

# Our Lady of Lourdes

**B**ERNADETTE was born on January 7, 1844, the first child of Francois and Louise Soubirous. Her family suffered from a series of misfortunes as she grew up and, as a result, they were living in a one-room house, which formerly served as the village jail. On the morning of February 11, 1858, the poor family did not even have firewood to heat their home. Bernadette, her younger sister, and a friend were searching for timbers to burn when they spotted a pile of driftwood at a bend in the River Gave. As she prepared to cross a shallow brook to reach the spot, Bernadette's life was about to change forever.

♣**FIRST APPARITION** *Thursday, February 11, 1858.* On this cold but calm morning, Bernadette hears a noise like a gust of wind. In a grotto near the River Gave, she sees a golden cloud in which a beautiful young Woman appears, dressed in white and holding a Rosary, and smiling most graciously toward the little visionary. Falling to her knees, Bernadette, being afraid, tries to pray the Rosary but fails to make the Sign of the Cross until the Lady makes it first. When Bernadette makes the Sign of the Cross, all fear leaves her. She prays the Rosary with the mysterious Lady, who moves the beads with Bernadette but only prays when the *Glory Be* is said, always bowing Her head. Bernadette later describes the Lady: "She was wearing a white dress reaching down to her feet, of which only the toes appeared. The dress was gathered very high at the neck by a hem from which hung a white cord. A white veil covered her head and came down over her shoulders and arms almost to the bottom of her dress. On each foot I saw a yellow rose. The sash of the dress was blue, and hung down below her knees. The chain of the Rosary was yellow, the beads white, big and widely spaced. The girl was alive, very young and surrounded with light." Let us always make the Sign of the Cross with great devotion.

♣**SECOND APPARITION** *Sunday before Lent, February 14.* After attending High Mass, Bernadette returns to the Grotto with friends. After praying one decade of the Rosary, she again sees the young Lady. Bernadette sprinkles Her with holy water, asking to remain if She came from God, otherwise go away. The Lady smiles and bends Her head. Bernadette then falls into a deep rapture. Not knowing about the nature of such

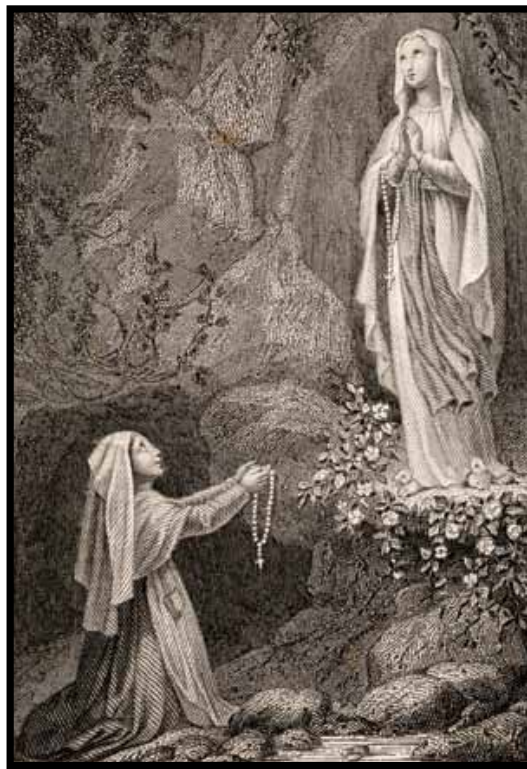
ecstasies, the children panic. The local miller comes to help Bernadette leave the place, testifying later: "She was smiling and her face was lovely, lovelier than anything I've ever seen." Only after she is taken from the grotto to the miller's home does Bernadette return to normalcy. Let us always test the spirits to see if they are of God.

♣**THIRD APPARITION (Annunciation)** *Thursday, Feb 18.* Our Lady, who heretofore has appeared on an upper niche in the Grotto, now moves closer to Bernadette. Bernadette asks Her name and the Lady replies, "Will you do me the kindness of coming here for a fortnight?" Bernadette agrees and the Lady replies: "I do not promise to make you happy in this world but

only in the other" and then disappears. A heavenly being comes down to earth to a virgin girl of 14 and asks her if she would say YES... *Fiat...* to God's plan for her and her people? She says, "Yes." The heavenly being adds that this YES will not be easy... will bring much trial and tribulation, but, nevertheless, the little virgin Bernadette will triumph in the end by going to heaven. Does this not parallel in some small way what Our Lady experienced so long ago with the visit of St. Gabriel the Archangel? Notice the number of visits requested by the Lady, including this initial visit. It is the same as the 15 mysteries of the Holy Rosary. What is more, what happens in each of these 15 days runs parallel in some way to what occurred in its corresponding mystery of the Rosary. Let us

always say YES to the graces of God given through His Holy Mother!

