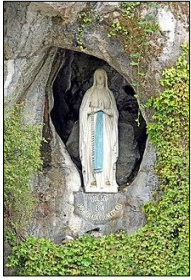


Our Lady of Lourdes

11th February 1858



One of the most famous appearances of the Blessed Virgin Mary over the centuries was to Saint Bernadette at the grotto in Lourdes in 1858. Here we recall the facts surrounding the visions, and God's gift, by Mary's hands, of so many healings of body and soul that have since ensued there.

Lourdes is a town in southern France, in the Pyrenees foothills. Bernadette Soubirous (7 January 1844 – 16 April 1879), the eldest of a poor family there, was a sickly child. She was fourteen years old when, on 11th February 1858, she went with her sister and a friend to collect firewood by the Gave de Pau River that runs through the town.

A mile away is the rocky outcrop of Massabielle, in which there is a cave-grotto. As the other girls went on ahead, Bernadette saw a lady in the grotto, holding a rosary. Bernadette then prayed the Rosary, at the end of which the Lady disappeared.

This was the first of eighteen visions that Bernadette received, principally in the following three weeks, with the final three over the following months. Only Bernadette could see the Lady, though by early March the crowds with her had grown to about 8000.

On 18th February, the Lady spoke, asking her to come there for a fortnight. A pivotal event during that time was the appearance of the spring. On 25th February the Lady had asked Bernadette, 'Go, drink of the spring'. There was only some muddy water, which she managed to drink – to the ridicule of some in the crowd. But on 1st March, the first healing took place with the water of the newly-found spring, which has flowed ever since. And healing has been the defining feature of Lourdes – the numerous miraculous cures that have taken place there these 160 years, verified by the independent Medical Bureau.

The parish priest insisted to Bernadette that the Lady reveal her name, and this she finally did on 25th March: '***I am the Immaculate Conception***', she told Bernadette, who did not understand these words. Pope Pius IX, in 1854, had infallibly defined Mary's Immaculate Conception as Catholic dogma, and now Mary confirmed this by her own lips.

'I am the Immaculate Conception.'

Human beings, the Catholic Church teaches, bear 'original sin'. Due to Adam's Fall, we come into existence deprived of sanctifying grace – the share in God's own life that is the seed of heavenly life. The Immaculate Conception is the teaching that, by God's special gift granted in view of the foreseen merits of Christ her Son, Mary came into existence unstained by original sin, with sanctifying grace already in her soul. And Mary, by humbly confessing, 'I am the Immaculate Conception', proclaims that this expresses, indeed, her very identity: she is the masterpiece of Christ's redeeming grace.

TIMELINE OF THE APPARITIONS OF 1858

11th February Bernadette, about to wade the stream, heard a noise like a gust of wind and looked up towards the grotto: "I saw a lady dressed in white, she wore a white dress, an equally white veil, a blue belt and a yellow rose on each foot." Bernadette prayed the rosary, while the Lady, who also held a rosary, passed the beads through her own fingers. When the prayer ended the Lady suddenly vanished.

14th February Bernadette felt an inner force drawing her to the grotto. Her parents, learning of her first experience, had initially forbidden her to return there, but at her insistence, her mother had allowed her. After praying the first decade of the rosary, she saw the Lady appearing. When she sprinkled holy water (to ward off evil), the Lady smiled and bent her head.

18th February For the first time, the Lady spoke. Bernadette held out a pen and paper asking her to write her name. She replied, "It is not necessary." She then said: "I do not promise you happiness in this world, but in the next. Would you be kind enough to come here for a fortnight?"

19th February This was a short and silent apparition. Bernadette came to the grotto with a lighted blessed candle. (This is the origin of carrying candles and lighting them in front of the grotto.)

20th February The Lady taught her a personal prayer. At the end of the vision Bernadette was overcome with sadness.

21st February The Lady appeared to Bernadette early in the morning; about 100 people were present. She was later questioned by the police commissioner. (On 22nd February, Bernadette went to the grotto, but the Lady did not appear.)

23rd February The crowd was 150. The apparition revealed to Bernadette a secret "for her alone".

24th February The message of the Lady: "Penance! Penance! Penance! Pray to God for sinners."

