

St. Bernadette Soubirous (1844-1879)

Bernadette Soubirous was born in 1844, the first child of an extremely poor miller in the town of Lourdes in southern France. The family was living in the basement of a dilapidated building when on February 11, 1858, the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared to Bernadette in a cave above the banks of the Gave River near Lourdes. Bernadette, 14 years old, was known as a virtuous girl though a dull student who had not even made her first Holy Communion. In poor health, she had suffered from asthma from an early age.



There were 18 appearances in all, the final one occurring on the feast of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel, July 16. Although Bernadette's initial reports provoked skepticism, her daily visions of "the Lady" brought great crowds of the curious. The Lady, Bernadette explained, had instructed her to have a chapel built on the spot of the visions. There the people were to come to wash in and drink of the water of the spring that had welled up from the very spot where Bernadette had been instructed to dig.

According to Bernadette, the Lady of her visions was a girl of 16 or 17 who wore a white robe with a blue sash. Yellow roses covered her feet, a large rosary was on her right arm. In the vision on March 25 she told Bernadette, "I am the Immaculate Conception." It was only when the words were explained to her that Bernadette came to realize who the Lady was.

Few visions have ever undergone the scrutiny that these appearances of the Immaculate Virgin were subject to. Lourdes became one of the most popular Marian shrines in the world, attracting millions of visitors. Miracles were reported at the shrine and in the waters of the spring. After thorough investigation Church authorities confirmed the authenticity of the apparitions in 1862.

During her life Bernadette suffered much. She was hounded by the public as well as by civic officials until at last she was protected in a convent of nuns. Five years later she petitioned to enter the Sisters of Notre Dame. After a period of illness she was able to make the journey from Lourdes and enter the novitiate. But within four months of her arrival she was given the last rites of the Church and allowed to profess her vows. She recovered enough to become infirmarian and then sacristan, but chronic health problems persisted. She died on April 16, 1879, at the age of 35.

She was canonized in 1933. Her feast day is April 16.

Millions of people have come to the spring Bernadette uncovered for healing of body and spirit, but she found no relief from ill health there. Bernadette moved through life, guided only by blind faith in things she did not understand—as we all must do from time to time.

St. Bernadette, pure and simple child, you who were privileged to behold the beauty of Mary Immaculate and to be the recipient of her confidence eighteen times at Lourdes; you who did desire from then on to hide yourself in the cloister of Nevers and there live and die as a victim of sinners' obtain for us that spirit of purity, simplicity, and mortification, which will lead us also to the glorious vision of God and Mary in Heaven. Amen.

Our Lady of Lourdes



On December 8, 1854, Pope Pius IX proclaimed the dogma of the Immaculate Conception in the apostolic constitution *Ineffabilis Deus*. A little more than three years later, on **February 11, 1858**, a young lady appeared to Bernadette Soubirous. This began a series of visions. During the apparition on March 25, the lady identified herself with the words: **“I am the Immaculate Conception.”**

Bernadette was a sickly child of poor parents. Their practice of the Catholic faith was scarcely more than lukewarm. Bernadette could pray the Our Father, the Hail Mary and the Creed. She also knew the prayer of the **Miraculous Medal**: “O Mary conceived without sin.”

During interrogations Bernadette gave an account of what she saw. It was “something white in the shape of a girl.” She used the word *aquero*, a dialect term meaning “this thing.” It was “a pretty young girl with a rosary over her arm.” Her white robe was encircled by a blue girdle. She

wore a white veil. There was a yellow rose on each foot. A rosary was in her hand. Bernadette was also impressed by the fact that the lady did not use the informal form of address (*tu*), but the polite form (*vous*). The humble virgin appeared to a humble girl and treated her with dignity.

Through that humble girl, Mary revitalized and continues to revitalize the faith of millions of people. People began to flock to Lourdes from other parts of France and from all over the world. In 1862 Church authorities confirmed the authenticity of the apparitions and authorized the cult of Our Lady of Lourdes for the diocese. **The Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes – February 11** – became worldwide in 1907.

Lourdes has become a place of pilgrimage and healing, but even more of faith. Church authorities have recognized over 60 miraculous cures, although there have probably been many more. To people of faith this is not surprising. It is a continuation of Jesus’ healing miracles—now performed at the intercession of his mother. Some would say that the greater miracles are hidden. Many who visit Lourdes return home with renewed faith and a readiness to serve God in their needy brothers and sisters. There still may be people who doubt the apparitions of Lourdes. Perhaps the best that can be said to them are the words that introduce the film The Song of Bernadette: “For those who believe in God, no explanation is necessary. For those who do not believe, no explanation is possible.”

