



THE QUEEN OF MAY - Our Lady Of Lourdes

In honor of "The Queen of May", the Faith Formation Commission will have short articles on different topics of the Blessed Virgin Mary for five consecutive weekends. This article, the first of the series, will focus on Our Lady of Lourdes which is the Roman Catholic name given in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary after the apparitions at the village of Lourdes in southern France.

On February 11, 1858, Mary appeared to a fourteen-year-old girl named Bernadette Soubirous, who was a shepherdess described as being poor, simple, innocent, shy, illiterate, and pious. As Bernadette was gathering firewood with her sister and a friend, she arrived at a rock cave. As she was removing her stockings to wade through some water to join the other two, she heard two gusts of wind and saw a beautiful young woman holding a rosary with white beads and golden chain, wearing a white dress with a blue sash and a white veil on her head. Bernadette was the only one of the three who saw the Blessed Virgin. The Blessed Virgin was pleased as Bernadette prayed the rosary. Bernadette was full of joy during the vision.

Observers came to witness Bernadette's encounters with Mary, which totaled eighteen visits. During these encounters, Mary asked for prayer and penance for the conversion of sinners. They prayed the rosary together. She wanted Bernadette to ask the priests to have a chapel built in the grotto. She also told Bernadette three secrets which she was never to reveal. She told Bernadette that she would be happy in the next world.

On February 25, 1858, the lady told Bernadette to "drink from the fountain and bathe in it". So, Bernadette drank from a muddy puddle. People thought she was crazy. The next day water flowed freely from the spring. On March 1, 1858, the first miracle took place. Then thousands of people began visiting the sight.

On March 25, at the suggestion of her parish priest, Bernadette asked the lady her name. The lady replied, "I am the Immaculate Conception". The priest knew that Bernadette was telling the truth. In 1862 a chapel was constructed on the site. In 1866 Bernadette joined the convent of the Sisters of Notre Dame of Nevers.

Four to six million pilgrims travel to visit Our Lady of Lourdes shrine each year, many wanting physical, spiritual, or emotional healing. The spring provides tens of thousands of gallons of water a week and is said to have miraculous curative powers. There have been thousands of cures with 69 recognized by the Catholic Church as miracles.

Our Lady of Lourdes is celebrated on February 11, the anniversary of the first apparition, at mass in many countries. Bernadette was canonized a saint in 1933. Her feast day is April 16.

Pope Pius XII, commemorating the 100th anniversary of the apparitions at Lourdes, wrote an encyclical on Lourdes. Excerpts from the encyclical include: "In the school of Mary one can learn to live, not only to give Christ to the world, but also await with faith the hour of Jesus, and remain with Mary at the foot of the cross... Go to her and receive peace of heart, strength for your daily duties, joy for the sacrifices you offer".

An inspiring video to view is: *Lessons From Lourdes: Our Lady and St. Bernadette* on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DshDkE6O9UA>