

# LE PELERINAGE DE LOURDES

## Against Materialism on the Centenary of the Apparitions at Lourdes

Pope Pius XII - 1957

To the Cardinals, Archbishops, and Bishops of France in Peace and Communion with the Apostolic See.

Beloved Sons and Venerable Brethren, Greetings and Apostolic Benediction.

Deep in Our soul are profound and pleasant memories of the pilgrimage to Lourdes which We had the privilege of making when We went to preside, in the name of Our Predecessor, Pius XI, over the Eucharistic and Marian celebrations marking the close of the Jubilee of the Redemption.

2. We are particularly pleased, therefore, to learn that, on the initiative of the Bishop of Tarbes and Lourdes, this Marian city is preparing an appropriate celebration for the centenary of the apparitions of the Immaculate Virgin at the grotto of Massabielle, and that an international committee has been set up for this purpose under the presidency of His Eminence Eugene Cardinal Tisserant, Dean of the Sacred College of Cardinals.

3. We wish to join with you, Beloved Sons and Venerable Brothers, in thanking God for the great favor granted your country, and for the many graces He has bestowed on multitudes of pilgrims during the past century.

4. We wish to invite all Our children to renew in this jubilee year their confident and generous devotion to her who, in the words of Saint Pius X, deigned to establish at Lourdes "the seat of her immense kindness." [1]

5. Every Christian land is a Marian land; there is not a nation redeemed in the blood of Christ which does not glory in proclaiming Mary its Mother and Patroness. This truth is brought into sharp relief by reflection on the history of France. Devotion to the Mother of God dates back to the early days of France's evangelization, and Chartres, one of the most ancient Marian shrines, still attracts a great number of pilgrims, including thousands of young people.

6. The Middle Ages, which, especially through Saint Bernard, sang Mary's glory and celebrated her mysteries, witnessed a marvelous flowering of French cathedrals dedicated to our Lady: Le Puy, Rheims, Amiens, Paris, and so many others. . . With their spires upthrust they announce from afar the glory of the Immaculate; they heighten its splendor in the pure light of their stained-glass windows and in the harmonious beauty of their statues. They bear witness above all to the faith of a people which outdid itself in a magnificent display of energy, erecting against the sky of France the permanent homage of its devotion to Mary.

7. In the cities and the countryside, on the hilltops and overlooking the sea, shrines consecrated to Mary — whether humble chapels or splendid basilicas — little by little enfolded the country in their protective shadow. Princes and shepherds of souls and the faithful without number have come to these shrines through the centuries, to the holy Virgin whom they have greeted with titles expressive of their hope or gratitude.

8. Here they invoke Notre Dame de Misericorde [Our Lady of Mercy], de Toute Aide [of All Help], de Bon Secours [of Prompt Succor]. There the pilgrim seeks refuge near Notre Dame de la Garde [Our Lady of Watchfulness], de Pitie, or de Consolation. Elsewhere

the pilgrim's prayer rises to Notre Dame de Lumiere [Our Lady of Light], de Paix, de Joie, or d'Esperance [of Hope]. Or he implores the intercession of Notre Dame des Vertus, des Miracles, or des Victoires. It is a wonderful litany of invocations whose unceasing recital tells, from province to province, the blessings which the Mother of God has bestowed on the land of France through the ages.

9. In many ways the nineteenth century was to become, after the turmoil of the Revolution, a century of Marian favors. To mention but a single instance, everyone is familiar today with the "miraculous medal." This medal, with its image of "Mary conceived without sin," was revealed to a humble daughter of Saint Vincent de Paul whom We had the joy of inscribing in the catalogue of Saints, and it has spread its spiritual and material wonders everywhere.

10. A few years later, from February 11 to July 16, 1858, the Blessed Virgin Mary was pleased, as a new favor, to manifest herself in the territory of the Pyrenees to a pious and pure child of a poor, hardworking, Christian family. "She came to Bernadette," We once said. "She made her her confidante, her collaboratrix, the instrument of her maternal tenderness and of the merciful power of her Son, to restore the world in Christ through a new and incomparable outpouring of the Redemption." [2]

11. You are quite familiar with the events which took place at Lourdes at that time, the spiritual proportions of which are better measured today. You know, Beloved Sons and Venerable Brethren, the astonishing circumstances under which the voice of that child, the messenger of the Immaculate, compelled the world's recognition despite ridicule, doubt, and opposition. You know the steadfastness and purity of her testimony, wisely put to the test by episcopal authority and approved as early as 1862.

