicit reference to Our Lady. What does the scene that we see represent? In the donation act of 1694 we have a precious indication: « painted is the Most Blessed Virgin among the young women of the temple ». The annotation leads us back to the apocryphal Gospels regarding the birth and the childhood of the Madonna. Probably the most persuasive reference is found in the apocryphal Gospel of Pseudo Matthew. Here one reads that, after the time that Mary spent in the temple, Joseph took her with other virgins, who had to stay with her in her house. The text continues: « These virgins were Rebecca, Sefora, Susanna, Aligea and Zahel. To these were given by the pontiffs silk, hyacinth, byssus, scarlet, purple cloth and linen. They drew sorts as to which each virgin would work on and Mary received the purple cloth for the veil of the Lord’s temple. After receiving it, the other virgins said to her: Even though you are the youngest of us all, you merited to receive the purple cloth » (Vangeli Apocrifi, a cura di G. Bonaccorsi, Florence 1948, p. 175). The artist may have freely interpreted the apocryphal episode, by increasing the number of virgins and without any reference to the purple cloth. The episode however would need to be situated within the House of Nazareth, and not in the temple of Jerusalem. All things aside, we find ourselves before « a very soothing painting », as it was defined by the historian of the Sanctuary Vincenzo Murri in 1791.
The display, set up in Rome, in the Venice Palace, until February 5th, had an extraordinary success. It was thought of and planned by Rossella Vodret and set up by Pier Luigi Pizzi. The newspaper « Corriere della Sera » dedicated two whole pages to it with articles of art critics (16 December pp. 56-57).

Lauretta Colonnelli highlighted how there was only one painting of Caravaggio on display, the famous Our Lady of Loreto, also called of the Pilgrims, kept in the church of St. Augustine in Rome (see photo on the left). She writes: « Just one Caravaggio, therefore, but situated next to Our Lady of Loreto by Annibale Carracci and his school, coming from the church of St. Onofrio on the Gianicolo (see photo on the right). From the contrast between the two canvases one can see the red line that joins all of the other works in the exposition. In fact the intentions of Vodret with the display, is that of reconstructing the panorama of the companions or disciples of Michelangelo Merisi in Rome in the seventeenth century ».

Vodret intended to reconstruct the panorama and the cultural context of the city of Rome at the time when Caravaggio was active. She did this by beginning, as we said, from the two paintings that have Loreto as their subject, that by Caravaggio and that by Carracci; the first was painted around 1604 and the second in 1605. The same dates and an identical subject. Yet – as Colonnelli observes – « with differences in the painting styles that are almost abyssal, which are rendered readable thanks to the fact that for the first time the two pieces of art can be seen one next to the other. In the one by Merisi there is a naturalistic style so advanced as to become revolutionary, while in the one by Carracci there is a classic re-elaboration of raphaellesque matrix, based on the representation of an idealized reality. This confrontation is important, because from these two giants of the painting realm, descend all of the other artists who worked in Rome during the following decades ».

Caravaggio, who, it is almost certain went to Loreto in 1603, represents Our Lady with the Child in her arms at the door of the marble encasement of the Holy House, as if she descended from the niche ready to welcome two elderly and rather dirty pilgrims, breaking all of the precedent iconographical schemes of Loreto. The realism is confirmed by the fact that the populace immediately recognized in the face of Our Lady the resemblances to the well-known courtesan Lena, and from the fact that the painter reproduced a chipping in the doorframe and an abrasion on the step, that in reality exist on the marble encasement.

Carracci, instead, following the traditional path of iconography concerning the Translation, imagines Our Lady with the Child sitting on a pillow of clouds above the roof of the Holy House, transported by three angels, who are about to land on the area of Loreto. In correspondence to the two transporting angels who are collocated on the sides of the House, there are other two heavenly beings who are crowning the Virgin, while the Child pours out water from a jug, symbol of the heavenly graces bestowed on the new territory where the walls from the house of Nazareth were destined to be collocated. The realism of Caravaggio is contrasted by the harmonic and symmetrical composition in the classicist style of Carracci, with the shapely angelic figures in raphaellesque style and the composed and solemn figure of the Virgin.
Books in foreign languages about the Sanctuary of Loreto

Recently some studies have been published about the Sanctuary of Loreto in foreign languages, that keep our attention turned towards « the first sanctuary of international renown dedicated to the Virgin » (John Paul II). This magazine already published a book review about the noteworthy study written by Yves-Marie Bercé, entitled “Lorette aux XVIe et XVIIe siècles. Histoire du plus grand pèlerinage des Temps modernes”, printed by the Sorbonne Editeur of Paris (see this magazine, n°3, Sept./Dec. 2011, pp. 84-86).