25th February Three hundred people were present. Bernadette relates, "She told me to go, drink of the spring...I only found a little muddy water. At the fourth attempt I was able to drink. She also made me eat the bitter herbs that were found near the spring, and then the vision left and went away." Some in the crowd ridiculed her actions as crazed.

27th February This time eight hundred people were present. The apparition was silent. Bernadette drank the water from the spring and carried out her usual acts of penance.

28th February Over a thousand people were present. Bernadette prayed, kissed the ground and moved on her knees as a sign of penance. She was then taken to the house of Judge Ribes who threatened to put her in prison.

1st March Over 1500 people assembled. At dawn, Catherine Latapie had come to the grotto and plunged her hand – partially immobile after an accident 18 months earlier caused ulnar paralysis – into the water of the spring, and was instantly cured. Later that month Louis Bouriette would be cured of two years' complete blindness in his right eye – the result of an accident – after bathing it in the water of the spring. The documented cures of Blaisette Cazenave, Henri Busquet, Justin Bouhort, Madelaine Rizan and Marie Moreau would follow over the course of 1858.

2nd March The Lady asked Bernadette: "Go and tell the priests that people are to come here in procession and to build a chapel here." Bernadette told this to Fr Peyramale, the parish priest of Lourdes. He wanted to know only one thing: the Lady's name; and he demanded another test: to see the wild rose bush flower at the grotto in the middle of winter.

3rd March Early in the morning, with 3000 people present, Bernadette arrived at the grotto, but the vision did not appear. But after school, she heard the inner 'invitation' of the Lady. She went to the grotto and asked her again for her name. The response was a smile.

4th March The crowd of about eight thousand people waited for a miracle as the fortnight came to an end. But the vision was silent, and the rose bush did not bloom. (Much as we, like the crowd, might wish it to have bloomed, it reminds us that God does not usually work miracles to our prior specifications – but in any case, much greater and clearer miracles were to follow, in the many healings in the years to come.) Fr Peyramale, meanwhile, stuck to his position. For twenty days Bernadette did not go to the grotto – she no longer felt the irresistible invitation.

25th March (Feast of the Annunciation) On the day the Church celebrates the Angel Gabriel greeting Mary as the one 'full of grace', (Lk 1:28) the Lady finally revealed her name. As Bernadette recounted: "She extended her arms towards the ground, then joined them as though in prayer and said: 'I am the Immaculate Conception'". Bernadette ran to tell the parish priest, repeating continuously these words that she did not understand.

7th April In this apparition, Bernadette, in the ecstasy of the vision, for 15 minutes rested her hand over a candle flame unaware, without responding or being burnt – as witnessed by bystanders, including medical doctor, Dr Douzous.

16th July (Feast of Our Lady of Mt Carmel) Bernadette received the mysterious call to the grotto, but the way was closed by a barrier. However, she saw the vision from the other side of the Gave River. "I felt that I was in front of the grotto, at the same distance as before. I saw only the Blessed Virgin, and she was more beautiful than ever."



In later years...

18th January 1862 The Bishop of Tarbes gives official Church approval to the apparitions of Lourdes.

29th July 1866 Bernadette enters the Sisters of Charity.

16th April 1879 She dies at Nevers from tuberculosis.



22nd September 1909 First exhumation of her body, in the presence of two doctors and other witnesses. They find it completely incorrupt. (In 1919 some darkening was found, due to a washing of the body in 1909. So for purposes of public devotion a customary light wax coating was given, seen in photographs such as the adjacent. But such images can still be seen as evocative of her original perfect preservation. In 1925, doctors found the muscles atrophied and the skin shrivelled, but no apparent decay.)



14th June 1925 Bernadette is declared 'Blessed' by Pope Pius XI.

8th December 1933 Pius XI canonises her as St Bernadette Soubirous; her feast day is 16th April.

13th May 1992 Pope John Paul II names 11th February (Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes) to be also World Day of the Sick.

THE MIRACULOUS HEALINGS

Claimed cures at Lourdes are investigated by the Medical Bureau, whose meetings doctors of any religious belief can be part of. To be accepted, any cure must be from a serious illness virtually impossible to cure; the cure must be sudden, complete and permanent, and unrelated to any prior medical treatment.

