

# Marian Pilgrimage: Day Four: Sunday 10 May 2020

## The Shrine of Our Lady of Lourdes, France

### The Story of Lourdes:

Lourdes, one of the most visited shrines in the world, holds a special place in the hearts of many. The Sick are the Guests of Honour.

**On February 11th, 1858**, Bernadette Soubirous, her sister Toinette, and a friend of theirs, Jeanne, went looking for wood near "the place where the canal rejoins the River Gave.

Toinette and Jeanne crossed the icy water but Bernadette did not do this because of her chronic asthma. She remained behind near the Grotto, a dirty, hidden, damp and cold place. It was called the "pigs' shelter" because the pigs feeding in the area used it as a shelter.

Bernadette heard "a noise like a gust of wind", but "none of the trees were moving". Raising her head, she saw, in a hollow of the rock a small young lady, who looked at her and who smiled. This was **the first apparition**, but the lady did not speak or identify herself.

**On February 14th**, Bernadette returned to the grotto, taking a bottle of holy water with her to sprinkle on the Apparition in case it was from the devil. The lady again appeared to her, which was the **second apparition**. Bernadette threw some holy water on the apparition, but the lady only smiled and did not speak.

**On February 18th** the **third apparition** took place, and **the Virgin Mary spoke for the first time, making three statements**.

**The first statement:** Bernadette held out a sheet of paper and a pencil so that she might write down her name, but the Lady replied: "**what I have to say to you does not have to be written down**". This was **the first statement** she made that day.

**The second statement** of the Virgin Mary was: "*Would you do me the kindness of coming here for fifteen days?*" Bernadette was overwhelmed. It was

the first time that anyone had addressed her in a formal way. Bernadette described these words by saying that the Virgin looked at her "as one person looks at another person".

**The third statement** of the Virgin was: "***I do not promise to make you happy in this world but in the next.***"

There were additional apparitions reported...

**The ninth apparition was really the culmination of the apparitions at Lourdes**, the Lady asked Bernadette to scrape the ground at the back of the grotto: "***Go to the spring, drink of it and wash yourself there***". She did this, scraping the ground three times trying to drink the muddy water, then smeared mud on her face. There was only a little muddy water to begin with, then little by little it became clear running water. The **Miraculous Spring** was finally revealed, and has continued to flow ever since, providing water for the physical healing of some, and spiritual healing for millions.

During **the thirteenth apparition**, Our Lady said: "***Go, tell the priests to come here in procession and build a chapel here.***" On March 25th, 1858, the day of **the sixteenth apparition**, Bernadette went to the Grotto, and at the order of the parish priest, Abbé Peyramale, asked the Lady for her name. Three times Bernadette asked the question. On the fourth request, the Lady responded in dialect "Que soy era Immaculada Conceptiou". ("**I am the Immaculate Conception**").

With these words the Mother of God confirmed what **Pope Pius IX had proclaimed as the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception four years earlier in 1854**. Bernadette, who **had never heard of this title**, did not understand the meaning of these words, but she went to the priest to tell him the Lady's name. He knew immediately that this title referred to the Mother of God, and the Bishop of Tarbes, Monseigneur Laurence, confirmed this.

The Immaculate Conception is, as the Church teaches, "Mary, conceived without sin, thanks to the merits of the Cross of Christ"

## About the Shrine of Our Lady of Lourdes:

There is much to see here, but beginning **in chronological order**: first, we see the two places where the Soubirous family lived just before, and during the Apparitions. Then we see the grotto, and move to the other sites in Lourdes that were built after the Apparitions.



Saint Bernadette's bed in the Boly Mill

**Bernadette was born at The Boly Mill**, where her family lived during more affluent times: her father was a miller and they had enjoyed relative prosperity during the early years of Bernadette's life. Unfortunately, water mills were being phased out as other power sources became available. So financial problems came upon the family. By 1854 they were destitute and the parents, with their four children, were evicted from the Boly Mill.

They moved to a succession of houses, each place less expensive and smaller than the previous one, until finally they were given free accommodation in a tiny one-room dwelling called Le Cachot. This had been a prison cell, very damp (certainly bad for Bernadette's asthma) and unfit even for animals. The Soubirous family lived there rent free, and even though in squalor, they were grateful for what they had, and never lost their inner joy. It was while living here that Bernadette went to the Grotto in search of firewood where the Blessed Mother appeared to her. In the final stage of her parents' lives they lived in the Maison Paternelle, belonging to Monsieur Lacade, the Mayor of Lourdes. In 1863



Farther Peyramale rented it to the Soubirous family. In 1866 Bernadette's mother died, and in 1867 the house was given to Bernadette's father who died in 1871.



Preparing for Mass at the Grotto in Lourdes

**The Grotto:** at Massabielle, where St Bernadette's visions took place is very simple, much the same as when the Apparitions occurred. Here we find a plain stone altar, and a lectern for the celebration of Mass. Above the main recess is the niche where the Apparitions were observed, and Fabisch's statue. A large stand of candles beside the altar is kept burning throughout the year. During the pilgrimage season, two pilgrimage Masses are usually celebrated each morning at the Grotto. The spring can be seen at the rear, protected by a glass cover. When Mass is not being celebrated, you can walk through the Grotto and touch the rocks directly under the statue). At the rear is a metal box into which written prayers or petitions may be placed (they are collected, offered in prayer daily and afterwards burnt).

A little way off are the Baths, where Pilgrims, including the sick, are lowered into the cold waters flowing from the Spring. This is a cleansing and a healing experience of prayer.

In front of the Grotto there are rows of benches, facing the statue, and visitors sit and pray. **Pilgrims are asked to remain silent** while in the vicinity to respect the atmosphere of Devotion.

From there you may wish to visit **The Crypt**, the first—and smallest—of the churches to be built here. Saint Bernadette's father worked on its construction and was present at its official opening, on Pentecost Sunday 1866.



**The Basilica of the Immaculate Conception** dominates the area and was completed in 1876. The Sanctuary is directly above the Grotto and the walls are lined with many plaques testifying to cures.

And as you enter you will see a plaque showing the statement of the Bishop who approved the Apparitions  
*..these Apparitions bear the characteristics of truth; that the*

*faithful can believe them as true. We humbly submit our judgement to the judgement of the Sovereign Pontiff, who is responsible for governing the Universal Church"*

**The Rosary Basilica**, was consecrated in 1901 with a capacity of 1,500 worshippers. Its style is influenced by Byzantine architecture. The nave is open and circular, surmounted by a dome. The exterior of the dome is surmounted by a gilded crown and cross, a gift from the people of Ireland in 1924. The exterior facade of the basilica was modified in 2007 to include a depiction of the Luminous Mysteries, which were added to the Rosary by Pope Saint John Paul II in 2002.



Pilgrims in the underground Basilica

**The Basilica of St. Pius X**, called "the Underground Basilica", is the largest of the churches. Some consider that it more closely resembles a giant parking garage: a modern, concrete building almost completely underground. It can accommodate about 25,000 people and was built to hold the crowds expected for the centenary of the Apparition in 1958. However, it is still very much a place of worship and its capacity makes it useful on special occasions such as the vast Summer pilgrimages. It has its own evocative atmosphere, especially when filled with young people from all over the world.

You can look up on You Tube: How You Can Visit the Grotto in Lourdes Every Day // France: A Pilgrimage with Mary. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hkqmdt17vj8>  
Travel well: Enjoy the 'tat shops', and the excellent cafes.