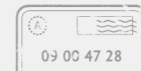

PILGRIM'S TRAVEL COMPANION

August 27 - September 9, 2025

A JOURNEY OF HEART, HEALING, & HOPE
WITH FR. JC MERINO



A Place Called "Nazareth"

On this twelfth day of your pilgrimage, the Church celebrates the **Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary** — the dawn of salvation, the birth of the one whose yes opened the way for God to dwell among us. Mary's birth reminds us that God's saving work often begins quietly, almost hidden, like a seed sprouting in the dark earth, or a child born in obscurity, destined to cradle the Light of the world.

Your steps today led you to **Lanciano**, where the Eucharistic Miracle proclaims what Mary first welcomed: "The Word became flesh" (John 1:14). In this small church, bread and wine have become Christ's Body and Blood, a visible sign of the invisible truth Mary lived every day in her little house at Nazareth. Centuries ago, at the words of consecration a doubtful priest, uncertainty met miracle. The bread on the altar brimmed with real human blood — visible, tangible, undeniable. The Eucharistic Miracle of Lanciano is not just a relic of the past but a living reminder that Christ continues to give Himself fully, vulnerably, and lovingly to His people.

From there, you journeyed to **Loreto**, to the Holy House of Nazareth itself — stones that once held the laughter of a Child-God, the whispered prayers of a Mother, the silent labor of a carpenter. Here, we are reminded that salvation is born not only in cathedrals or miracles, but also in the ordinary walls of family life, where love is practiced in hidden ways.

For me, walking this path with Papa, the message is clear: our own homes, even in seasons of weakness or uncertainty, can become Nazareth. Papa's recovery, slow and fragile, is not wasted time but holy time, where God asks us to find Him in patience, in care, in the daily "yes" of sacrificial love. Just as Mary's hidden years prepared her for her great "Fiat," so too - I believe - that our hidden days of healing prepare us for grace yet unseen.

Today, as we honor Mary's birth, we learn that every beginning (or ending) — no matter how small — is filled with promise. The Eucharist of Lanciano anchors us in Christ's abiding presence. The Holy House of Loreto invites us to welcome Him anew in our own lives. And Papa's journey, like Mary's, reminds me that God's love is from east to west, entering our ordinary days and transforming them into sanctuaries of hope, healing, and heart.

"Blessed are you, Mary, for you believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled" (Luke 1:45).

Of Flesh, Stone, and Sacred Flight: Lanciano + Loreto + Assisi



September 7, 2025

Day 12: A Place Called Nazareth

This morning, we journey deeper into the heart of mystery.

We begin in Lanciano, a humble Italian town that holds one of the Church's most awe-filled treasures: the Eucharistic Miracle of the 8th century. Within the Church of St. Longinus, we will behold the consecrated Host that turned into human flesh and blood of Jesus – a sacred sign that whispers what our faith has always proclaimed: God is truly here. We will celebrate Mass in this place where mystery takes form and miracles become flesh, reminding us that belief is not always seen, but sometimes – mercifully – it is.

And after the Eucharistic wonder of Lanciano, we journey onward to Loreto – a hilltop town crowned by a house.

But not just any house. This is the Holy House of Nazareth – three stone walls said to be carried by angels, cradled now within the grand basilica. Here, Mary once lived, prayed, and said her earth-shaking "yes." Here, the Word became flesh, not with thunder, but in the quiet beating of a human heart.

We step inside not as tourists but as pilgrim guests – welcomed into the threshold of the Incarnation. The Black Madonna of Loreto gazes upon us, cloaked in the prayers of centuries. She is the Patroness of Pilgrims and Aviators, the guardian of those in transit – across skies, across borders, across inner deserts.

This house reminds us that God begins in the ordinary, and transforms it into holy ground. God's Word – God's love – is incarnational, present in our work and daily lives. Hope is born at home, and that healing begins wherever Christ is received.

As the bells ring across the red rooftops of Loreto, we are reminded: "The heart of pilgrimage is not in reaching the destination, but in returning home with a heart remade."