♣**FOURTH APPARITION (Visitation)** *Friday, Feb 19.* Accompanied to the Grotto by her mother and godmother (and namesake, Aunt Bernarde), Bernadette, holding a lighted candle for the first time, is again transformed as she falls into a rapture. All noticed the beauty that shone upon the little virgin's face: her countenance changed, her smile became mysteriously lovely, people wept at the sight. Like St. Elizabeth before her, she is filled with the Holy Ghost at the greeting of the Mother of God. In this visitation to the Grotto, the first of which her own mother and godmother are present, Bernadette's whole being proclaims the greatness of the Lord! At the same time a mob of devils, working from the River Gave, try to interfere with things: commanding Bernadette ... "Get

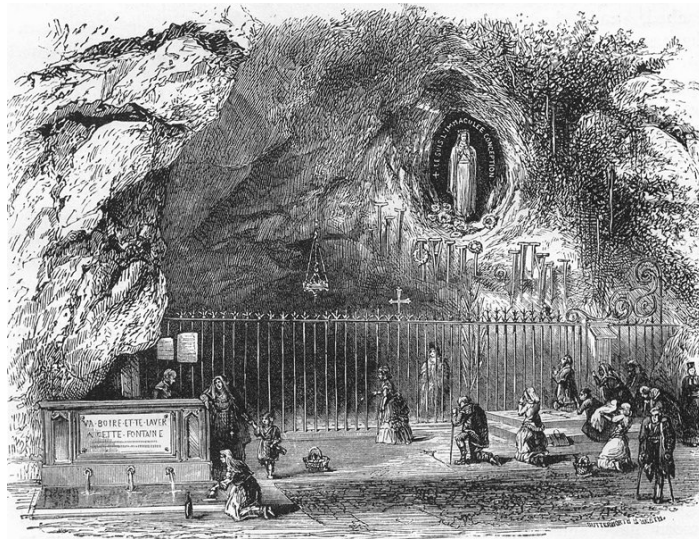


out of there! Get out of there!" A mere glance, however, from the Immaculate Conception positioned in the niche above renders the demons silent. Surely, this is an echo of how the devil lost his grip upon the forerunner of the Lord, St. John the Baptist, when he was cleansed of Original Sin in the womb at the Visitation of Our Lady. The devil is powerless against Our Sovereign Queen. As the twelfth chapter of the Apocalypse says of him... he tries to use water to drown out the Virgin Queen, and the Child born of Her, but fails. With Jesus in Her womb, the Virgin Mother of God becomes a mother to men of this world with the Visitation... St. John the Baptist, the forerunner, is born through Her into the life of grace! The devil is furious! In this mystery and visit to the Grotto, we find a striking portrayal of baptism with its exorcisms. Let us renew our baptismal vows frequently.

♣ **FIFTH APPARITION (Nativity)** Saturday, February 20.

As word spreads, crowds begin to gather at the Grotto, a cave not unlike the stable in Bethlehem. On that cold morning, even before the sun has begun to brighten the day, a small crowd watches as Bernadette again falls into a rapture, candle in hand, while praying the Rosary. Her face becomes all smiles and she makes graceful bows and signs of reverence. Conversing with the Lady, she learns a prayer that she is to keep secret and yet pray every day of her life. Like the shepherds of Christmas, all return to Lourdes glorifying and praising God for what they had seen and heard. Let us always be reverent before the mysteries of the Lord and His Mother.

