

Preston, Tuesday 11th February 2025

Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, Amen.

Dear Canons,

Dear Abbe,

Dear Sisters, my dear Brethren,

Today, we celebrate Our Lady of Lourdes, the Virgin who appeared to Saint Bernadette and entrusted her with a message of penance, prayer, and purification. At the heart of these apparitions, there is a simple yet profoundly symbolic act: Mary invites Bernadette to “go drink at the spring and wash herself.” This gesture echoes the mystery of water throughout Scripture, where it is a sign of life, purification, and grace.

From the very first chapters of Genesis, water appears as a fundamental gift from God. In the Garden of Eden, a river flows out and divides into four streams: the Pishon, the Gihon, the Tigris, and the Euphrates¹. This image of Eden’s rivers evokes the abundance and life that God desires for mankind.

But after the Fall, water also becomes an instrument of purification. The Great Flood destroys the world’s evil, yet Noah and his family are saved in the ark². Later, God leads His people through the waters of the Red Sea³, and in the desert, He makes water flow from the rock struck by Moses⁴. These waters already prefigure those of our baptism, through which we pass from the death of sin to life in God.

Throughout the Gospel, Jesus reveals Himself as the true living water. To the Samaritan woman, He says: “Whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst⁵”. He heals the blind man by telling him to wash in the pool of Siloam⁶. And above all, at the moment of His Passion, from His pierced side flows blood and water⁷, symbols of the Eucharist and Baptism, the sources of our salvation.

This living water continues to flow in the Church today: in the baptismal font where we are reborn, in the tears of repentance that cleanse our souls, and in sanctifying grace that nourishes our spiritual life.

When Bernadette Soubirous digs into the muddy ground of the grotto and the water begins to flow, she humbly obeys the Virgin’s invitation. She reminds us that spiritual healing requires humility and faith.

¹ Gen., 2, 10-14.

² Gen., 6-9.

³ Ex., 14.

⁴ Ex., 17, 6.

⁵ Jn., 4, 14.

⁶ Jn., 9, 7.

⁷ Jn., 19, 34.

At Lourdes, many sick pilgrims immerse themselves in the water, hoping for a physical cure. But the deepest miracle is that of the heart: those who come with a contrite spirit, seeking God, find in this spring a renewal of their soul, reconciliation with God, and a stronger life of faith.

If water purifies and gives life, it is always in connection with the spiritual motherhood of the Virgin Mary. At Cana, she intercedes for Jesus to change water into wine⁸. At the foot of the Cross, she becomes our Mother when Jesus entrusts her to us through John⁹.

This is why Lourdes reminds us that Mary watches over our Christian life as a mother watches over her children. She leads us to the true source, Jesus Christ, and invites us to drink from this living water each day through prayer, the sacraments, and the offering of our lives to God.

Responding to Mary's Call

On this feast day, let us heed Our Lady of Lourdes' invitation: let us go drink and wash at the source. Let us ask her for the grace to rediscover our baptism, to live as true children of God, and to become, in turn, sources of living water for those around us.

May Our Lady of Lourdes take us under her mantle and lead us, with Saint Bernadette, to the only source that will never run dry: the Heart of her Son, where we find salvation and eternal life.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, Amen.

⁸ Jn., 2, 1-11.

⁹ Jn., 19, 26-27.