



The Raphael Recorder

Charity no

1098328

May/June

Published from 54 Kings Avenue, Woodford Green. IG8 0JF.

2020

Welcome

Welcome to this second edition of the Raphael Recorder.

Our mission is to take the sick and disabled to Lourdes, to care for them in every way during the pilgrimage and with them to offer prayers for all those who suffer in any way. We continue to be disappointed and frustrated by the restrictions placed on travel due to the Corona virus.

Good News

I am delighted to say that Fr Leo is on the mend. He has been told that his condition does not require further treatment. Those living in the Langho area might have heard the sigh of relief from Fr Leo when he received the news. We, too, should give thanks to Our Lord that Leo's medical treatment has been successful.



Thoughts

If the coronavirus has taught us anything is the value of freedoms and how much we took those freedoms for granted. This means to mix with people we like, to travel where and when we like and, too, to worship where we like. The virus has frightened us because none of us knows how to overcome the disease. We are trying to control the spread of the virus and we are all experiencing social distancing. The politicians tell us it is not possible to tell how long restrictions will need to be in place and that we should not expect things to revert to how they were! Like St Bernadette we have to be patient.

More Good News

We are delighted to report that Dorothy Abbott, mother of Trustee Kath Scahill, has reached her majority and attained one hundred years. Dorothy is in a care home and Kath is only able to communicate with her mother through a thick glass panel. The staff at the care home did make a fuss of Dorothy and prepared a party with cake and candles. Ad multos annos.

What is happening in Lourdes.

The Sanctuary of Lourdes has reopened its gates in a very controlled manner. From 16th May the Domaine is open between 2.00pm until 6.00pm and entry will be either through St Michael's Gate or St Joseph's Gate. The Church of St Bernadette on the opposite side of the River Gave will be open for prayer and for confessions. The Rosary will be recited by Fr Horatio Brito, former rector of the Sanctuary, at 3.30pm, and will be televised live.

Pilgrims may enter the Sanctuary in groups of nine and be accompanied by a member of a religious community. To allow as many as reasonably possible to visit the Sanctuary there will be a time limit of thirty minutes for any one group. This should give time for pilgrims to confess, pray in front of the Grotto (albeit with the River between), to light a candle at the 'bruloirs' and to fill bottles with water from the taps. Marshalls will be provided by the local Hospitalities.

The Theme of the Year 2020 in Lourdes is 'I am the Immaculate Conception'

The Pastoral Theme in Lourdes this year is Mary's words, 'I am the Immaculate Conception,' which is the culmination of the messages of Our Lady to Bernadette.

What was the name of the mysterious lady who was appearing to Bernadette? That was the pressing question for her family, the Church and the civil authorities in Lourdes during the apparitions of February and March 1858. Despite Bernadette's request for the lady to sign her name on a paper, the only answer Bernadette received was a smile. Bernadette knew that the lady was kind and gracious to her, that her presence and words filled her with an immense joy, and that the drive to go to the grotto when she felt the inner call could not be resisted.

Before the lady was to reveal herself as Mary Immaculate, she wanted to teach us through Bernadette the reality of sin which disfigures us, separates us from God, and keeps us from experiencing the prospect of the joy of the heavenly world. Hence Mary's requests to Bernadette for penitence, for her to pray for sinners, for her to kiss the ground for sinners, for her to eat the grass in the grotto as a penance. When she told Bernadette to go and wash at the spring, where she had to scabble in the muddy ground to unearth, this was an enactment of the cleansing power of the water of baptism, in which we sinners receive the forgiveness and healing Christ won for us through his passion and death. The next message of the lady was for Bernadette to go and tell the priests to build a chapel there and have the people come in procession. This is meant to be a sign of the renewal of the Church, which is built up of us as its living stones, who gather together to worship, enabling us to live a life free from sin and to witness to God's healing forgiveness and his love.

People had expected that the fortnight of apparitions would reach its climax in a sign to confirm their authenticity, but a three week period of waiting ensues, which is a kind of test of Bernadette's faithfulness. In our own lives we have similar experiences – we have to go on waiting in faith and hope, we have to live according to God's timetable not our own. The period of waiting comes to an end significantly on the 25th March, the Feast of the Annunciation of the Lord, when we celebrate Mary's acceptance of the divine invitation to become Mother of the Redeemer. Having responded to the urge to go once again to the grotto, Bernadette is joined by the lady, and asks her four times, 'Mademoiselle, would you please have the goodness to tell me your name?'

Each time the lady smiles, and on the fourth occasion her face grows serious and she passes the rosary she holds into her right hand. She stretches out her arms towards the earth, a simple gesture in which nevertheless majesty shone forth. Then she joins her hands at the chest, lifts her eyes to the sky and says, 'I am the Immaculate Conception.' It is this moment that the sculptor Joseph Fabisch tried to capture in the statue he carved for the grotto in 1863. He commented, 'I have never seen anything as beautiful as when I asked Bernadette how the Holy Virgin was when she said, "I am the Immaculate Conception." ' Similarly, when Bernadette described the gesture of Our Lady at this moment to the nuns at the convent in Nevers when she entered as a postulant, it caused unspeakable emotion.

At the lady's revealing of her name, Bernadette is overwhelmed with a sense of joy, gratitude and hope, even though she does not yet understand the full meaning of these words. What that meaning is, had really already been explained by St Paul in Ephesians 1:4, 'Before the world was made, God chose us in Christ to be holy and immaculate, and to live through love in his presence.' This has already come true in Mary, who as Mother of the Church is the promise of what we too are destined to become. It is significant that Mary revealed her identity as immaculately conceived to Bernadette on the Feast of the Annunciation. It was on that occasion that the Angel Gabriel saluted her as 'full of grace.' Down through the centuries, the Church has become ever more aware that Mary, full of grace, was redeemed from the first moment of her existence, her conception. Four years before the apparitions in Lourdes, Pope Pius IX had proclaimed, 'The most blessed Virgin Mary was, from the first moment of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege of almighty God and by virtue of the merits of Jesus Christ, Saviour of the human race, preserved immune from all stain of original sin.' Now Mary herself had confirmed this as she revealed her identity to Bernadette. In revealing herself as the Immaculate Conception Mary shows us the promise of victory over sin and evil in our own lives through the redemption her Son won for us. She shows us the faithful love of God and of the fruitfulness of God in our lives. No wonder Bernadette could say in prayer to Mary in later years: 'How glad was my soul, good Mother, when I gazed upon you.'

So our joyful and trusting prayer can be: 'O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee.'

With thanks to Rev Fr Richard Andrew, Parish Priest of Holy Trinity, Brook Green, for this explanation.