Now we indicate two other scientific contributions, one in French by Alain Boureau and one in Croatian by Andrija Mutnjaković.

Alain Boureau, L’Inconnu dans la Maison

The author, a well known medievalist, with a keen interest in scholastic Philosophy, published a book in 2010, already quoted by Bercé, entitled: L’Inconnu dans la Maison. Richard de Mediavilla, les Franciscains et la Vierge Marie à la fin du XIIIe siècle.

His study focuses, therefore, on the Franciscan philosopher Richard de Mediavilla. The author points out how suddenly, in less than ten years, between 1290 and 1300, the devotion to the Virgin took a new turn in the west. The role of Duns Scoto is well known as regards the formulation in favor of the Immaculate conception of Mary, elaborated around 1298 but prepared before, according to Boureau, already in 1292 by Henri de Gand.

The author inserts between these two moments, in an articulated manner touching on various themes, the first formulation of the miracle of the transportation of the Holy House of Loreto from the Orient to the West. He found it in the so-called Quodlibeta of the Franciscan Richard de Mediavilla, that was written around 1295, and not beforehand, in Naples as he demonstrates with stringent details.

The Franciscan philosopher, in the question II, 2, asks the following question: « Could God move locally an object from the Orient to the West, according to a rectilinear motion, in an instant? ». Boureau sees in this question a clear allusion to the translation of the Holy House. Seven of the eighty-one questions, according to his opinion, are not explainable without a reference to that event.

The author then asks why did this formulation ever remain unknown until the second half of the XV century and he explains this long silence with the fact that a legend of this sort necessitates a long active diffusion process. He specifies, in particular, that the events of the transportation of the Holy House are linked, according to the historical documentation, to the family of Niceforo Comneno, despot of Epirus, denominated Angeli. We know that Niceforo, in giving his own daughter Ithamar as a wife to Philip d’Angiò, son of Charles II, king of Naples, transferred to the future son-in-law, as a dowry, the « holy rocks » taken from the House of Nazareth. Boureau observes: « The nominal transposition of the Angels or angelic transporters of the House of Nazareth was not able to escape from those who reject the miracle. The narration included its own reductive interpretation. It is not for the historian to decide if the
circumstance of the marriage created the legend or if it captured it. In any case, this collision should have embarrassed those who supported the sanctuary of Loreto » (p. 159).

This interpretation sheds light and, in some way, explains the two trends in the lauretan tradition: that of the transportation by angelic ministry and that of human initiative. A fact that took place through human intervention is given, on the speculative level, an explanation as a miraculous sign.

Also, the formulation of Mediavilla helps to interpret a miniature made in Paris by Giovanni Pucelle around 1325, found in the manuscript Le Ore di Giovanna d’Evreux (queen of France). The miniature, illustrated already by the famous iconologist Erwin Panofsky, represents the Virgin and the announcing angel under a small construction that seems to germinate into two, one within the other, with an allusion maybe to the House that in Nazareth was protected within the crusade basilica and adorned by a structure called jubé, which is evident here in the space that the Angel Gabriel occupies. There are various angels represented, some are half busts, within the half-circles of the windows, two others are musicians, around the House, and one, on the bottom, flying while he is transporting it. Due to the precarious dating (1325), doubts were usually expressed concerning the possible reference of the miniature to the translation of the Holy House, but now the question of Richard de Mediavilla suggests to interpret the miniature as the first iconographical allusion to the miraculous transportation of the Holy House, considering also the place where it was painted, Paris, where the writings of the Franciscan philosopher would have been well known.