12. Crowds flocked even then and they still surge into the grotto of the apparitions, to the miraculous spring, and into the shrine erected at Mary's request.

13. There is the moving procession of the lowly, the sick, and the afflicted. There is the impressive pilgrimage of thousands of the faithful from a particular diocese or country. There is the quiet visit of a troubled soul seeking truth. "No one," We once said, "has ever seen such a procession of suffering in one spot on earth, never such radiance of peace, serenity, and joy!" [3]

14. Nor will anyone ever know, We might add, the full sum of the benefits which the world owes to the aid of the Virgin! "O specus felix, decorate divae Matris aspectu! Veneranda rupes, unde vitales scatuere pleno gurgite Iymhae!" [4]

15. This century of Marian devotion has also in a certain way woven close bonds between the See of Peter and the shrine in the Pyrenees, bonds which We are pleased to acknowledge.

16. The Virgin Mary herself desired this tie. "What the Sovereign Pontiff defined in Rome through his infallible Magisterium, the Immaculate Virgin Mother of God, blessed among all women, wanted to confirm by her own words, it seems, when shortly afterward she manifested herself by a famous apparition at the grotto of Massabielle. . . ." [5] Certainly the infallible word of the Roman Pontiff, the authoritative interpreter of revealed truth, needed no heavenly confirmation that it might be accepted by the faithful. But with what emotion and gratitude did the Christian people and their pastors receive from the lips of Bernadette this answer which came from heaven: "I am the Immaculate Conception!"

17. It is therefore not surprising that it should have pleased Our Predecessors to multiply their favors toward this sanctuary.

18. As early as 1869 Pius IX of holy memory rejoiced that the obstacles created against Lourdes by the malice of men “rendered stronger and more evident the clarity of the fact.”[6] And strengthened by this assurance, he heaped spiritual benefits upon the newly erected church and crowned the statue of our Lady of Lourdes.

19. In 1892 Leo XIII granted the proper Office and Mass of the feast “In apparitione Beatae Mariae Virginis Immaculatae,” which his successor was to extend to the Universal Church a short time later. Henceforth the ancient appeal of the Scriptures was to have a new application: “Arise, my love, my beautiful one, and come. My dove in the clefts of the rock, in the hollow place of the wall. . .”[7]

20. Near the end of his life, this great Pontiff decided to install and bless a reproduction of the grotto of Massabielle in the Vatican gardens, and in those days his voice rose to the Virgin of Lourdes in an ardent and trusting prayer: “In her power may the Virgin Mother, who once cooperated through her love with the birth of the faithful into the Church, now be the means and guardian of our salvation; may she return the tranquillity of peace to troubled souls; may she hasten the return of Jesus Christ in private and public life.”[8]

21. The fiftieth anniversary of the definition of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin gave Saint Pius X occasion to bear witness in a solemn document to the historic connection between this act of the Magisterium and the apparitions at Lourdes. “Pius IX,” he wrote, “had hardly defined it to be of Catholic faith that Mary was from her very origin exempt from sin, when the Virgin herself began performing miracles at Lourdes.”[9]

22. Soon afterward he created the episcopal title of Lourdes, attached it to that of Tarbes, and signed the introduction of the cause for the beatification of Bernadette. It was especially reserved to this great Pope of the Eucharist to emphasize and promote the wonderful harmony existing at Lourdes between Eucharistic worship and Marian prayer. “Devotion to the Mother of God,” he noted, “has led to a flowering at Lourdes of remarkable and ardent devotion to Christ our Lord.”[10]

23. It could not have been otherwise. Everything about Mary directs us to her Son, our only Savior, in anticipation of whose merits she was immaculate and full of grace. Everything about Mary raises us to the praise of the adorable Trinity; and so it was that Bernadette, praying her rosary before the grotto, learned from the words and bearing of the Blessed Virgin how she should give glory to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

