

FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK

THE FEAST OF LOURDES...

There is an old story told about a little old Irish lady who visited the great Shrine of Lourdes which is in southern France. At that shrine, many wonderful miracles have taken place through the years. When the woman returned from her trip to the shrine, a customs officer examined her luggage. He asked her, "What's in that bag?" The lady replied, "Oh, in there? Why there's Lourdes water in there!" Well, the customs agent smelled alcohol so he asked her to open the bag. When she did, he shouted, "Hey this is whiskey!" The woman bowed her head and said, "Glory be to God-another miracle!"

Well, there have been many authentic miracles that have come out of the shrine of Lourdes through the years. I am writing about Our Lady of Lourdes in the bulletin this week because on this coming Monday, February 11th, we celebrate this great Marian Feast. I am sure that most of us have heard about the story of Our Lady's apparition there.

It was on February 11, 1858 that the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared to Bernadette Soubirous, a poor peasant girl in the Grotto at Massabielle, France. As Bernadette was praying the rosary, Mary appeared to her. As she described it, "There came out of the Grotto a golden colored cloud and soon after a lady, young and beautiful, the like of whom I had never seen..."

The Blessed Virgin prayed the rosary with Bernadette and on successive visits told her to unearth a spring. At first, this was difficult as there was not that much water there, just a few drops in the mud. But Bernadette dug and dug and finally unearthed the spring at Lourdes at which she drank from. Since that time, millions of people have gone to the shrine there to drink the healing waters and to bathe in them.

Those who are seriously ill, "Malades" as they are called, are helped into the water and many miraculous healings have taken place. When I visited Lourdes in 1988, I was so impressed to see hundreds of crutches all along the walls near the Grotto. Those crutches were placed there by people who had been cured and no longer needed them!

When Our Lady spoke to Bernadette, she identified herself as the "Immaculate Conception." The word immaculate means "not stained." In a world that is so stained, so corrupted by lust, avarice, pride and immorality, we need a role model to look up to. That good example is the Blessed Virgin Mary. The stain of sin never touched her at all. She is our "tainted nature's solitary boast."

At Lourdes, Mary told Bernadette that prayer, penitence and detachment from material things were very important. Unfortunately, in our world today we hear the opposite message. Most people don't pray, don't sacrifice and immerse themselves totally in the good and pleasurable things of this world, forgetting their eternal destiny. This life is not all there is. The Christian philosophy, is "First the fast, then the feast (The Feast of Heaven). The worldly philosophy is "First the feast, then the hangover!"

As we celebrate the Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes on Monday, we ask the Blessed Mother for a healing miracle. May she touch us all with her motherly love and bring peace, health and happiness today, but unfortunately in all the wrong places. May Our Blessed Mother Mary always be our guiding star in these days when so many have lost their way to God and to peace!

*Sincerely in Christ,
Father Jerome*