

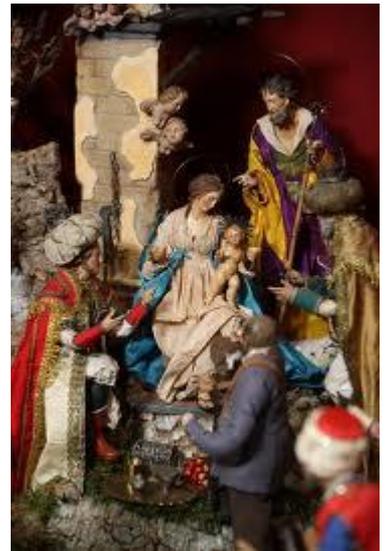


Christmas Practices in Loreto

Sadly there are few references to Christmas preparations or observances in the surviving annals of Loreto houses in Ireland. In spite of this, glimpses of Christmas traditions as observed in the lifetime of M. Teresa Ball can be seen.

The members of the Institute usually completed a retreat in advance of Christmas, in preparation for the holy feast, and renewed their vows at mass on Christmas Days. The preparation of a crib, to recall the true meaning of Christmas, was an important activity in the Loreto communities. M. Benedicta Somers, Gorey writing on 19th December 1852, 'We are preparing to have a very large "Crib" in the Church for the devotion of the congregation.....We will also have our own "Crib" within the convent'.

Students, both day and boarding pupils, were subject to yearly examinations in the days preceding the Christmas festive period. Pupils examined were rewarded with premiums, the most prestigious of these, having been ordered from France especially for the occasion. Pupils were not permitted to return home for this holiday, M. Teresa Ball wrote to parents explaining that the disruption necessitated with lengthy travel arrangements, and the excitement of a return home, unnecessarily distracted the pupils from their studies. Pupils were thus obliged to remain in school, but were treated to a holiday from their school work for periods of 7 – 10 days. Concerts and entertainments were composed and performed by the pupils in front of the community and visiting dignitaries. With a break from the usual routine of classes, and the annual entertainments and recitations from the pupils, a suitable holiday atmosphere must have pervaded in the communities.



The importance of remembering those less fortunate was also an important part of the Christmas preparations and traditions. Rev. M. Alphonsa Ellis, Superior, Loreto Manchester wrote on 21 December, 'M. Benedicta is busy getting up a Christmas tree for the poor school in St Wilfrids, the proceeds are to buy clogs for the poor children'. The account books for Loreto Navan, record the payment of monies to charities, including some especially selected by the Rev. Mother.