24. We are pleased in this centenary year to adopt as Our home the homage rendered by Saint Pius X: “The unique glory of the shrine of Lourdes lies in the fact that people are drawn there from everywhere by Mary to adore Jesus Christ in the august Sacrament, so that this shrine — at once a center of Marian devotion and a throne of the Eucharistic mystery — surpasses in glory, it seems, all others in the Catholic world.[11]

25. Benedict XV wanted to enrich this shrine, already loaded down with favors, with new and valuable indulgences, and though the tragic circumstances of his Pontificate did not allow him to multiply public expressions of his devotion, he nevertheless willed to honor the Marian city by granting to its bishop the privilege of the pallium at the place of the apparitions.

26. Pius XI, who had been to Lourdes himself as a pilgrim, continued the work of Benedict XV. He had the joy of raising to the honors of the altar the girl who had been favored by the Virgin and who, in the habit of the Congregation of Charity and Christian Instruction, had become Sister Marie Bernard. Did he not, so to say, authenticate on his part the promise made by the Immaculate to young Bernadette that she would “be happy not in this world, but in the next”?

27. From that time on, Nevers, which takes pride in keeping Bernadette’s precious relics, has attracted a great number of Lourdes pilgrims who have wanted to learn from her how the message of Lourdes applies to our day.

28. Soon the illustrious Pontiff who, like his predecessors, had honored the anniversary celebrations of the apparitions by sending a legate, decided to conclude the Jubilee of the Redemption at the Grotto of Massabielle where, in his own words, “the Immaculate Virgin Mary appeared several times to Blessed Bernadette Soubirous, and, in her kindness, exhorted all men to do penance at the scene of these wondrous apparitions, a place she has showered with graces and miracles.”[12] Truly, Pius XI concluded, is this sanctuary “now justly considered one of the principal Marian shrines in the world.”[13]

29. We could not refrain from adding Our voice to this unanimous chorus of praise. We did so particularly in Our Encyclical *Fulgens corona*, by recalling, in the spirit of Our Predecessors, that “the Blessed Virgin Mary herself wanted to confirm by some special sign the definition which the Vicar on earth of her Divine Son had pronounced amidst the vigorous approbation of the whole Church.”[14]

30. On that occasion We recalled how the Roman Pontiffs, conscious of the importance of this pilgrimage, had never ceased to “enrich it with spiritual favors and generous benefits.”[15]

31. The history of the past century, which We have recalled in its broad outlines, is a constant illustration of this Pontifical generosity, the most recent manifestation of which has been the closing at Lourdes of the centenary year of the definition of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception.

32. But We would like especially to recall to your attention, Beloved Sons and Venerable Brothers, a recent document in which We encouraged the growth of a missionary apostolate in your beloved country. We intended by this message to call to mind the “singular merits which France had acquired through the centuries in the progress of the Catholic faith,” and for this reason “We turned Our mind and heart to Lourdes where, four years after the definition of the dogma, the Immaculate Virgin herself gave supernatural confirmation to the declaration of the Supreme Teacher, by appearances, conversations, and miracles.”[16]

33. Today once again We turn to the famous shrine as it prepares to receive the crowds of centenary pilgrims on the shores of the River Gave. In the past century ardent public and private prayers have obtained from God many graces of healing and conversion at Lourdes through Mary’s intercession, and We are firmly confident that in this jubilee year our Lady intends to respond open-handedly once more to the expectation of her children. But We are particularly convinced that she urges us to master the spiritual lessons of the apparitions and set ourselves upon the path which she has so clearly traced for us.

34. These lessons, a faithful echo of the Gospel message, accentuate in a striking way the differences which set off God's judgments from the vain wisdom of this world.

35. In a society which is barely conscious of the ills which assail it, which conceals its miseries and injustices beneath a prosperous, glittering, and trouble-free exterior, the Immaculate Virgin, whom sin has never touched, manifests herself to an innocent child. With a mother's compassion she looks upon this world redeemed by her Son's blood, where sin accomplishes so much ruin daily, and three times makes her urgent appeal: "Penance, penance, penance!" She even appeals for outward expressions: "Go kiss the earth in penance for sinners." And to this gesture must be added a prayer: "Pray to God for sinners."