Andrija Mutnjaković, *Sikstov Grad*

The title of the book is: The city of Sixtus V, with reference to Loreto, elevated to the level of a diocese and city by that Pontiff in 1586. The author highlights the relationship of the sanctuary of Loreto with Croatia, where – in Trsat – according to a late version of facts, the Holy House stopped over. However, he does not ignore, rather he underlines, the historical reality of the transportation of the Holy House by the initiative of Niceforo Angeli.

He traces the history of the construction of the basilica, begun in 1469, noting how Gianuizzi, as the planner of the church, mentioned the name of the Dalmatian Giorgio da Sebenico; he recalls the architectonic importance of the Apostolic Palace and, especially, he focuses on the Illyrian Palace, destined to welcome the young students of the opposite shore of the Adriatic.

Above all the author focuses on the work of Sixtus V, Pope from 1585 to 1590, who brought to completion the facade of the basilica and who transformed the city of Loreto with the addition of the Montereale neighborhood. The text amply develops this theme of Sixtus, recalling renowned protagonists, in a rich series of documentation and penetrating observations.

Sunday, 27 November 2011, at 5pm, during a solemn concelebration presided by the Archbishop of Spoleto-Norcia, Msgr. Renato Boccardo (see picture to the right) the antique church of Our Lady of Loreto, partially renovated and opened again for worship since 2007, was declared as a “diocesan Sanctuary”. The Sanctuary was packed with a crowd who celebrated and who were sincerely grateful to Our Lady of Loreto who has protected the city of Spoleto over the centuries.

The devotion of the people of Spoleto to Our Lady of Loreto dates back to the XIV century. A witness to this fact are that many of the oldest images of the Virgin of Loreto are venerated and still able to be admired in the churches of the diocese of Spoleto.

The devotion of Spoleto was centered around the image of Our Lady of Loreto in a chapel built a little outside of the city in 1538. The devotion grew immensely during the terrible earthquake of 20 April 1571, which was followed by many little earthquakes that seemed to never end. The people turned to Our Lady of Loreto and the quakes ended.

The people of Spoleto then decided to build a church around the chapel that protected the image of Our Lady of Loreto. The church since then has been a reference point of the Marian devotion in the city of Spoleto, so much so that, in order to be able to reach it with commodity and to be protected from the storms, they built a long portico that went from the city to the church of Loreto.

Now, following the requests of the faithful, and to sanction the long faith tradition of the people of Spoleto, Archbishop Boccardo decided, with the decree signed 8 September 2011, to declare the church of Our Lady of Loreto as a “diocesan Sanctuary”, where the faithful can entrust themselves to the Virgin following the example of the previous generations. (Photo M. Montanari)

On December 5, 2011 the « Scuola Volontari di Truppa A. M. » from Taranto, picked up from the Universal Congregation of the Holy House a ceramic statue, 110 cm tall, made by the company Niccacci from Deruta. On December 10th, Feast day of Our Lady of Loreto, patron of aviators, the statue was brought to the city’s church of the Carmel for a solemn rite and afterwards it was transferred to the chapel of the School itself.
Maxi Screens in the Basilica of the Holy House

On Sunday, 20 November 2011, two maxi screens were inaugurated in the basilica. They are collocated on chains in the arches, to the sides of the presbyterium, facing the two lateral naves, where the columns impede the faithful to follow the functions that are celebrated on the main altar of the Annunciation. The images, projected in high resolution on the two motorized screens, now permit those who are present to follow the celebrations better and with more participation, as the pontifical delegate, Msgr. Giovanni Tonucci, and the rector of the shrine, Fr. Giuliano Viabile, desired. The installment of the maxi screens was done by the specialized company «Web» from Govone (Turin). (Photo Montesi)

Connection with the Holy House on the television transmission of Rai 1 «Door to Door»

On December 8, Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, there was a television transmission «Door to Door» on Rai 1, led by Bruno Vespa, during which there was a threefold connection with the Holy House in Loreto. During the first moment they showed some pilgrims who were going around on the stair of the marble encasement of the Holy House on their knees. The second moment was the transmission of the witness of Maria Gabriella Gardini, healed from a myopic macular hole in the retina, unique case in world literature and of the De Angelis couple, who attested that, many years ago, when their son was in a very grave health situation in the hospital Salesi in Ancona, after a devout and prayerful visit to the Holy House by his father, around the same hour, the little one came out of the coma and in very brief time he was healed. The third transmission shared the testimony of Barbara Pirri who, for years was unable to have a child, yet after wearing the blue ribbon, thanks to the prayers of the Passionist sisters and the Capuchins of the Shrine, she received the gift of motherhood through the intercession of the Virgin of Loreto, this also changed her life as a Christian. From Loreto “Door to Door” was conducted by Vittoriana Abate.