♣ **SIXTH APPARITION (Presentation)** Sunday, Feb 21. Before attending Mass on the first Sunday of Lent, Bernadette visits the Grotto. During this apparition, the Immaculate Lady looks off into the distance and shows signs of deep sorrow, saying, "Pray to God for sinners." At the sight of Her sadness, Bernadette cannot help shedding tears. Just as with Simeon's prophecy, the Immaculate Heart of Mary seems to be pierced even now with the sword of sorrow caused by the sins of men, sins that crucify Her Son, making Him a sign of contradiction. Dr. Dozous is there for the first time to check and observe the visionary for any abnormalities. No medical irregularities are observed. Later that day, St. Bernadette has to give a serious presentation of the happenings at the Grotto to the city officials. Herod is already looking for the Infant King. In dealing with them, Bernadette later says: "I was no longer myself, I was not afraid." Let us not fear any earthly power. With the help of God, we shall go forward bravely!



♣ **(Finding in the Temple)** Monday, February 22. Although the police and her parents forbid her to visit the Grotto, God had already accepted the 15-day contract agreed to earlier by her parents. Thus, Bernadette is mysteriously pushed to go to the Grotto later in the day, even though she tries to obey her parents' orders. Kneeling in prayer surrounded by other faithful visitors as well as the vigilant police, Bernadette is saddened when the Lady does not appear. It seems the Immaculate Virgin wanted the *Stabat Mater* to ring true in Her little confidante: "Make me feel as you have felt, make my heart to glow and melt...". St. Bernadette feels the loss keenly and is almost inconsolable, wondering, "What have I done to offend the Lady?" Our Heavenly Mother also plainly displays here that She is not called down from heaven on demand as so many false modern apparitions would

have us believe... but rather, She, the sovereign Queen decides when She will appear. The parents relinquished and decided their daughter should finish the 15 days of visits. Let us keep our vows to God, come what may!

♣ **SEVENTH APPARITION (Agony in the Garden)** Tuesday, February 23.

Surrounded by peasants and nobles, Bernadette enters into communication with the Lady for about an hour. Although her words cannot be overheard by those attending, it is evident that she is in animated conversation with the Lady, who entrusts a sorrowful secret to her. In making her petitions to the Lady, she weeps and kisses the ground. One doubting nobleman said: "I had felt Her presence and I was convinced that Her motherly gaze had hovered over my head. It was a most solemn hour of my life! I was thrown almost into a delirium of madness by the thought that a cynical, sneering, self-satisfied fellow like me had been permitted to come so close to the Queen of Heaven...". Let us stay awake and be vigilant in these most trying times.

♣ **EIGHTH APPARITION (Scourging at the Pillar)** Wednesday, February 24.

During her rapture, the color of Bernadette's face changes, from color rising up, to a death-like pallor covering her "like a veil" leading some in the crowd to worry. With a look of sadness the Lady reveals Her first message, "Penance! Penance! Penance! Pray to God for sinners! Kiss the ground as an act of penance for sinners." Bernadette responds, "Yes... with all my heart" and then obediently falls prostrate upon the ground and kisses it as an act of penance. For the first time, she also walks on her knees. Let us strive to do our penance by fulfilling the duties of our state in life.

♣ **NINTH APPARITION (Crowning with Thorns)**

*Thursday, February 25.* The Lady instructs Bernadette to drink and wash herself at the fountain in the Grotto. Looking about, she finds no water and tries to walk on her knees to the River Gave but is called back. Directed by the Lady, she finally makes her way to the rear of the Grotto and begins to dig. After three tries, a small amount of water appears and Bernadette drinks a mouthful and washes her face. As commanded, she also eats some of the grass growing there. Not understanding the action and seeing her mud-stained face, she is ridiculed and presently rejected by the large, now uneasy crowd. Many jeer at her strange actions. Others exclaim: "She is out of her mind! She is mad!" Bernadette relives the *Ecce Homo*. Let us do what is right, come what may.

♣ **(Carrying of the Cross)** *Friday, February 26.* Bernadette returns to the Grotto and registers no surprise at the sight of the newly-revealed spring. Although she prays again, the Lady does not appear this day. Bernadette humbly takes up her Cross. Let us not be surprised at our distractions and lack of devotion during prayer, rather, let us pray to love our cross all the more.

♣ **TENTH APPARITION (Crucifixion)**

*Saturday, February 27.* After an animated conversation with the Lady, Bernadette follows Her instructions to "...wash at the spring," perform other acts of penance and, "Go and tell the priests to have a chapel built here!" The Church, the New Eve, was born from the side of Christ as He slept on the wood of the Cross. May we never leave Her confines!