36. As in the days of John the Baptist, as at the start of Jesus' ministry, this command, strong and rigorous, shows men the way which leads back to God: "Repent!"[17] Who would dare to say that this appeal for the conversion of hearts is untimely today?

37. But the Mother of God could come to her children only as a messenger of forgiveness and hope. Already the water flows at her feet: "Omnes sitiētes, venite ad aquas, et haurietis salutem a Domino." [18] At this spring where gentle Bernadette was the first to go to drink and wash, all miseries of soul and body will flow away. "And I went and washed and I see," the grateful pilgrim will be able to reply, in the words of the blind man of the Gospel.[19]

38. But as was true for the crowds which pressed around Jesus, the healing of bodily ills is still a gesture of mercy and a sign of that power which the Son of Man has to forgive sins.[20] The Virgin invites us to the blessed grotto in her Divine Son's name for the conversion of our hearts and in the hope of forgiveness. Will we heed her?

39. The true greatness of this jubilee year is in the humble answer of the man who admits that he is a sinner. Great blessings for the Church could be justly anticipated if every pilgrim to Lourdes — in fact, every Christian united in spirit with the centenary celebrations — would first realize within himself this work of sanctification, "not in word, neither with the tongue, but in deed and in truth." [21] Moreover, everything invites him to this work, for nowhere, perhaps, except at Lourdes does one feel so moved to prayer, to the forgetting of oneself, and to charity.

40. When they see the devotion of the stretcher-bearers and the serene peace of the invalids, when they consider the spirit of brotherhood which unites the faithful of all races in a single prayer, when they observe the spontaneous mutual assistance and the sincere fervor of the pilgrims kneeling before the grotto, then the best of men are seized by the appeal of a life more completely dedicated to the service of God and their brothers; the less fervent become conscious of their lukewarmness and return to the road of prayer; quite hardened and skeptical sinners are often touched by grace, or at least, if they are honest, are moved by the testimony of this "multitude of believers of one heart and one soul." [22]

41. But in itself this experience of a few brief days of pilgrimage is not usually sufficient to engrave in indelible letters the call of Mary to a genuine spiritual conversion. That is why We exhort the shepherds of dioceses and all priests to outdo one another in zeal that the centenary pilgrimages may benefit by preparation, and, above all, by a follow-up which will be as conducive as possible to a profound and lasting action of grace.

42. Only on condition of a return to regular reception of the sacraments, a regard for Christian morals in everyday life, entry into the ranks of Catholic Action and other apostolates recommended by the Church, can the great crowds expected to gather at Lourdes in 1958 yield — according to the expectations of the Immaculate Virgin herself — the fruits of salvation so necessary to mankind today.

43. But however important it may be, the conversion of the individual pilgrim is not enough. We exhort you in this jubilee year, Beloved Sons and Venerable Brothers, to inspire among the faithful entrusted to your care a common effort for the Christian renewal of society in answer to Mary's appeal.

44. "May blind spirits . . . be illumined by the light of truth and justice," Pius XI asked during the Marian feasts of the Jubilee of the Redemption, "so that those who have gone astray into error may be brought back to the straight path, that a just liberty may be granted the Church everywhere, and that an era of peace and true prosperity may come upon all the nations." [23]

45. But the world, which today affords so many justifiable reasons for pride and hope, is also undergoing a terrible temptation to materialism which has been denounced by Our Predecessors and Ourselves on many occasions.

46. This materialism is not confined to that condemned philosophy which dictates the policies and economy of a large segment of mankind. It rages also in a love of money which creates ever greater havoc as modern enterprises expand, and which, unfortunately, determines many of the decisions which weigh heavy on the life of the people. It finds expression in the cult of the body, in excessive desire for comforts, and in flight from all the austerities of life. It encourages scorn for human life, even for life which is destroyed before seeing the light of day.

47. This materialism is present in the unrestrained search for pleasure, which flaunts itself shamelessly and tries, through reading matter and entertainments, to seduce souls which are still pure. It shows itself in lack of interest in one's brother, in selfishness which crushes him, in justice which deprives him of his rights — in a word, in that concept of life which regulates everything exclusively in terms of material prosperity and earthly satisfactions.