The Eucharistic Miracle in Lanciano

A Basilian monk, who was celebrating Mass at the Church of St. Legontian (now known as the Church of the Eucharistic Miracle), was experiencing doubts about the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist—whether the bread and wine truly become the Body and Blood of Christ.

During the consecration at Mass, as he pronounced the words "This is My Body... This is My Blood", the host visibly turned into human flesh, and the wine into human blood, in front of him and the congregation.

The miraculous Flesh and Blood have been preserved for over 1,200 years and are still venerated in Lanciano. The Flesh remains intact and has the appearance of human heart tissue. The Blood coagulated into five globules, of varying shapes and sizes. In 1970–1971, and later in 1981, the Church permitted extensive scientific analysis by Dr. Odoardo Linoli, a professor of anatomy and pathology, with assistance from Dr. Ruggero Bertelli of the University of Siena.

The findings revealed: The Flesh is human cardiac muscle tissue—specifically from the left ventricle of the heart. The Blood is real human blood,

type AB, which is the same blood type found on the Shroud of Turin. No preservatives were found in the samples, despite their age. These results are still on display and accepted as scientifically unexplainable by current natural laws.

The miracle powerfully confirms Catholic teaching on the Real Presence—that Christ is truly present, Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity in the Eucharist. It is a visible sign to help faith overcome doubt, echoing Christ's own words in John 6:51–55, where He says, "My flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink." The Flesh being heart tissue speaks of the Sacred Heart of Jesus—a symbol of His love and sacrifice. The Blood type AB, often associated with people of Middle Eastern descent, connects this miracle to Jesus' own heritage.

Today, the Sanctuary of the Eucharistic Miracle in Lanciano is a major pilgrimage site, drawing thousands of faithful every year who come to witness the miracle and deepen their Eucharistic devotion.







The Holy House of Nazareth

Loreto is home to one of the most cherished Marian shrines in the world – the Basilica della Santa Casa (Basilica of the Holy House) – a site steeped in mystery, devotion, and beauty.

At the heart of the sanctuary is the Santa Casa, believed to be the very house where the Blessed Virgin Mary lived, received the Annunciation from the Angel Gabriel, and where Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit.

According to ancient tradition and popular devotion, the house was miraculously transported by angels from Nazareth to Tersatto (modern-day Croatia) in 1291, and eventually to Loreto, Italy, in 1294. Inside, pilgrims venerate the humble stone walls of Mary's home, preserved beneath an ornate marble canopy sculpted by Donato Bramante and adorned by master artists of the Renaissance.

Above the Holy House stands the revered image of the Black Madonna of Loreto, a statue of Mary as the protectress of the home and patroness of travelers and aviators. She wears a rich embroidered robe, and though her features are darkened by centuries of candle smoke and devotion, her presence radiates maternal warmth and power.

Because the house was "flown" by angels, Our Lady of Loreto was declared Patroness of Aviation and Aviators by Pope Benedict XV in 1920.

Pilgrims come from around the world not just to honor Mary, but to entrust their journeys, missions, and families to her care.

A Place of Tenderness and Triumph

Loreto is not a grand Marian apparition site – it is quieter, older, and more intimate. It's a place that draws you not because Mary *appeared* here, but because she *lived* here. The house speaks of everyday holiness, of meals cooked in silence, of prayers uttered in hope, of God's Word entering the world in the most hidden of ways.

Here, in these stones, the WORD was made flesh. Here, we remember that God begins with the home – with our Blessed Mother.





PRAYER:

Lord Jesus,

In the quiet of Nazareth, You found home—
a simple place, humble walls, and daily grace.
Help me to find my own Nazareth within,
a sacred space where love is born anew,
where hope grows quietly in the soil of my heart.
Teach me to say "yes" like Mary,
to welcome Your presence in the ordinary,
to find You in the small moments,
and to carry Your light into the world.

May my place called Nazareth

be a refuge of peace, a cradle of healing,
and a home where Your Spirit dwells forever.

Amen.



**LET YOUR
LIGHT
shine**

Pilgrim Thought:

Where have I seen God's presence take
flesh in my life?

What in me needs to fly from Nazareth to
Loreto—to move, to trust, to say yes?