♣ **ELEVENTH APPARITION (Resurrection)** *Sunday, February 28.* Very early in the morning over a thousand pilgrims accompany Bernadette in prayer. Dressed in her modest Sunday best, she carries out all the penitential practices of the previous day on the now slimy ground, yet her clothes remain clean and neat. After the Sunday High Mass some officials detain Bernadette, attempting to play on her fears, even resorting to threats. "We're going to lock you up. We're going to put you in prison." She responds: "I'm ready—put me in, but it had better be strong and locked up tight or I'll escape. I'm telling you." Having nothing left to accuse her of, they let go. Later the gentleman Clarens—somewhat scandalized by Bernadette's previous day's penitential acts of walking on her knees, kissing the ground, and washing once again in the dirty water—came to persuade her that she was in error and that she should give up going to the Grotto. Clarens walks away converted by the simple, unassuming Bernadette. In the evening some stonemasons from Lourdes work the ground at the Grotto where Bernadette stooped to drink and wash. From that moment the water begins to gush out limpid

and plentiful. Let us rise up early in the morning and say our prayers, seeking ever to keep our baptismal robe free of the stains of sin.

♣ **TWELFTH APPARITION (Ascension)** *Monday, March 1.*

Before some fifteen hundred faithful, Bernadette repeats the same acts of penance as on the previous days. A priest is present for the first time. Standing nearby he describes the scene: "By her posture and by the expression on her face, it was evident that her soul was enraptured. What profound peace! What serenity! What lofty contemplation! Her smile was beyond all description... The child's gaze, fixed on the Apparition, was no less captivating. Impossible to imagine anything so pure, so sweet, so loving..." Of the crowd he says: "The whole crowd felt a gentle thrill. Bernadette alone saw the Apparition, but everyone felt, as it were, conscious of its presence. Joy mingled with fear was depicted on every face. It is difficult to imagine a more religious spectacle. Oh, how good it was to be there! I felt I was on the threshold of Paradise." Later that same day, Catherine Latapie, a young pregnant woman with a paralyzed hand, responds to an urge to visit the Grotto and dips her hand in the water from the spring. She is instantly healed of her malady. This became the first miracle recognized by the Church attributed to Our Lady of Lourdes. May we always seek peace where it can be found... by keeping our eyes fixed on heaven.

♣ **THIRTEENTH APPARITION (Pentecost)**

*Tuesday, March 2.* Today the Lady confides instructions to Bernadette: request of the priests that a chapel be built here and that they come in

procession. When relating the Lady's request to the Dean of Lourdes, the Abbe Peyramale, he asks, "What is the Lady's name?" Bernadette replies, "I do not know, M. le Cure." He lectures her on how she is leading people astray and that "all over the world they will talk about you and the Grotto." The Dean says, "Ask the Lady Her name once more, and when we know Her name, we will build Her a chapel. And it won't be a little one, I tell you; it will be a very big one." Upon leaving the Dean, Bernadette exclaims: "I am quite happy now: I have carried out my commission." It was on the first Pentecost Sunday that the Holy Ghost, Who *proceeds* from the Father and the Son, descended upon the Blessed Mother and the Apostles in the Upper Room. On that day the Church was born visibly, with 3000 men converting at the sermon of St. Peter. The visible Church has been processing to Her final goal ever since. By keeping to our duties of our state in life, we will remain in Her faithful company of pilgrims.

♣ **FOURTEENTH APPARITION (Assumption)** *Wednesday,*

*March 3.* With some three thousand pilgrims pressed in and around the Grotto, Our Lady does not appear. The

grief on Bernadette's face proved to many that she is not hallucinating about the visions. A little later in the morning, however, a relative encourages her to return and try again. At the same time she perceives the familiar interior push to retreat to Massabielle. With only about a hundred people present, Bernadette prays the Rosary and sees the Lady, who says: "You did not see me this morning because there were some people there who wished to see what you look like in my presence, and they are unworthy of it: they spent the night at the Grotto and they dishonored it." Bernadette again requests the Lady's name and that She work a sign for the Dean of Lourdes. The Lady only smiles and disappears. As the mystery of the Assumption took place in hiddenness, so too let us not foolishly unveil the special graces given to us from heaven lest they evaporate like perfume from an open bottle.