48. "And I will say to my soul. the rich man said, Soul, thou hast many good things laid up for many years; take thy ease, eat, drink, be merry. But God said to him, Thou fool, this night do they demand thy soul of thee." [24]

49. To a society which in its public life often contests the supreme rights of God, to a society which would gain the whole world at the expense of its own soul [25] and thus hasten to its own destruction, the Virgin Mother has sent a cry of alarm.

50. May priests be attentive to her appeal and have the courage to preach the great truths of salvation fearlessly. The only lasting renewal, in fact, will be one based on the changeless principles of faith, and it is the duty of priests to form the consciences of Christian people.

51. Just as the Immaculate, compassionate of our miseries, but discerning our real needs, came to men to remind them of the essential and austere steps of religious conversion, so the ministers of the Word of God should, with supernatural confidence, point out to souls the narrow road which leads to life. [26] They will do this without

forgetting the spirit of kindness and patience which they profess, but also without concealing anything of the Gospel's demands.[27] In the school of Mary they will learn to live not only that they may give Christ to the world, but also, if need be, to await with faith the hour of Jesus and to remain at the foot of the cross.

52. Assembled around their priests, the faithful must cooperate in this effort for renewal. Wherever Providence has placed a man, there is always more to be done for God's cause. Our thoughts turn first to the host of consecrated souls who, within the framework of the Church, devote themselves to innumerable good works. Their religious vows dedicate them more than others to fight victoriously under Mary's banner against the onslaught which inordinate lust for freedom, riches, and pleasure makes on the world. In response to the Immaculate, they will resolve to oppose the attacks of evil with the weapons of prayer and penance and by triumphs of charity.

53. Our thoughts turn also to Christian families. to ask them to remain faithful to their vital mission in society. May they consecrate themselves in this jubilee year to the Immaculate Heart of Mary! For married couples this act of piety will be a valuable aid in performing their conjugal duties of chastity and faithfulness. It will keep pure the atmosphere in which their children grow up. Even more, it will make the family, inspired by its devotion to Mary, a living center of social rebirth and apostolic influence.

54. Beyond the family circle, professional and civic affairs offer a vast field of action for Christians who desire to work for the renewal of society. Gathered about the Virgin's feet, docile to her exhortations, they will first take a searching look at themselves and will try to uproot from their consciences any false judgments and selfish impulses, fearing the falsehood of a love for God which does not translate itself into effective love for their brothers.[28]

55. Christians of every class and every nation will try to be of one mind in truth and charity, and to banish misunderstanding and suspicion. Without doubt, social structures and economic pressures of enormous weight burden the good will of men and often paralyze it. But if it is true, as Our predecessors and We Ourselves have insistently stressed, that the quest for social and political peace among men is, above all, a moral problem, then no reform can bear fruit, no agreement can be lasting without a conversion and cleansing of heart. In this jubilee year the Virgin of Lourdes reminds all men of this truth!

56. And if in her solicitude Mary looks upon some of her children with a special predilection, is it not, Beloved Sons and Venerable Brothers, upon the lowly, the poor, and the afflicted whom Jesus loved so much? "Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest," she seems to say along with her divine Son.[29]

57. Go to her, you who are crushed by material misery, defenseless against the hardships of life and the indifference of men. Go to her, you who are assailed by sorrows and moral trials. Go to her, beloved invalids and infirm, you who are sincerely welcomed and honored at Lourdes as the suffering members of our Lord. Go to her and receive peace of heart, strength for your daily duties, joy for the sacrifice you offer.

58. The Immaculate Virgin, who knows the secret ways by which grace operates in souls and the silent work of this supernatural leaven in this world, knows also the great price which God attaches to your sufferings united to those of the Savior. They can

greatly contribute, We have no doubt, to this Christian renewal of society which We implore of God through the powerful intercession of His Mother.

59. In response to the prayers of the sick, of the humble, of all the pilgrims to Lourdes, may Mary turn her maternal gaze upon those still outside the limits of the only fold, the Church, that they may come together in unity. May she look upon those who are in search, who are thirsty for truth, and lead them to the source of living waters.

60. May she cast her glance upon the vast continents and their limitless human areas where Christ is unfortunately so little known, so little loved; and may she obtain for the Church freedom and the joy of being able to respond everywhere, always youthful, holy, and apostolic, to the longing of men.