“Lo! Mary is exempt from stain of sin, Proclaims the Pontiff high; And earth applauding celebrates with joy Her triumph, far and high. Unto a lowly timid maid she shows Her form in beauty fair, And the Immaculate Conception truth Her sacred lips declare.” (Unattributed hymn from the Roman Breviary)

Patron Saint of: Bodily ills

Saint Catherine Labouré and The Miraculous Medal (1806-1876)

Saint Catherine was born on May 2, 1806 to Peter and Louise

Labouré. On January 22, 1830 she entered the Probation House of the Daughters of Charity at Rue du Bac, Paris. On April 21 of that same year, she officially became a novice.

en·coun·ter

[spirituality]



On July 19, she experienced a vision of the blessed Mother sitting in the Director's chair in the chapel. Catherine knelt beside the Blessed Mother, rested her hands on Mary's lap, and felt the Virgin's arms around her. Mary said, "God wishes to charge you with a mission. You will be contradicted, but do not fear; you will have the grace." On November 27, 1830, the Blessed Mother appeared to her again. Catherine, raising her eyes to the main altar, saw her beautiful Lady standing on a large globe. Mary's silken robe shone with the whiteness of dawn. A pure white veil fell to her feet and beneath the veil she wore a lace band binding her hair. A small golden ball was in her hands which she offered to God with her eyes heavenward. Suddenly, Mary's hands were resplendent and flashed in a brilliant cascade of light. The flood of glory was so bright that the globe on which Mary stood was no longer visible. Catherine understood that the rays symbolized the graces shed on those who sought them. The gems on Our Lady's fingers had no rays. Catherine understood this to symbolize the graces for which people did not ask. Mary's arms swept wide and down. Surrounding her head was an oval frame with the words, "O Mary conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee."

Then the vision of the Virgin turned completely around. On the other side appeared a huge 'M' with a cross about it. The letter rested on a bar, beneath which appeared two hearts. The first heart was encircled by a crown of thorns, the second was pierced by a sword. Catherine understood this to mean that we have been purchased by a God who was crucified in the very presence of his own mother, the Queen of Martyrs. The Virgin spoke again. This time she gave a direct order. "Have a medal struck in this form. All who wear it will receive great graces."

Catherine's confessor obtained permission from the Archbishop to have the medal struck. Catherine kept this secret all of her life, revealing it only to her confessor. She passed to her eternal reward on December 31, 1876, and was canonized on July 27, 1947. The first parish in the world to be named in her honor was Saint Catherine Labouré parish in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania on March 1, 1948. Her feast day is **November 28**.



The Miraculous Medal Novena Prayers

In the name of the Father + and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Come, O Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of Your faithful, and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth Your Spirit, and they shall be created, and you shall renew the face of the earth.

Let us pray. O God, who did instruct the hearts of the faithful by the light of the Holy Spirit, grant us in the same Spirit to be truly wise and ever to rejoice in His consolation, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

O Mary, conceived without sin: Pray for us, who have recourse to you. (3x)

O Lord Jesus Christ, who have vouchsafed to glorify by numberless miracles | the Blessed Virgin Mary, | Immaculate from the first moment of her conception, | grant that all who devoutly implore her protection on earth, | may eternally enjoy Your presence in heaven, | who, with the Father and Holy Spirit, | live and reign, God, forever and ever. Amen.

O Lord Jesus Christ, | who for the accomplishment of your greatest works, | have chosen the weak things of the world, | that no flesh may glory in your sight; | and who for a better and more widely diffused belief | in the Immaculate Conception of Your Mother, | have wished that the Miraculous Medal | be manifested to Saint Catherine Laboure, | grant, we beseech You, | that filled with like humility, | we may glorify this mystery by word and work. Amen.

Memorare

Remember, O most compassionate Virgin Mary, | that never was it known | that anyone who fled to your protection, | implored your assistance, | or sought your intercession, | was left unaided. | Inspired with this confidence, | we fly unto you, | O Virgin of Virgins, our Mother; | to you we come; | before you we kneel, | sinful and sorrowful. | O Mother of the Word Incarnate, | despise not our petitions, | but in your clemency hear and answer them. Amen.

Novena Prayer

Priest and People: O Immaculate Virgin Mary, | Mother of our Lord Jesus and our Mother, | penetrated with the most lively confidence | in your all-powerful and never-failing intercession | manifested so often through the Miraculous Medal, | we your loving, and trustful children | implore you to obtain for us | the graces and favors we ask during this Novena, | if they be beneficial to our immortal souls, | and the souls for whom we pray.

(Here privately form your petitions.)

You know, O Mary, | how often our souls have been the sanctuary of your Son | who hates iniquity. | Obtain for us then | a deep hatred of sin | and that purity of heart | which will attach us to God alone | so that our every thought, word and deed | may tend to His greater glory. | Obtain for us also | a spirit of prayer and self-denial | that we may recover by penance | what we have lost by sin | and at length attain to that blessed abode | where you are the Queen of Angels and of men. Amen.

An Act of Consecration to Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal

O Virgin Mother of God, | Mary Immaculate, | we dedicate and consecrate ourselves to you | under the title of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal. | May this Medal be for each one of us | a sure sign of your affection for us | and a constant reminder of our duties toward you. | Ever while wearing it, | may we be blessed by your loving protection | and preserved in the grace of your Son. | O most powerful Virgin, | Mother of our Savior, | keep us close to you | every moment of our lives. | Obtain for us, your children | the grace of a happy death; | so that, in union with you, | we may enjoy the bliss of heaven forever. Amen.

O, Mary conceived without sin. Pray for us who have recourse to you. (3x)