

*Our
Lady*



*of
Loreto*

The Cover Pictures

The pictures on the cover are of two statues both of which are statues of Our Lady of Loreto.

The one at the upper left-hand corner is the actual statue of the shrine in Italy. There is an exact replica of this statue in the small chapel of Our Lady of Loreto in the grounds of the Seminary of Saint-Sulpice at Issy-les-Moulineaux. As a student, our Founder loved to pray in that chapel. And it was one day when he was praying before the statue there in 1818 that he had the inspiration to found the Association of the *Holy Family*. However, later on, when he had a special statue of Our Lady of Loreto made for us, he had it modelled on the statue of Our Lady in the Church of Saint-Sulpice in Paris before which he had his great “God Alone” experience in 1816.

The picture at the bottom right-hand corner is of that statue of Our Lady of Loreto which Fr. Noailles had made especially for us and which is beside the island in Martillac.

Our Lady of Loreto and the *Holy Family*

When Fr. Noailles founded the first community in 1820 he called it *The Community of Loreto*. He gave it this name, he says, so that the Sisters would never forget that their principal aim was “to honour and imitate the most Holy Family.” When we read that we may wonder what the connection is between Loreto and Jesus, Mary and Joseph.

Loreto is, in fact, Nazareth. This is because Loreto is the name of the place in Italy where it was believed the house of Nazareth was transported by angels at the end of the thirteenth century. (That is why Our Lady of Loreto is the patron of those who travel by air.) There are, however, other theories about how the house got to the north of Italy. Some say that the Crusaders brought it back stone by stone from Nazareth. Others say that it was brought back by an Italian family called *de Angelis* and it is easy to see how this version of the story could have given rise to the account of the angels carrying it. It is significant that archaeological excavations have shown that the stone from which the house is made is from the Holy Land. This type of stone is not found in Italy. Whatever the truth of the matter is, Loreto has been a great centre of prayer and pilgrimage for centuries and remains so to this day.

Fr. Noailles certainly believed that the house in Loreto was the real house of Nazareth. He made a retreat there once and obviously had a deep spiritual experience while celebrating Mass in the Holy House. Among other things, he says that he was “transported into heaven” seeing “only Jesus, Mary and Joseph as they appeared to men.”

This house was originally regarded as just the house where the Annunciation took place, and the emphasis was on Our Lady. But then, when devotion to the Holy Family became popular, around the middle of the seventeenth century, the story was told that when the Holy Family returned from Egypt, Mary's parents – Anna and Joachim – had died, and Jesus, Mary and Joseph moved into their house. So by the Founder's time the Holy House of Loreto, as it is known, was considered to be the house not only where the Annunciation took place but also the dwelling-place of the Holy Family.

As we celebrate the feast on December 10, perhaps we could make our own the wish that Fr. Noailles expressed in a letter to Mother Bonnat after his visit to the shrine of Loreto in Italy in 1840:

***May we all merit to belong to Jesus, Mary and Joseph more
and more by walking in their footsteps and from now on
living only for God alone.***

Aine Hayde

For an extract from this long letter, dated 7 November 1840, see Source 8: cards 586a-586b.

For the complete letter (in French), see *Lettres du serviteur de Dieu Pierre-Bienvenu Noailles*, vol. II, pp. 567-570.