

St. Bernadette Soubirous

A Prayer

O God, protector and lover of the humble, You bestowed upon Your servant, Bernadette, the favor of beholding the Immaculate Virgin Mary and of talking with her. Grant that we may deserve to behold You in heaven. Amen.



Patron Saint of People Ridiculed for their Piety

St. Bernadette Soubirous is best known by the apparitions she had of Our Lady of Lourdes. Bernadette was born on January 7, 1844, in Lourdes, France. She was often sick and she suffered from severe asthma throughout her entire life. Her family was very poor; so poor, in fact, that at a very early age Bernadette had to live with a foster-mother for 18 months simply because her parents could not afford to feed her.

As a young girl Bernadette helped her family by working as the shepherdess of the family's flock. Because her family was so poor, Bernadette's education was neglected. At the age of 14 she had not even made her first communion yet. However, she always carried her rosary with her and she knew how to pray the Our Father and Hail Mary prayers.

On February 11, 1858, Bernadette's life changed forever when the Blessed Virgin Mary revealed herself to the 14 year old girl. Mary took out a rosary and asked Bernadette to pray with her. They prayed together and then Mary left her. The Blessed Mother would appear to Bernadette a total of 18 times; the last time was on July 16. Often other people came to see the apparitions but Bernadette was the only one ever able to see Mary.

On February 25 the Blessed Mother appeared to Bernadette and asked her to dig in the mud near her feet. She did so and a miraculous spring appeared out of the ground. The water from this spring continues to flow today, and many people have experienced miracles by using this spring water and asking God for healing from their illnesses.

One month later, on March 25, the Blessed Mother appeared to Bernadette and called herself, "The Immaculate Conception." Young Bernadette did not understand what this title meant, but she repeated it to herself many times until she could tell it to her parish priest. Her priest was amazed by this revelation because it confirmed the very title for Mary that Pope Pius IX had defined only four years earlier!

Unfortunately, some anti-religious government officials and even some people within the Church did not believe Bernadette and persecuted her. Though she was threatened and bullied by authorities, Bernadette was persistent and she never wavered from her faith in the apparitions. Bernadette's name means, "Brave as a bear," and she certainly acted with great courage by clinging to her faith despite persecution.

In 1866 Bernadette went to live with the Sisters of Notre Dame in Nevers, France. Her painful illnesses worsened until she died on April 16, 1879, at the young age of 35. The Blessed Mother had told her, "I do not promise to make you happy in this world, but in heaven." Our Lady's message to Bernadette in the apparitions was to pray for sinners, to do penance, and to have a Church built on the site in Mary's honor. A Church has been at the site since 1866 and each year millions of pilgrims visit Lourdes.

Even after her death God continued to use St. Bernadette. Her coffin was removed from the ground thirty years after her burial and her body was found to look almost exactly as it had the day she was buried! Because her body did not decay like most bodies do after death, her body is called incorrupt. Many people come from around the world to see the body and thank God for His mercy and for Our Blessed Mother.

Bernadette was canonized in 1933 by Pope Pius XI. She is the patron saint of Lourdes, of the poor, of people ridiculed for their piety, of shepherds, and of sick people. She set an example for us today by living humbly, praying her rosary, and doing penance for sinners. She devoted herself completely to Jesus, saying, "Nothing is anything more to me; everything is nothing to me, but Jesus."

Goal for the month:

Pray the rosary; try to set aside a certain time each week to pray the rosary for your family and for poor sinners. Thank God for the good health He has blessed you with and pray for those who are sick and suffering.