

## Pilgrimage to the House and Tomb of St Maria Goretti

### *Ferriere and Nettuno*



Following the Audience with the Holy Father and after a hearty lunch, the pilgrims set off for the Ferriere and Nettuno to visit the home and shrine of St Maria Goretti, south-west of Rome near the port of Anzio. St Maria Goretti is one of the Church's most popular saints. Her beatification in 1947 and canonization in 1950 were historic events in that for the first time a parent was present at the glorification of their child as Assunta Goretti watched Pope Pius XII canonize her daughter. Maria has been recognized by the Church as a martyr of purity, dying as she was fighting off the advances of a young man who was intent on raping her.

Born in Corinaldo in the east of Italy in 1890, Maria was the third of six children. Trapped in poverty, Luigi Goretti, decided to move his family to Ferriere, south of Rome in the hopes of making a living. Things did not work out as the farm he had obtained yielded little, and his bad health sapped his strength. He formed a partnership with a Giovanni Serenelli who moved into the Goretti home with his feckless son, Alessandro. With Luigi's death, life became

more difficult for the family and Alessandro began to make advances at Maria. Profoundly religious she resisted, but on the 5<sup>th</sup> July 1902 he tried to force her to submit to him, when she refused he stabbed her numerous times. She died in hospital in Nettuno the following day.



*Goretti Farmhouse, Ferriere*

The group first visited the house where St Maria lived and was attacked, located in Ferriere. Ferriere is a tiny village near Anzio, in what was once swamp land. The farmhouse is preserved in excellent condition and is divided into two levels. The kitchen in which the family lived and where Maria was attacked is on the first floor: it is now a chapel. On the kitchen floor a bronze statue surrounded by flowers and *ex votos*, marks the spot where Maria lay dying. Other mementos and photographs tell the story of this young girl's life and sacrifice. A traditional image of the young saint hangs above the altar surrounded by a sunburst.



*Former kitchen of the house, the room in which St Maria was attacked, now a chapel*



*Monument marking the spot where Maria was stabbed and lay dying*

Having spent some time in prayer, the group re-boarded the bus and traveled to Nettuno where the remains of St Maria are venerated. Nettuno is a seaside town with an impressive old city. The Shrine of Our Lady of Grace houses the shrine. The building is fairly modern and under the pastoral care of the Passionists. The Shrine was originally founded as a shrine to house a medieval image of Our Lady which had been brought to Italy from England to save it from the iconoclasm of the Reformation. This image is enthroned above the main altar of the church.



*Shrine of Our Lady of Grace and St Maria Goretti*

The remains of St Maria lie in an altar in the Crypt Chapel of the church. Her bones recomposed in a wax effigy, the body is clothed in the white dress and blue sash and medal of the Children of Mary, she holds a silver lily in her hand (one of her titles is the Lily of Corinaldo) and a crown on her head.

After members of the group that spent some time praying at the tomb, Fr John offered Mass on the tomb. In his homily he spoke of the relevance of St Maria Goretti for our times. *"We are engaged in a revolutionary act"* he said. Living in a permissive age, he noted, where sex has been reduced to mere pleasure, to venerate the memory of one who said no to permissive sex, and to hold her up as an example for all men and women is to question the spirit of our age, and given the intolerance of the prophets of *laissez faire* sexuality this was

unacceptable, yet prophetic. Reflecting on personal memories, he explained how he first learned of the life and sacrifice of St Maria from his aunt, Biddy, as he was growing up. He was delighted, he said, to have her here among the pilgrims, as she finally made it to the shrine of a saint she loved so much.



*The body of St Maria Goretti*



*Fr John celebrates Mass on the tomb of St Maria*

Following the Mass the pilgrims visited the museum attached to the shrine and in which many items associated with St Maria are on display including some major relics. Among these items is the canonization banner, a lock of her hair and the medal with which she was invested as a Child of Mary as she lay dying.

After a long day, the group boarded the bus to return to Rome, looking forward to a quiet evening meal and an early night.



*Mary and John Cahill at Mass at the tomb of St Maria*