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MEDIA ADVISORY – *for immediate release*

The Patroness of Mercy to begin an extended tour of the United States

The Pilgrimage of Mercy will be the first time the body of St. Maria Goretti travels to the USA and only the second time she has left Italy

On the day that Catholics celebrate her liturgical feast, Treasures of the Church is proud to announce a major event for the US Church. From September to November the nation will host the *Pilgrimage of Mercy: the Tour of the Major Relics of St. Maria Goretti*.

Father Carlos Martins, CC, a *Custos Reliquiarum* (ecclesiastically-appointed curate of relics) and director of Treasures of the Church, will lead a tour of the United States with the sacred remains* of St. Maria Goretti. An immensely popular saint, it is the first time her body travels to the USA and only the second time she has left Italy.

The youngest canonized saint in the Catholic Church, the 11-year-old Maria Goretti died July 6, 1902, after being stabbed 14 times in an attempted rape. Her last words on her deathbed were of mercy towards her 20-year-old attacker: “I forgive Alessandro Serenelli ... and I want him with me in heaven forever.” The unrepentant Serenelli famously reported receiving an apparition of his victim within his prison cell, some 6 years into his 30-year sentence. That occasion began his dramatic transformation from a violent and ruthless brute to that of a gentle and renewed soul intent on spreading devotion to God and his saintly victim. In his words, “Maria’s forgiveness saved me.”

The tour comes on the heels of a papal declaration of an Extraordinary Holy Year of Mercy set to begin December 8th. This visit of the major relics of St. Maria Goretti is an effort on the part of the Congregation of the Causes of Saints, her Pontifical Basilica, and Treasures of the Church, to prepare and catechize the United States for this great celebration in the life of the Church.

St. Maria’s remains are inside a glass-sided casket. Inside the casket is a wax statue which contain her skeletal remains. To be clear, St. Maria’s body is not incorrupt, and none of the sacred remains are visible. Nevertheless, the skeleton is complete, save for small amounts of bone that have been placed in reliquaries,

and her right arm which was donated by her mother to the Church of St. Nicholas (now known as the Sanctuary of St. Maria Goretti) in her birth town of Corinaldo. It was with her right arm that Maria defended her purity and prevented Alessandro Serenelli from raping her.

The tour includes stops at 25 Catholic dioceses spanning 16 states, including the Archdioceses of New York, Boston, Newark, Philadelphia, Detroit, Chicago, Atlanta, Houston, and Oklahoma City. Hosts of the body will include parishes, schools, and prisons. The schedule for the expositions that are open to the general public (i.e., those held in parishes) can be found on the official tour web site at www.MariaGoretti.com.

Each exposition will include presentations on the life and virtues of St. Maria Goretti throughout the day. These will provide the catechetical and spiritual basis for the veneration of her remains which follows.

Martins, who has been ministering with relics for almost 20 years, remarks that “God never disappoints”, but always “shows up” at an exposition. “There are healings at each one. Hundreds, perhaps even thousands, have been reported to me. Spectacular ones. Attendees have reported cancer, heart disease, tumors, osteoporosis, physical deformities, etc., disappear immediately and completely.” Though a great number of miracles have been physical (his website www.TreasuresOfTheChurch.com lists a sample of these), he admits that the most spectacular is the healing of faith where a new and deeper relationship with God and His saints are formed in the faithful. “It is a most wonderful thing to see a parish, school, or prison renewed after an exposition. That is the basis for this ministry’s existence, and I cannot wait to see where St. Maria will take it.”

Standing-room-only crowds are expected at each location. Invitations from bishops desiring to host an exposition have poured into his office since word of the tour emerged from Rome. Cardinal Edwin O’Brien, Grand Master of the Knights of the Holy Sepulchre, made the following statement after the announcement: “I am delighted that the Church in the United States will have the opportunity to celebrate the Holy Year of Mercy through the inspiring story of the life and death of St. Maria Goretti! May the opportunity to reverence her relics demonstrate the power of Divine Mercy and forgiveness awaiting every one of us who takes the message of Jesus seriously to heart.”

Cardinal Raymond Burke, Patron of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta and former Prefect of the Supreme Tribunal of the Apostolic Signatura, notes that “Many who attend [such] expositions experience a renewal of faith and are deeply moved by their encounters with these treasures of the Church.” Bishop Edward Slattery, bishop of Tulsa, Oklahoma describes the visit of St. Maria Goretti’s sacred relics as an opportunity for the faithful “to begin to experience what the pontiff spoke of in March when he said that through this Year of Mercy

the Church would ‘find in this Jubilee the joy of rediscovering and rendering fruitful God’s mercy.’”

See www.MariaGoretti.com for an up-to-date listing of exposition times and locations. Admission is free.

***Note:** The Catholic tradition of venerating relics is not worship but a way to honor and draw near to the saints, and to petition for their prayers, since they are believed to be with God (Wisdom 3:1). Fr. Martins’ explanation of the Catholic practice of the veneration of relics, complete with references for its scriptural foundation, can be found at <http://mariagoretti.com/delta/about-relics>.