♣ **FIFTEENTH APPARITION (Coronation)** *Thursday, March 4.* On the last of the fifteen days requested by the Lady, after attending Mass, Bernadette makes her way to the Grotto where she prays all 15 decades of the Rosary and smiles 18 separate times as she is enraptured for over an hour. Although most of the twenty thousand people present sense the deep peace of the moment, many are sad something more fantastic did not happen. Asked later "why were you sometimes happy and sometimes sad?" during the ecstasy, Bernadette responds: "I am sad when She is sad, and I smile when She smiles." Let us resolve to serve His Majesty, Jesus Christ, and His beloved Queen, Blessed Mary, heedless of the consolations received or not received.

From this time large numbers of pilgrims begin a constant vigil at the Grotto. Candles are constantly burning and offerings cover the ground to assist in the cost of constructing a chapel.

♣ **SIXTEENTH APPARITION (Solemn Feast of the Annunciation)** *Thursday, March 25.* Although there has been no trace of the Lady for the past three weeks and Bernadette had not visited the Grotto, she is moved by a grace to return to the cave of Massabielle. Upon arriving very early in the morning, she finds the Lady already present, looking kindly over a large crowd. On this day, the Feast of the Annunciation, Bernadette is moved to ask fervently three times the Lady's name, after which She makes a grace filled sweeping motion looking up to heaven (not unlike the priest makes at the beginning of the Canon at Mass), declaring solemnly: "I am the Immaculate Conception" (using the local dialect, "*Que soy era Immaculada Councepciou*") and, once again, She disappears smiling.

♣ **SEVENTEENTH APPARITION** *Wednesday of Easter Week, April 7.* After the last apparition, Bernadette had to undergo the scrutiny and tests of various doctors. Today, moved to return once again to the Grotto, she falls into a rapture holding a large candle, whose flame she protected by her left hand. Witnessed by the physician Dr. Dozous of Lourdes, the enraptured Bernadette holds her hand in the candle's flame for 15 minutes without incurring any bodily harm. The

physician prevents anyone from rescuing her. He finds no sign of injury when examining her afterwards. Twenty-one years later on this same liturgical day, Wednesday after Easter, Bernadette would die, her body remaining incorrupt.

♣ **EIGHTEENTH AND FINAL APPARITION (Feast of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel)** *Friday, July 16.* As the sun was setting, Bernadette is once again interiorly moved to visit the Grotto. Barred by a fence the authorities erected, she approaches from across the river and falls into a rapture once again. As it was in her first encounter, so too in the last... no words are spoken. She later said, "I have never seen Her look so beautiful." When her friends asked how she could see the Lady so well from across the River Gave and with the barrier in place, Bernadette replied, "I saw neither the Gave nor the planks. It seemed to me that the distance between the Lady and myself was no greater than at other times. I saw only Her." We know that Our Lady promised Bernadette to be with her for the remainder of her life. How fitting that the last apparition occurred on the Feast day of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel, who promises to be near all those who wear Her Scapular.

Since these phenomenal apparitions of 1858, Lourdes, France has become a site of pilgrimage, with some six million pilgrims passing through each year. The reasons: just as Our Lady was present before St. Bernadette arrived on March 25, 1858, so too, She is there for us now. Most who visit Lourdes feel Her presence. Many weak in faith or lacking any belief in God have been instantly converted at the Grotto. Also, the waters flowing from the cave of Massabielle have been the source of many physical and spiritual healings. Finally, the site is a place where Catholics from around the world can come and feel at home in worshipping God and honoring His Blessed Mother.

Although many thousands have received marvelous cures there, less than seventy are recognized by the Church as verifiably miraculous according to the Lourdes Medical Bureau's rigorous standards. The following is among the first of these recognized miracles... In 1858 Bernadette's neighbor, Louis-Justin Bouhohorts, only 18 months old at the time, suffered from meningitis, polio-myelitis, and complete paralysis of his legs. After a seizure, the doctor pronounced him near death, giving him only hours to live. In fact, his father had left the house to make burial arrangements, but his mother took Louis-Justin to the Grotto spring and immersed him in the water. Upon returning home, the child slept through the night. In the morning, he was able to walk even though he had never walked before! Doctors pronounced his cure complete and inexplicable. In fact, at age 77, Louis-Justin attended the canonization of St. Bernadette in Rome ♣

