

Ferrero Rocher: The chocolate inspired by Our Lady of Lourdes.

“The success of Ferrero we owe to Our Lady of Lourdes; without her we can do little,” said Michele Ferrero, the company’s founder.

By Francesca Pollio Fenton.

April 16, 2024, at 6:00 AM ET

Many know Ferrero Rocher for its popular hazelnut chocolates, but the company’s tie to Our Lady of Lourdes is lesser known. Michele Ferrero, the company’s founder and a devout Catholic, had a deep devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary and wanted to honour her through his work. It is reported that he named his company “Rocher” after the rock grotto, the Rocher de Massabielle, which marks the location where the Virgin Mary appeared to St. Bernadette in Lourdes, France. In fact, “Rocher” means “rock” in French. With this in mind, many point to the chocolate’s crunchy coating and uneven gold wrapping as Ferrero’s attempt to resemble this rock formation at Lourdes, which had a special meaning to the chocolatier. At the 50th anniversary of the founding of the company, Ferrero said: “The success of Ferrero we owe to Our Lady of Lourdes; without her we can do little.” In an interview with CNA’s Spanish-language news partner, ACI Prensa, in 2023, Father Mauricio Elias, a chaplain at the Sanctuary of Lourdes, said: “Mr. Ferrero had a lot of devotion to the Virgin of Lourdes; he came a lot to Lourdes and was a benefactor.” “He was a man who always came here, he had a lot of devotion to the Virgin, he confessed, he led a Christian life,” Elias added. It was said that Ferrero made annual pilgrimages to Lourdes and also organized a visit for his employees. He also had a statue of the Virgin Mary in each of his company’s 14 production facilities around the world.

Ferrero passed away on Feb. 14, 2015, at the age of 89. Shortly before his death, a flood damaged the sanctuary at Lourdes. Ferrero promised “a great donation to recover what was lost,” Elias shared. After his death, his children kept their father’s promise and helped with the repairs. The family-run business continues its tradition with Michele’s son, Giovanni Ferrero, running the company today. Founded in 1946 in Alba, Italy, by Pietro Ferrero, Michele’s father, today Ferrero Rocher is the third-largest chocolate producer in the world. Since its launch in other European countries in 1982, the company has expanded to include other brands such as Nutella, Tic Tac, and Kinder, among others.