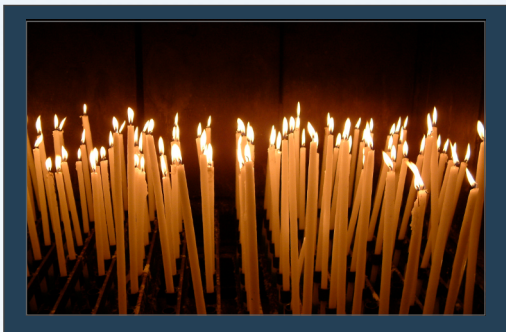




7. Mary the pilgrim

Immediately after the Annunciation, when Mary heard that she was to be a mother, she cast aside any personal needs and travelled to the hill country to visit her cousin, Elizabeth, who also was expecting a child. Mary went to care for someone in need and in so doing undertook a difficult journey.

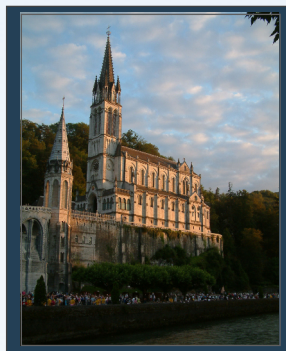
Once more, Mary set off for the hill country; but this time it was to prepare a young girl to meet her Son, Jesus in Holy Communion. Bernadette could not have had a better teacher.

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee.
blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.
Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now, and at the hour of our death. Amen.

Personal prayer

8. The Messages of Lourdes

Consider some of the words spoken by Mary to Bernadette: "Would you have the graciousness to come here every day for fifteen days?" and "I do not promise to make you happy in this world, but in the other." The "other" spoken by Our Lady is thought to mean the world of prayer, the world of spirituality, of detachment from the world of greed, selfishness and power.



Be faithful to the Gospel message of love and forgiveness and you will know peace. Our Lady told Bernadette to ask the priests to build a "chapel" and to ask the people to come in procession. Lourdes has been described as "a foretaste of heaven." And in this sense the priests have indeed helped to build a "church." – a place of acceptance and love.

Reflect on the messages and personal prayer

9. My pilgrimage

My pilgrimage is about to begin; I'm excited but also apprehensive. What will I bring with me to Lourdes? What will I leave behind? Our Lady invites us to leave behind our fears, our regrets, our anger and anything that keeps us from the love of God. Ultimately what I should learn from my pilgrimage is that God loves me and calls me to love in return.

Lord, I pray for that peace which you alone can give and give thanks for the chance to take part in this pilgrimage.

May I become a better person from this experience and may no one be hurt because of anything I do, say or fail to do. Lord, bless our pilgrimage. Amen.

Personal prayer

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NOVENA

LOURDES PILGRIMAGE



1. Pilgrimage

What is a pilgrimage? The whole of life has been described as a pilgrimage. It is a journey to a sacred place to find God or deepen my relationship with God. It is a search for meaning and questioning. Who am I? What is my purpose in life?

What are my expectations of this pilgrimage?
What are my hopes? And what are my concerns?

"The one journey that ultimately matters is the journey into the place of stillness deep within one's self. To reach that place is to be at home; to fail to reach it is to be ever restless." – N Gordon Cosby

Lord, help me to be still and to be open to what you have to say to me as I prepare for my journey to Lourdes. Open my heart and ears to listen to you.

Personal prayer

2. To be a pilgrim

What does it mean to me to be a pilgrim? It means being open to God and open to change. What changes do I need to make in my life? How easy will it be for me to change? Will it make me a better person? What must I do to ensure I am open to what God is saying to me? What will I bring to Lourdes?

Lord, help me face these questions and more as I prepare for my pilgrimage to Lourdes. Grant me the openness to know myself; the humility to listen to what God is saying and the willingness to respond.

Personal prayer

3. Sharing the journey

I'm not travelling alone. Others, too, are searching. Others also will have their hopes, expectations and fears. How warm and welcoming will I be to my fellow pilgrims? Will I listen to their stories or will I be too anxious to tell them mine?

Lord, help me to be friendly, sociable but also sensitive to the needs of others. I pray that I will always put the needs of others before my own desires.

Personal prayer

4. What happened in Lourdes?

On 11 February 1858 a 14-year-old girl, named Bernadette, went with her sister and friend to gather firewood from a field on the outskirts of Lourdes, France. While close to a cave Bernadette saw, in a dark recess high on the wall of the grotto, "a gentle light and a beautiful girl dressed in white who smiled at her."

This was the first of eighteen Apparitions.

OUR LADY OF LOURDES, PRAY FOR US. ST BERNADETTE, PRAY FOR US.

On 25 March, during the sixteenth apparition, the lady revealed her name by saying: "I am the Immaculate Conception." It was Mary, Mother of Jesus who had visited Bernadette. We, too, visit her in this holy place.

Lord, give me the simplicity and humility of Bernadette; help me to be comfortable in your presence and with your Blessed Mother.

Personal prayer

5. Bernadette's Pilgrimage

Bernadette responded to Our Lady's request to visit her every day for fifteen days. She walked only a short distance from her home to the Grotto for each of the Apparitions but her journey was often fraught with difficulty. She was often ridiculed and criticised. One woman slapped her in the face for "putting on the comedies". Bernadette faced many challenging interrogations. Throughout all of this, Bernadette retained her dignity and her gentleness.

Lord, my journey also might be difficult, both the physical journey and the inward journey to discover who you wish me to be. Grant, I pray, to face the challenges ahead with faith in your goodness and hope that the Holy Spirit will guide me on the right path.

Personal prayer



6. Bernadette the pilgrim

Was Bernadette searching for something? One thing is certain; she desperately desired to make her First Holy Communion; she longed to receive Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. When asked what made her happier, her First Holy Communion or the Apparitions, she replied: "The two go together but they cannot be compared. I was very happy with both."

Bernadette was humble; she sought obscurity, rather than attention; she was steadfast and when asked if she was afraid, she replied, "I am not afraid for I have always told the truth."

Lord, to be a true pilgrim may mean letting go of my securities and be open to change. This worries me; I might not be ready to change. Help me to see things as you do.

Personal prayer