In the picture, from left to right: Barbara Pirri, Mrs. De Angelis and, behind her, her son and husband, Vittoriana Abate with the microphone in her hands, Mrs. Maria Gabriella Gardini, Fr. Giuseppe Santarelli, the niece and the husband of Mrs. Gardini. (Photo Montesi)
On 23 November 2011, more than one hundred pilgrims coming from far off Siberia, accompanied by their own priests («pope») and by the bishops of Novyi Urengoy Nikolay and of Khanty-Mansiysk Pavel, made a devout visit to the Holy House, where they remained for a long time in deep prayer. They were welcomed by Roberto Stefanelli, employee of the Universal Congregation, who gave them a tour of the artistic wonders of the basilica arousing in them true admiration. (Photo Montesi)

Cardinal Koch visits Loreto

Cardinal Kurt Koch, Emeritus Archbishop of Basilea and president of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity, on December 16-17, 2011 visited the Sanctuary of the Holy House. He came from Fermo, where he had held a «lectio magistralis» at the Theological Institute. On December 17th, Sunday, he presided the solemn pontifical Mass at 11am. It was animated by the Chorus of the Cathedral of Adria (Rovigo – Italy).

From left to right: Fr. Sergio Andriotto, confessor in the basilica, Cardinal Kurt Koch and Fr. Marco Flichy, French chaplain in Loreto. (Photo Montesi)

Russian pilgrimage from Siberia
The figure of **Lorenzo Lotto** commemorated by Giovanni Villa

After the display about Lorenzo Lotto in the Stables of the Quirinal (March 2- June 12, 2011), in the context of the full calendar of events and commemorations of the work of the great artist, that involved the Lombardia, Veneto and Marche Regions, on December 12, 2011, in the Hall of the Evangelists of the Ancient-Treasure Museum, Professor Giovanni C.F. Villa, through a projection of some chosen images, recalled the figure and work of the great maestro, who chose to live his last years in Loreto as an oblate of Our Lady, leaving seven canvases, some of which are of very high quality. The speaker, with refined and appropriate demonstrations, helped us to relive some important moments of the painter and to admire some of his masterpieces.

On December 27, 2011, Archbishop Giovanni Tonucci, from the Rai office in Ancona, was connected with Rai2 during the transmission of the rubric « Your facts », directed by Giancarlo Magalli, illustrating some healings, considered as prodigious, obtained through the intercession of Our Lady of Loreto. The Archbishop announced that this coming spring there will be a Medical Observatory begun, aggregated to the Lauretan Study Center, following the model of the one that already exists in Lourdes, that will study on a scientific level, the healings that are registered in Loreto.

Archbishop Tonucci during the transmission «Your facts»
On December 6-7, 2011 the Marche Region welcomed a delegation of eighteen Palestinians, who are in charge of security in the sacred places of the Holy Land, for an advanced course. On the 7th, accompanied by Roberto Oreficini, Head of the Security Department and Civil Protection in the Marche, they visited the Shrine of Loreto. They were welcomed in the German Chapel by Archbishop Giovanni Tonucci, who had a friendly exchange with them and gave to each a publication about the Sanctuary of Loreto. Then they had a guided tour of the Shrine. Afterwards, they were welcomed in the municipal by the Mayor Paolo Niccoletti, who observed that the Sanctuary of the Holy House was chosen as a model, for the vigilance and control that has been guaranteed in various occasions especially during the visits of Holy Fathers. (Photo Graciotti)

For the occasion of the « Marche Day », that recurs on December 10, Feast of Our Lady of Loreto, the Marche Region conferred the « Picchio d’oro » award to the minister of Economy of the United Arab Emirates Sultan Bin Saeed Al Mansouri, who, on the afternoon of December 9, accompanied by the governor Gian Mario Spacca, visited the Sanctuary of Loreto, filled with pilgrims who had gathered for the vigil of the « Coming ». The illustrious guest, through an expertly guided tour, was able to admire the rich history and artwork of the Sanctuary.

