

Life

St. Bernadette was born in Lourdes, France in 1844. Her father's business failed, and the family lived in a small one-room jail for debtors. As Bernadette had poor health and often could not go to school because of asthma, she was illiterate. On February 11, 1858, at the age of fourteen, she and her sister and friends gathered firewood at a remote garbage dump. To avoid her getting sick from wading in the water, she was left by the stream. There in a cave, she saw a beautiful lady dressed in white clothes, with a blue sash on her waist and a rosary in her hand. This was the first apparition of the Virgin. The Virgin appeared to her 18 times in a few months. When people heard about Bernadette's experience, many followed her to the cave hoping to see a miracle, but only Bernadette could see the Virgin. On one such appearance, the Virgin ordered her to dig a hole on the ground and drink water from there. Bernadette's face was muddied, and everyone laughed at her and cursed her as a liar. After the crowd left, spring water flowed out of the excavation spot. A blind man resumed his eyesight after his eyes contacted the spring water. This is the Holy spring of Lourdes. The news that the spring water could heal spread quickly throughout Europe. Bernadette was constantly questioned by doctors, officials, clergy, and was treated unreasonably at times, but she was full of confidence and repeated the facts. After four years of in-depth investigation, the Holy See accepted the apparitions of the Virgin to Bernadette. The media and the masses touted her like a god, constantly harassing her. Bernadette chose to go to a distant convent and take care of patients there, and no longer mentioned the Virgin's appearances. She was praised for her humility in saying that "The Blessed Virgin chose me only because I was the most ignorant." She also said: "The Virgin used me as a broom to remove the dust. When the work is done, the broom is put behind the door again."

Bernadette died in 1879. When her body was exhumed later, she was found to be incorrupt. Bernadette was canonized not because she saw the Virgin, but because of her response to this grace, that was, to obey the Lord's instructions and faithfully lived out her faith.

Reflection

Someone once questioned Bernadette: "If the Virgin wants to appear in this world, why does she choose a foolish, illiterate, unheard of shepherd girl?" When Bernadette told the priest to build a chapel in the nearby cave, the priest did not understand why the Lord wants to build a chapel next to a garbage dump. God's thoughts are not our thoughts (Isaiah 55:8). He fully understands and accepts our shortcomings. He will not love us only because we are worthy. Let us obey the teachings of the Virgin and respond to the love of the Lord with repentance and prayer.

On August 15, 2004, Pope John Paul II explained the important message of Lourdes after praying the Angelus, pointing out that the Virgin "Revealing herself as the one who is full of God's grace, she called for penance and prayer. She indicated to Bernadette a spring of water and asked her to drink of it. That spring of fresh water has become one of the symbols of Lourdes: a symbol of the new life which Christ gives to all who turn to him. Christianity is truly a fountain of life, and Mary is the first guardian of this fountain. She points it out to all people, inviting them to renounce their pride and to learn humility, so that they can draw from the mercy of her Son and thus work together for the dawn of the civilization of love."

We must let go of ourselves in order to hear the voice of the Lord, humbly pursue his sacred will, and preach the gospel of love.

Prayer

When the Virgin appeared to Bernadette, she prayed the rosary with her, telling her to pray, repent and atone our sins, and pray for the sinners. Let's obey the instructions of the Virgin and implement her teaching.

May we learn from St. Bernadette's humility to listen to God's will,
follow the instructions of the Virgin to repent,
make amendments, say the rosary and pray for sinners.
St. Bernadette, please pray for us.