THE APPEALS OF OUR LADY

APPARITIONS AND MARIAN SHRINES IN THE WORLD

Apparitions of the Virgin Mary in LOURDES

FRANCE, 1858

The moment chosen by the Blessed Mother to appear and to speak to Bernadette Soubirous was during the hour which normally is used to dine, namely: 12 o'clock noon, and precisely on Fat Thursday (which began the weekend leading up to Fat Tuesday, before Lent). From the 11th of February to the 16th of July 1858, the Virgin Mary appeared 18 times to the fourteen-year-old Bernadette. At Lourdes more than 7000 miraculous healings have been counted, of which 67 have been officially recognized by the Medical Bureau. The most recent miracle was accepted on the 21st of September 2005. In 1862, the Bishop of Tarbes officially acknowledged the authenticity of the apparitions that occurred four years earlier.

1st Apparition: The Encounter **Thursday, February 11th, 1858**
Accompanied by her sister and by a friend, Bernadette goes to Massabielle, along the River Gave, to collect dry wood. While she prepares to cross the river, she hears a noise that sounded like a swish of wind directed toward the Grotto: **"I saw a Lady clothed in white. She was wearing a white dress, a white veil, a blue sash around her waist, and a yellow rose on each foot."** She makes the Sign of the Cross and recites the Rosary with the Lady. At the end of the prayer, the Lady vanishes.

2nd Apparition: The Holy Water **Sunday, February 14th**
Bernadette senses an internal force that compels her to return to the Grotto despite being forbidden by her parents. After much insistence, her mother permits her. Upon the first decade of the Rosary, she sees the same Lady appear. Bernadette sprays some Holy Water on the Lady. At the end of the prayer, she vanishes.

3rd Apparition: The Lady Speaks **Thursday, February 18th**
For the first time, the Lady speaks. Bernadette asks her to write her name, the Lady tells her: **"It is not necessary." "I do not promise to make you happy in this world but in the other. Would you do me the kindness to come here for the next fifteen days?"**

4th Apparition: Brief and Silent Apparition **Friday, February 19th**
Bernadette goes to the Grotto with a lit blessed candle, from this gesture is born the custom of bringing candles and lighting them in front of the Grotto.

5th Apparition: In Silence **Saturday, February 20th**
The Lady teaches Bernadette a personal prayer.

6th Apparition: "Aquero" **Sunday, February 21st**
Early in the morning the Lady presents herself to Bernadette and to about one hundred people. As a result she is interrogated by the Commissioner Jacomet who wants to know what she saw. Bernadette hints to him only with **"Aquero"** ("That one," referring to the Lady).

7th Apparition: The Secret **Tuesday, February 23rd**
The Apparition reveals to her a secret "only for herself," one hundred and fifty people are present.

8th Apparition: Penitence! **Wednesday, February 24th**
Message from the Lady: **"Penitence! Penitence! Penitence! Pray to God for the sinners! You must kiss the ground in expiation for the sinners!"**

9th Apparition: The Font **Thursday, February 25th**
Three hundred people are present and Bernadette says: **"She told me to go and drink from the font (...) I found only a little muddy water. On the fourth attempt I was able to drink. She also made me eat some of the grass that was found near the spring. Then the vision disappeared."** In front of the crowd that tells her: **"You know that they think you are crazy doing such things?"** She replies only: **"It is for sinners."**

12th Apparition: First Miracle **Monday, March 1st**
More than 1500 people are gathered and, for the first time, even a priest. During the night, Catherine Latapie, of Loubajac, goes to the Grotto, immerses her dislocated arm into the water of the font: her arm and her hand heal, recuperating their ability to move.

13th Apparition: Message to Priests **Tuesday, March 2nd**
The crowd grows ever larger. The Lady tells her: **"Tell the priests to come here in procession and that they are to build a chapel."** The pastor of Lourdes, before every intervention, wants to know the name of the Lady and demands proof: to see the rose garden of the Grotto bloom in the middle of winter.