From right to left: Gian Mario Spacca, Sultan Bin Saeed Al Mansouri, Archbishop Tonucci and Fr. Stefano Vita. (Photo Montesi)
BOOKLETS ON LORETO

1) Devotion to Our Lady of Loreto $ 0,80 £ 1,00 € 1,00
   (Prayer Booklet - Available in English, Italian, French, German, Spanish, Polish and Portuguese)

2) Loreto, in Art and History $ 7,00 £ 4,50 € 5,00
   (English, German, French, Spanish, Portuguese and Italian)

3) Loreto - The shrine of the Holy House Spiritual Guide
   $ 1,50 £ 1,00 € 1,00
   (English, German, French, Spanish, Italian, etc...)

4) «La Santa Casa di Loreto, Tradizione e Ipotesi» size $ 18,00 £ 10,00 €12,00
   (Italian ed. only)

5) Loreto - History and Art $ 15,00 £ 9,00 €10,00
   (English, German, French, Portuguese, Spanish and Italian). Big size

6) Illustrated History of the Holy House $ 4,50 £ 2,60 € 3,00
   (English and Italian)

OTHER

Minimum offering per
Relic Prayer Card of Our Lady of Loreto $ 0,70 £ 0,50 € 0,50
Holy Oil - minimum offering per bottle $ 1,50 £ 1,00 € 1,00

PARCHMENTS

1) Angelus $ 1,50 £ 1,00 € 1,00
2) Magnificat
   (Canticle of the Blessed Virgin Mary) $ 1,50 £ 1,00 € 1,00
3) Come Holy Spirit
   (Pentecost Sequence) $ 1,50 £ 1,00 € 1,00

PLEASE NOTE: There are other religious articles besides those listed above, car plaques and key chains of Our Lady of Loreto, etc. All prices are subject to change with increase of cost for articles. Please include the mailing cost for requested articles. All items are usually sent by ship, unless requested otherwise, because Air mail postage is very expensive and almost double the price of articles. Orders sent by regular mail are received within 2-3 months from date of shipment. Payment both for articles and mailing cost should be made by either Travellers check or International Money Order. Do NOT send by Postal Money Order... NOT negotiable in Italy.

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Kindly print CLEARLY the name(s) and address(es) of those to be subscribed.

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Universal Congregation of the Holy House
60025 LORETO (AN) - ITALY
I would like to CONSECRATE my family to the Family of Nazareth and place my children under the protection of Our Lady of Loreto.

I would like to CONSECRATE myself to Our Lady.

I would like my family to become PERPETUALLY ENROLLED in the Universal Congregation of the Holy House so as to share in all spiritual favours and in the mass which is celebrated in the Holy House DAILY for all members.

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I would like _____________________________ to be enrolled in the Universal Congregation of the Holy House.

The CONSECRATION and PERPETUAL ENROLLMENT are two separate requests and can be done only upon receipt of offering, so as to avoid confusion and to assure its validity. Individual: US $ 10,00 - £ 9,00 - € 10,00; Family: US $ 16,00 - £ 14,00 - € 16,00. For Perpetual Enrollment, both the Living and the Deceased may be enrolled.

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• Remember Our Lady’s requests at Fatima: Prayer, Penance, the Rosary, Consecration to her Immaculate Heart. Therefore, consecrate yourself, your family to Her and renew your act of consecration often.

• Ask for your parchment of Consecration from Our Lady’s home through the Universal Congregation of the Holy House - 60025 LORETO (AN), Italy.

• Blessed in the Holy House before being sent, it is a personal document of Consecration to Our Lady from Her home.

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Those who desire to collaborate more towards the Aims of the Universal Congregation of the Holy House and the Marian Apostolate of Loreto can ask to become members of the “Friends of the Holy Family” - Promoters of the Holy House.