61. "Kindly come . . . ," said the Virgin to Bernadette. This discreet invitation, which does not compel but is addressed to the heart and requests with delicacy a free and generous response, the Mother of God addresses again to her children in France and the whole world. Christians will not remain deaf to this appeal; they will go to Mary. It is to each of them that We wish to say at the conclusion of this letter with St. Bernard: "In periculis, in angustiis, in rebus dubiis, Mariam cogita, Mariam invoces. . . Ipsam sequens, non devias; ipsam rogans, non desperas; ipsam cogitans, non erras; ipsa tenente, non corruis; ipsa protegente, non metuis; ipsa duce, non fatigaris, ipsa propitia, pervenis. . ." [30]

62. We are confident, Dear Sons and Venerable Brothers, that Mary will hear your prayer and Ours. We ask her this on the feast of the Visitation, which fittingly honors her who a century ago visited the land of France.

63. And in inviting you to sing to God together with the Immaculate Virgin the Magnificat of your gratitude, We invoke upon you and your faithful, on the shrine of Lourdes and its pilgrims, on all those who bear the responsibilities of the centenary celebration, the most bounteous outpouring of grace. In token of which We impart with all Our heart, and with Our constant and paternal best wishes, the Apostolic Benediction. 64. Given at Rome, from Saint Peter's, on the feast of the Visitation of the Most Holy Virgin, July 2, 1957, the nineteenth year of Our Pontificate.

---

#### REFERENCES:

1. Letter of July 12, 1914: *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 6: 1914, p. 376.
2. Discourse delivered at Lourdes on April 28, 1935: Eugenio Cardinal Pacelli, *Discorsi e panegirici* (2nd ed., Vatican, 1956) p. 435.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 437.
4. "O blessed grotto, favored by Mary's presence! O hallowed rock whence spring the living waters of a flowing stream!" — Office of feast of the Apparitions, Hymn for II Vespers.
5. Decree de Tuto for the Canonization of Saint Bernadette, July 2, 1933: *AAS* 25: 1933, p. 377.
6. Letter of September 4, 1869, to Henri Lasserre: Vatican Secret Archives, Ep. lat. anno 1869, n. 388, f. 695.
7. Cant. 2. 13-14. Gradual of the Mass of the feast of the Apparitions.
8. Brief of September 8, 1901: *21 Acta Leonis XIII*, 159-160.
9. Encyclical letter *Ad diem illum*, February 2, 1904: *I Acta Pii X* 149.
10. Letter of July 12, 1914: *AAS* 6: 1914, p. 377.



- 11. Brief of April 25, 1911: Arch. brev. ap., Pius X, an. 1911, Div. Lib. IX, pars 1, f. 337.
- 12. Brief of January 11, 1933: Arch. brev. ap. Pius XI, Ind. Perpet. f. 128.
- 13. Ibid.
- 14. Encyclical letter Fulgens corona, September 8, 1953: AAS 45: 1953, p. 578. [English tr. in *The Pope Speaks*, Vol.1, No. 1,p.43-Ed.
- I[5]. Ibid.
- 16. Apostolic constitution Omnium Ecclesiarum, August 15, 1954: AAS 46: 1954, p. 567.
- 17. Matt. 3.2; 4.17.
- 18. Office of the feast of the Apparitions, first Response of Third Nocturne.
- 19. John 9. 11 .
- 20. Cf. Mark 2.10.
- 21. I John 3.18.
- 22. Acts 4.32.
- 23. Letter of January 10, 1935: AAS 27, p. 7.
- 24. Luke 12.19-20.
- 25. Cf. Mark 8.36.
- 26. Cf. Matt. 7.14. 27. Cf. Luke 9.55.
- 28. I John 4.20.
- 29. Matt. 11.28.
- 30. "Amid dangers, difficulties, and doubts, think of Mary, invoke Mary's aid.... If you follow her, you will not stray; if you entreat her, you will not lose hope; if you reflect upon her, you will not err; if she supports you, you will not fall; if she protects you, you will not fear; if she leads you, you will not grow weary; if she is propitious, you will reach your goal...." Second Homily on the Missus est: PL CLXXXIII, 70-71.