14th Apparition: A Smile **Wednesday, March 3rd**
Bernadette is at the Grotto already at 7 o'clock in the morning, followed by 3000 people, but the Lady does not appear! After school, she senses the interior invitation of the Lady. She goes to the Grotto and asks her name. The reply is a smile. Subsequently, the pastor repeats his requests.

15th Apparition: The Most Anticipated Day! **Thursday, March 4th**
The crowd, nearly 8000 people, asks for a miracle. The Lady remains silent. For 20 days Bernadette does not go back to the Grotto, no longer sensing the invitation.

16th Apparition: The Name They Were Awaiting! **Thursday, March 25th**
The Lady finally reveals her name, but the rose garden, upon which she placed her feet during the course of her apparitions, does not bloom. Bernadette remembers: "She raised her eyes to Heaven, uniting, in the sign of prayer, her hands, which were outstretched and open toward the ground, and said to me: **"Que soy era Immaculada Councepcion – I am the Immaculate Conception."** The young visionary ran to her pastor and repeats continuously these words, the significance of which she does not understand, but which enormously impress the prelate when they are pronounced in front of him. The visionary is unaware that this theological expression refers to the Holy Virgin and four years earlier, in 1854, Pope Pius IX had defined the dogma of the Immaculate Conception.

17th Apparition: The Miracle of the Candle **Wednesday, April 7th**
The flame of the candle that Bernadette has in her hand envelops her for a long time without burning her: fact immediately certified by a physician, Dr. Douzous.

18th Apparition: The Final Apparition **Thursday, July 16th**
Bernadette feels the mysterious plea from the Grotto, but her access is closed off by an iron grille. She then goes to the front, on the other shore of the riverbank of the Gave: **"... I saw only the Virgin, I have never seen her so beautiful!"**

During the time of Bernadette, the Grotto of Massabielle was a dirty place, dark, damp, and cold. This Grotto was called "the shelter for swine" because it was the place to where the pigs were led. It is in this spot that Mary, total whiteness, total pureness, sign of God's love, namely – sign of that which God wants to do in each one of us, had wanted to appear. There is an immense contrast between this Grotto, dark and damp, and the presence of the Virgin Mary, the "Immaculate Conception." This is what the Gospel reminds us: the encounter between the prosperity of God and the poverty of man. Christ had come to seek that which was lost

Detail of a sculpture at the entrance of the lower Shrine

Representations of the apparitions

The visionary: Saint Bernadette Soubirous

The Blessed Mother announced herself to Bernadette Soubirous precisely with the title of "The Immaculate Conception"

Statue of the Blessed Mother in the square near the Shrine

Saint Bernadette chose to embrace the religious life and entered the Convent of the Sisters of Charity in Nevers

Upper part of the Shrine

Casa di Bernadette Soubirous

Convent of the Sisters of Charity in Nevers

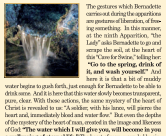
Original photograph taken during one of the apparitions of Lourdes

View of the Shrine

One of the three Basilicas of the Shrine

Pope Pius IX defined the dogma of the Immaculate Conception a few years prior to his Apparition

Apostolic Constitution "Ineffabilis Deus" (c. 1854)



The gestures which Bernadette carries out during the apparitions are gestures of liberation, of freeing something. In this manner, at the ninth Apparition, "the Lady" asks Bernadette to go and scrape the soil, at the heart of this "Cave for Swine," telling her: **"Go to the spring, drink of it, and wash yourself."** And here it is that a bit of muddy water begins to gush forth, just enough for Bernadette to be able to drink some. And it is here that this water slowly becomes transparent, pure, clear. With these actions, the same mystery of the heart of Christ is revealed to us: "A soldier, with his lance, will pierce the heart and, immediately blood and water flow." But even the depths of the mystery of the heart of man, created in the image and likeness of God: **"The water which I will give you, will become in you a wellspring of eternal life."** The heart of man, wounded by sin, is signified by the grasses and by the mud. But in the depth of this heart, there is the same life of God, signified by the spring

View of the Grotto, from the Gave River, above the Shrine

Stained-glass windows on the inside of the Shrine which illustrate the apparitions