THE “FRIENDS OF THE HOLY FAMILY”

• Those who spread devotion everywhere to Our Lady of Loreto and the Holy Family, as also to the place where they dwelt… the Holy House of Nazareth at Loreto.

• Active members, who love the Holy Family, Our Lady, and spread that love by their zealous efforts, by their Marian voice and prayer life.

• If you feel called to give witness to your love in action, to get more involved as a true Christian, then ask for your Promoter membership card, which will be sent to you accordingly through the Universal Congregation.

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THE SHRINE OF THE HOLY HOUSE • Jan./Apr. 2012
Universal Congregation of the Holy House of Loreto

ORIGIN. The Universal Congregation of the Holy House was officially established in 1883 by Monsignor Thomas Gallucci of Loreto, in collaboration with Fr. Pietro da Malaga, o.f.m., Cap., blessed and enriched with indulgences by the Sovereign Pontiffs Leo XIII and Pius X.

AIMS. 1) To spread devotion to the mystery of the Incarnation, to Our Lady and to the Holy Family. And veneration for the Holy House, where the great events of the Annunciation and of the Incarnation took place. 2) To contribute and to decorate by wills and offerings towards the Shrine and its works. 3) To celebrate solemnly the Marian feasts, in particular: The Immaculate Conception, the memory of the Translation (December 10th, feast of Our Lady of Loreto), and the month of May. 4) To recall to the faithful the solemnity of the Annunciation of Our Lord (March 25th).

ENROLLMENT. It is extended to all the devotees of Our Lady of Loreto, who wish to spread the venerated title and to cooperate in the carrying out of the Institutional aims of the Sanctuary and to share in the spiritual benefits granted to those enrolled. Enrollment is particularly recommended to the members of the great family of Aviation since Our Lady of Loreto is its Patroness (Apostolic letter of Benedict V, 24th March 1920); and to those who want to consecrate their families to the Holy Family.

SPIRITUAL FAVOURS. 1) A plenary indulgence on the day of enrollment and on December 10th, under the usual conditions of receiving worthily the holy sacraments of Penance and Holy Communion and to pray for the intentions of the Holy Father and of the Universal Church.
2) Participation in the merits of the Mass which is celebrated daily in the Holy House for the members living and decease.
3) Participation in the prayers said in the Holy House and in the Order of the Friars Minor Capuchin.

TO ENROLL - Individual membership: offering of US $ 15,00 - £ 9,00 - € 10,00.
Family membership: offering of US $ 25,00 - £ 14,00 - € 16,00
To become part of the spiritual family it is sufficient to send the name (individual or family name). The Living and the Deceased may be enrolled. It is heartily recommended to recite the Angelus three times daily and to honour Our Lady by the frequent recitation of the Rosary and the Litany of Our Lady.

LORETO: Useful Information

- LORETO: 127 metres above sea level; about 18 miles south of ANCONA; two miles from the sea of PORTO RECANATI; a city of about 10,600 inhabitants; Province of ANCONA in the Marches region - Centre of Italy.
- TRAVELLERS BY CAR: Take the Adriatic Highway or Bologna Canosa «autostrada», toll road 14; coming from Rome, via Ancona, it is about a 5 hours’ ride.
- TRAVELLERS BY TRAIN OR BUS: A round-trip from ROME-LORETO-ROME (via Ancona by train), comes to about $ 35.00 (about a 4 hours’ ride); from ANCONA-AIRPORT there is a bus to ANCONA-Railway station available; then, from ANCONA, the bus to LORETO usually makes a stop first at CASTELFIDARDO and arrives directly at LORETO’s City (a 50 minutes’ ride), proceeding onwards to RECANATI (comes to about $ 4.00). If instead a train is taken (a 20 minutes’ ride), you arrive at LORETO’s Railway station (about one mile from LORETO’s City) where there is a bus available otherwise by taxi.
- TRAVELLERS BY CAR: Write to: Universal Congregation of the Holy House, LORETO - 60025 LORO (Ancona, ITALY)

Web site: www.santuarioloreto.it E-mail: santuarioloreto@tin.it sacrestia@delegazioneloreto.it