There is assessment of the patient's personality in order to rule out trickery, acting, illusion, or a possible hysterical or delirious pathology. A study of the medical documents before and after the cure is made, to ensure that there was an indisputable change from a precise medical diagnosis of a known illness to a situation of restored health. Only if the International Medical Committee finds a cure to be unexplained by current medical science might the local bishop of the patient then declare the cure miraculous.

Even if a cure might (in itself) be hypothesised as one day maybe being explicable by *future* science, there is generally also the 'coincidence' of the sudden cure occurring at the very time, for example, of the use of the Lourdes water, or the Blessing of the Sick or Eucharistic Procession at Lourdes.

Generally, the medical conditions in question are accepted as not being psychologically based, so such coincidences are not explained merely by the power of suggestion. The Lourdes water itself has of course been tested, and is basically pure water, with no extraordinary chemical properties.

Over 7000 claimed cures have been presented to the Bureau. Using the above rigorous standards, Church authority has declared only 70 of these cures to be *miraculous*. (Actually, even just one valid proof would indicate that Lourdes was genuine: 70 is abundance.)

This does not mean that none at all of the other thousands of cures were truly miraculous – maybe only that the evidence and documentation presented were not sufficient to *prove* their miraculous nature with certainty. Thus a sceptic, considering any single one of these other thousands of individual cases in isolation, might legitimately say, 'not proven'. And yet, once we have already accepted the miraculous nature of all or at least many of the 70 'official' cures, it is a reasonable supposition that some proportion, at least, of the other thousands of cases may also be miraculous – even though this cannot be strictly proven in the particular individual instances.