Some miracles of Lourdes

Elisa Aloi

Among the many miraculous healings obtained at Lourdes through the intercession of the Virgin Mary, there is that of Elisa Aloi, inexplicably healed of multiple tuberculosis lesions of the bone on the 5th of June 1958 that for 11 years constrained her to bed without being able to either move nor turn about.
*"I departed for Lourdes while I was very ill, I had a high fever – she recounts – the second to last day of the pilgrimage the priest who transported me on the gurney asked me: "Elisa, would you like to go out?" "Yes – I replied to him – bring me to the pools." After we got out of the pools I suddenly felt vibrations, **I felt my legs moving** inside the casts and I said: "O Lord, what a suggestion... take from me this thought of being able to move my legs." When I then understood to not have been the victim of an illusion, I called the doctor: they put me on the Esplanade amongst the carts, wagons and stretchers of the other foreigners and I shouted: "Doctor Zuppin, I can move my legs inside the cast" and he, to not have me shout, came to my stretcher and lifted the cover. He was immobilized.* ***He saw that the wounds were closed, the bandages and the drainage tubes were clean*** *and placed next to the legs (editor's note: Elisa had a device attached from her pelvis to the lower right limb that was opened to allow for the medication of her 4 fistulae). Right after the procession they took me to the Medical Bureau and I suppose that the doctors who observed me quickly shouted about the miracle when I asked them: "Because the plaster cast, I want to walk." The physicians* of the Bureau advised that the personal physician who was treating the lady should be the one to remove the plaster cast, so then having returned to her hometown of Messina, in the region of Sicily, Elisa was immediately subjected to new radiology examinations which confirmed the incredible-event. The professor who for years had Elisa in his care and that, as a last hope of halting the progression of the tuberculosis infection, **had removed from her right leg about 10 centimeters of bone** in order to avoid the necrosis, affirmed: "I do not doubt the miracles of God and of the Blessed Mother, nor would I like to doubt the words of our radiologist who say that you have absolutely nothing; not even a trace of decalcification, but the bone upon which I myself operated, that with my own hands I took from your leg, **has grown back!"**

In the x-ray the right limb is clearly seen as regrown, slightly higher than the left, despite having been cut 10 cm by the surgeon as the last hope of stopping the progression of the tuberculosis infection and to avoid necrosis

Vittorio Micheli

"Medically inexplicable". This is how the heart surgeon named Mario Botta of the town of Olgiate Comasco, in the province of Como, in the region of Lombardy, defined the healing of a malignant tumor in the pelvis of Vittorio Micheli, a sixty-eight-year-old originating from Valsugana, in Trentino, who recounted his incredible event of being a miraculous one of Lourdes during an encounter for the 22nd World Day of the Sick. Half a century earlier, when he was 18 years old, the young Vittorio was diagnosed with a bone tumor in his pelvis that caused the crushing disintegration of the bone, of the tendons, and of the muscles. *"The leg of the patient* – stressed Mario Botta, heart surgeon at the Niguarda Hospital in Milan and member of the AMIL, the International Medical Association of Lourdes – *was attached to the body only by the skin."* Then, the healing. *"I did not want to go to Lourdes – recounted Micheli – my mother, however, insisted so much that in the end I allowed myself to be persuaded. I was bandaged and already treated with morphine. As soon as I was immersed in the pool of blessed water, the pain disappeared. I quickly stopped the morphine and then, after some time, the cast was removed and the leg was healed."*
The pathology of the young Micheli was verified by numerous x-rays and by a histology exam carried out by three different schools of anatomical pathology. After the visit to Lourdes, the leg was completely healed. *"From the exams following the pilgrimage – explained Botta – it has appeared that the bone, the muscles, and the tendons have all newly reformed. Micheli has resumed walking and is able to have a normal life."* From the miraculous healing, or "medically inexplicable," to say it with the words of science, fifty years have passed. Vittorio Micheli did not have any relapse nor oncological problems. *"At the moment of the diagnosis, before the pilgrimage to Lourdes* – the patient emphasizes – *I was not administered chemotherapy medicines and I did not endure radiation therapy because the specialists had decided that it would have been useless at that point, given the stage of the disease."*

Lourdes, Grotto of Massabielle