

1844 - 1879



# Who was St Bernadette?

Bernadette Soubirous was born in Lourdes on 7th January 1844. She was the eldest of nine children born to Francois Soubirous and Loieuse Casterot. Francois was a miller, but at the time of the Apparitions, was unemployed. The family (six persons) lived in the Cachot (a disused prison cell) in considerable poverty. Bernadette spent some of her childhood on fosterage in Bartres (3 km from Lourdes). She stayed with her aunt and helped by looking after the sheep. In view of her poor health, this was better than the crowded cell. At the time of the Apparitions, early in 1858, Bernadette was 14 years old and had just returned to Lourdes to prepare for her first Communion. She was not a bright pupil and knew only a few prayers.

*The story of Lourdes begins with the story of Bernadette. This young girl was a person of no significance in a small and backward village. Yet through her, that village has become a world centre of spiritual focus. People come from every continent to pray at this shrine. The lesson of her life is that God can use the humblest of us if we come to him with faith and love.*

## The Story of Lourdes

### 1st Apparition: Thursday 11th February 1858

Bernadette went with her sister, Toinette-Marie (11 years) and a friend, Jeanne Abadie (13 years) to collect firewood. Afraid to follow the other two across the small Savy Canal, Bernadette paused, and began to take off her stockings. She heard a gust of wind, but nothing moved. Then she saw a lady at the Grotto nearby.



*"I saw a lady dressed in white. She had a white dress girdled with a blue sash, and a yellow rose on each foot, the colour of the chain of her rosary. After that I rubbed my eyes. I thought I must be making a mistake. I put my hand in my pocket and took out my rosary. I tried to make the Sign of the Cross, but I could not lift my hand to my forehead. The vision made the Sign of the Cross. Then my hand trembled, I tried, and was able to sign myself. I said the rosary. The Vision passed her beads through her fingers, but did not move her lips. When I had finished my rosary, the Vision suddenly disappeared."*



## 2nd Apparition: Sunday 14th February

Bernadette's mother was persuaded by the children to allow them to revisit the Grotto. This time Bernadette sprinkled Holy Water at the Lady: she smiled in return.

## 3rd Apparition: Thursday, 18th February

This time the Lady spoke and said, ***"Will you be good enough to come here every day for fifteen days?"*** She also confided to Bernadette ***"I do not promise to make you happy in this world, but I will in the next."***

## 4th & 5th Apparitions: Fri 19th & Sat 20th February

Bernadette's mother reluctantly permitted further visits and accompanied her daughter to the Grotto.

## 6th Apparition: Sunday 21st February

On this occasion Bernadette was seen to be in tears. She had been given a message. ***"Pray for Sinners."***

## 7th Apparition: Tuesday 23rd February

Again the Lady appeared and spoke. Bernadette's ecstasy lasted for an hour.

## 8th Apparition: Wednesday February 24th

On this day Bernadette kissed the ground and turned to the crowd crying out ***"Penance, penance, penance."***

## 9th Apparition: Thursday February 25th

Today, Bernadette behaved very strangely. She scraped the muddy ground with her hands, and tried to drink and wash. People thought that she had gone insane. However the Lady had said, ***"Go and drink at the spring and wash in it."*** By the next day there was a steady flow of water, at the point where Bernadette scraped away the ground.



## 10th Apparition: Saturday February 27th

This time, Bernadette received a command: ***"Go tell the priests to build a chapel here."*** At the Presbytery, later, she gave the message to the Parish Priest, Abbe Peyramale. He replied that he must know the name of the Lady.

***"God speaks in the depths of the person, without the noise of words."***

## 11th & 12th Apparition: February 28th & March 1st

The Lady appeared but gave no message.

## 13th Apparition: Tuesday March 2nd

The Lady gave another message for the priests: ***“Go and tell the priests to build a chapel here, and to come in procession.”***

Poor Bernadette had to visit the Presbytery again; and once more Abbe Peyramale asked for the Lady’s identity, and for more exact information.

*“For the few years we still have to live in this world, we must do our best to spend our time as well as possible.”*

*“Oh my God, may Your Will be done! I accept all sufferings since such is Your Will.”*

- St Bernadette -

## 14th Apparition: Wednesday March 3rd

There was no apparition in the morning, but later in the afternoon the Lady came.

## 15th Apparition: Thursday March 4th

This time there was no further message, although it was the final day of the promised fifteen days.

## 16th Apparition: Thursday March 25th

This time Bernadette felt a strong urge to ask the Lady her name, which she did four times. The Lady joined her hands over her breast, and said ***“I am the Immaculate Conception.”***

## 17th Apparition: Wednesday April 7th

This was the Wednesday of Easter Week. although there was no message, it was remarkable for the fact that while she was in ecstasy, a bystander held a candle flame to her fingers for fifteen minutes without any trace of burn.

## 18th Apparition: Friday July 16th

Feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. Our Lady appeared for the last time even though the Grotto had been barricaded by the authorities.



*“My job is to inform,  
not to convince.”*

- St Bernadette -

## What happened after the Apparitions?

Two years after the apparitions Bernadette went to stay at the Hospice of the Sisters of Nevers in Lourdes. She remained there until she entered the Novitiate of the order, in the town of Nevers in 1866. She left Lourdes and the Grotto never to return. By that date, many important things had happened. In 1862 the Episcopal Commission had declared that the events at Lourdes had all the marks of truth and were worthy of belief. In 1864 the statue of Mary was placed in the Grotto and blessed. And in 1866, the Crypt, the first 'Chapel' was blessed, and Mass was celebrated there.

## The end of Bernadette's life...

At Nevers, Bernadette began the life of an enclosed nun, though her health was very fragile, and being 22, she was older than the other novices. She became a saint, not because she saw the Blessed Virgin at the Grotto, but because she showed heroic holiness - unwittingly helped by the unusually severe treatment given her by the Mistress of Novices, Mother Marie Therese.

It was during the last three years of her life that her holiness became obvious to all. She had acted as infirmarian and assistant sacristan up to October 1875, but at that point, her health had finally collapsed, and she was confined to bed for the remaining three years. A tubercular condition in the right knee combined with asthma made those years a continual agony. She died on April 16th 1879.

It is an interesting point that although many people were cured or had their conditions eased at Lourdes, Bernadette herself always had poor health and suffered terribly during her final years.

Bernadette Soubirous was declared Blessed in 1925 and a Saint in 1933.



Saint  
**Bernadette**  
Relic Pilgrimage **Ireland 2024**