THE DECLARED MIRACLES OF LOURDES

1. Catherine Latapie: **ulnar paralysis**; 2. Louis Bouriette: **blindness in right eye**; 3. Blaisette Cazenave: **chemosis with ectropion**; 4. Henri Busquet: **fistular adenitis**; 5. Justin Bouhort: **chronic post-infective malnutrition with retarded motor development**; 6. Madelaine Rizan: **left hemiplegia**; 7. Marie Moreau: **lesions on the eye with major loss of vision**; 8. Pierre De Rudder: **un-united fracture of the left leg with pseudarthrosis**; 9. Joachime Dehant: **ulcer of leg with extensive gangrene**; 10. Elisa Seisson: **cardiac hypertrophy, oedema of lower limbs**; 11. Sr Eugenia: **abscess in the right iliac fossa with fistulae; phlebitis**; 12. Sr Julienne: **pulmonary tuberculosis**; 13. Sr Joséphine-Marie: **pulmonary tuberculosis**; 14. Amélie Chagnon: **tuberculous osteo-arthritis**; 15. Clémentine Trouvé: **osteo periostitis of the right foot**; 16. Marie Lebranchu: **pulmonary tuberculosis**; 17. Marie Lemarchand: **pulmonary tuberculosis with ulcers of face and legs**; 18. Elise Lesage: **tuberculous osteo-arthritis**; 19. Sr Marie de la Présentation: **chronic tuberculous gastro-enteritis**; 20. Fr Cirette: **amyotrophic lateral sclerosis of spinal cord**; 21. Aurélie Huprelle: **acute pulmonary tuberculosis**; 22. Esther Brachmann: **tuberculous peritonitis**; 23. Jeanne Tulasne: **lumbar Pott's disease, with neuropathic club foot**; 24. Clémentine Malot: **pulmonary tuberculosis with haemoptysis**; 25. Rose François: **fistular lymphangitis of the right arm with enormous œdema**; 26. Fr Salvator: **tuberculous peritonitis**; 27. Sr Maximilien: **hydatid cyst of the liver, phlebitis**; 28. Marie Savoye: **rheumatic mitral valvular heart disease**; 29. Johanna Bézenac: **cachexia and lupus of the face**; 30. Sr Saint-Hilaire: **abdominal tumour**; 31. Sr Sainte-Béatrix: **laryngo-bronchitis, probably tuberculous**; 32. Marie-Thérèse Noblet: **dorso-lumbar spondylitis**; 33. Cécile Douville De Franssu: **tuberculous peritonitis**; 34. Antonia Moulin: **fistulous osteomyelitis, arthritis of the knee**; 35. Marie Borel: **six fistulae in lumbar and abdominal region**; 36. Virginie Haudebourg: **tuberculous cystitis, nephritis**; 37. Marie Biré: **blindness of cerebral origin, bilateral optic atrophy**; 38. Aimée Allope: **multiple tuberculous abscesses with four fistulae**; 39. Juliette Orion: **pulmonary and laryngeal tuberculous, suppurating left mastoiditis**; 40. Marie Fabre: **chronic inflammatory bowel disease, uterine prolapse**; 41. Henriette Bressolles: **Pott's disease, paraplegia**; 42. Lydia Brosse: **multiple tuberculous fistulae**; 43. Sr Marie-Marguerite: **abscess of kidney with phlyctenular oedema**; 44. Louise Jamain: **pulmonary, intestinal and peritoneal tuberculosis**; 45. Francis Pascal: **blindness, paralysis of the lower limbs**; 46. Gabrielle Clauzel: **rheumatic spondylosis**; 47. Yvonne Fournier: **Leriche's syndrome**; 48. Rose Martin: **cervical cancer**; 49. Jeanne Gestas: **dyspeptic disorders with post-operative obstructive episodes**; 50. Marie-Thérèse Canin: **dorso-lumbar Pott's disease and tuberculous peritonitis**; 51. Maddalena Carini: **tuberculosis with coronary disease**; 52. Jeanne Frétel: **tuberculous peritonitis**; 53. Théa Angèle: **multiple sclerosis for 6 years**; 54. Evasio Ganora: **Hodgkin's disease**; 55. Edeltraud Fulda: **Addison's disease**; 56. Paul Pellegrin: **post-operative fistula**; 57. Fr Léo Schwager: **multiple sclerosis for 5 years**; 58. Alice Couteault: **multiple sclerosis for 3 years**; 59. Marie Bigot: **arachnoiditis of posterior fossa (blindness, deafness, hemiplegia)**; 60. Ginette Nouvel: **Budd-Chiari disease**; 61. Elisa Aloï: **tuberculous osteo-arthritis, multiple fistulae**; 62. Juliette Tamburini: **osteoperiostitis with fistulae, epistaxis**; 63. Vittorio Micheli: **sarcoma of pelvis**; 64. Serge Perrin: **right hemiplegia, with ocular lesions**; 65. Delizia Cirolli: **Ewing's sarcoma**; 66. Jean-Pierre Bély: **multiple sclerosis**; 67. Anna Santaniello: **fatal form of rheumatic heart disease**; 68. Sr Luigina Traverso: **extensive paralysis**; 69. Danila Castelli: **tumour, related ailments**.

70th Lourdes healing announced

On 11th February 2018, the verification of a 70th cure was announced in France, that of Sr Bernadette Moriau.

From the Associated Press report:

Bishop Jacques Benoit-Gonin of Beauvais proclaimed the miracle nearly a decade after Sr Moriau attended a blessing of the sick ceremony at the Lourdes sanctuary in southern France. Moriau's experience underwent extensive studies and tests by the International Medical Committee of Lourdes.

Moriau had four operations on her spinal column between 1968 and 1975 and was declared fully disabled in 1980. One foot was permanently twisted, requiring her to wear a brace and use a wheelchair. She took what she said were significant doses of morphine for pain.

"I never asked for a miracle," the nun, now 79, recounted of her July 2008 pilgrimage to Lourdes. After returning to her home convent near Beauvais and praying in the chapel, "I felt a (surge of) well-being throughout my body, a relaxation, warmth.... I returned to my room and, there, a voice told me to 'take off your braces,' " she said in a video posted on the Beauvais diocese web site. "Surprise. I could move." Moriau said she immediately did away with all her aids, from braces to morphine — and took a 5 kilometre hike a few days later.

The bishop said the nun's "sudden, instantaneous, complete and durable change" alerted him to a possible miracle. The Lourdes medical committee said the changes were unexplainable "in the current state of our scientific knowledge," he added. Alessandro de Franciscis of the Lourdes Office of Medical Observations said he led the investigation into her cure and is "totally convinced" that there is no medical explanation.