



The Marian

A Newsletter Published
By St. Anthony's Guild

Dear Friends of Our Blessed Mother,

On February 11, The Franciscan Friars will be honoring the Blessed Mother with a special Mass in observance of Our Lady of Lourdes.

Mary has appeared as apparitions under many titles to many diverse peoples in different periods of history. Her suffering was like "a sword piercing her heart" as she watched her son's Passion and Death, and she is constantly alert to even our smallest sufferings. Our Blessed Mother comes to us when we need her most, with a message and guidance specific to the problems and needs that we have.

The Franciscan Friars of Holy Name Province will be praying for you, as always, on this important Feast of Our Lady which also coincides with the World Day of the Sick. We hope you will take time to pray for the sick and for those who work very hard to alleviate their pain and suffering during this wonderful Novena to Our Lady.

Many blessings and prayers for good health,

Fr. David Convertino, OFM

Executive Director, St. Anthony's Guild

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A Marian Fact

She is Believed by Many to Be the Greatest of All Saints

Mary is considered by many to be the greatest of all saints because she was chosen and prepared by God to be the mother of His Son, and because she freely chose to cooperate fully in the graces given to her and in the vocation she received.



Through The Lens of a Friar

Fr. Thomas J. Walters, OFM

Meet Fr. Tom, a Franciscan Priest with Holy Name Province for the past 37 years. He has been a part of the ministry at the St. Francis Residences helping our homeless sisters and brothers who struggle with mental illness. Here is his story.

"My Franciscan story is a simple one having been influenced by my uncle Fr. Gervase Walters OFM, who worked for Fr. John Forrest, OFM the Founder and Director of St. Anthony's Guild for many years. Seeing how happy my uncle was and my family's great love for the Franciscan Order, I was very much attracted to it and especially to Holy Name Province."

"They call me a "lifer", that is because I entered St. Joseph Seminary in Callicoon, NY right from grammar school and then, after graduating from High School, I attended Siena, our Franciscan College in Loudonville, NY."

"My profession of vows as a Franciscan Friar was 41 years ago and I have been ordained for 37 years."

Some of my ministries before ordination were at St. Anthony Hospital in St. Petersburg, FL, then to parish ministry in West Milford, NJ and Kingston, Jamaica. All of these were great, but my greatest love has been being stationed at St. Francis of Assisi Church in New York City and working at the St. Francis Residences with Fathers John Felice, OFM and John McVean, OFM for the last 37 years."

"This ministry has been so rewarding, being able to help these mentally ill homeless sisters and brothers find a place in which they could find peace and be cared for. I want to thank you all for being so generous to us, your generosity has enabled us to be your hands to care for those who cannot care for themselves. God bless and know you are all in my prayers."



History of Our Lady of Lourdes



The Shrine of Our Lady of Lourdes in southern France is the most visited pilgrimage site in the world -- principally because of the apparent healing properties of the waters of the spring that appeared during the apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary to a poor, fourteen-year-old girl, Bernadette Soubirous.

The first apparition occurred February 11, 1858. There were eighteen in all; the last took place July 16, of the same year. No one except Bernadette ever saw or heard the apparition. The mysterious vision Bernadette saw

in the hollow of the rock Massabielle, where she and friends had gone to gather firewood, was that of a young and beautiful Lady. She described the Lady as clothed in white with a blue-ribbon sash and a Rosary hanging from her right arm. Now and then the apparition spoke to Bernadette.

One day, the Lady told the girl to drink from a mysterious fountain within the grotto itself, the existence of which was unknown, and of which there was no sign. Bernadette scratched at the ground, and a spring immediately bubbled up and soon gushed forth.



On another occasion, the apparition bade Bernadette to go and tell the priests she wished a chapel to be built on the spot and processions to be made to the grotto. At first the clergy were incredulous. The priest said he would not believe it unless the apparition gave Bernadette her name. After another apparition, Bernadette reported that the Lady told her, "I am the Immaculate Conception". Though the girl was unfamiliar with the term, the Pope had declared the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary in 1854.

Through that humble girl, Mary revitalized and continues to revitalize the faith of millions of people. People began to flock to Lourdes from other parts of France and from all over the world. In 1862 Church authorities confirmed

the authenticity of the apparitions and authorized the cult of Our Lady of Lourdes for the Diocese. The Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes became worldwide in 1907.

Many of the nearly 5 million people who visit Lourdes every year return home with renewed faith and a readiness to serve God and their brothers and sisters in need.

February 11th marks the feast of Our Lady of Lourdes and is a day set aside for us to pray for all those who are suffering from illnesses of any kind. This day also now coincides with World Day of the Sick, an observance introduced by Pope John Paul II as a way for believers to offer prayers for those suffering from illnesses and for those caring for them.

A Pilgrims Journey to Lourdes by Beth Coakley Dolce



I have had the privilege of being a pilgrim on a unique journey to Lourdes 13 times during the Spring with the Order of Malta. Our mission is to serve our Lords' sick, poor and suffering throughout the world. In Lourdes, each member is assigned a sick person, or malady, who will be in our care for a week.

The city of Lourdes is far more than a place in France, it is a life-changing experience.

While in Lourdes, we participate in numerous healing masses, pray the rosary and receive blessings for the sick. We also bathe in the healing waters, participate in a procession with the Eucharist and walk the life size stations of the cross. We get to receive the sacrament of Reconciliation, light candles at the Grotto, sing, enjoy new friends and so much more.

Friends often ask me after my "pilgrimage" "Did you see any miracles?" and I respond "of course!" "Did I see the blind immediately see or the lame immediately walk?" No, of course not (although this has happened), but every pilgrim who is open to the grace of little Bernadette and Our Lady is in some way miraculously changed. Sometimes obvious, sometimes subtle. We all come to Lourdes simply to get better physically, spiritually and emotionally.

Upon arriving in Lourdes, you are instantly struck by the awesome majesty of the snow-capped Pyrenees mountains and then the perpetual hum of the swift flowing river Gave. These forces of nature seem to embrace the simple rock

Grotto of Our Lady where silent sanctity radiates. Here, as we pass the spring of healing waters, we are acutely aware that this is a sacred space. Grandeur has met grace and power has met prayer.

Little Bernadette inspires me. Although she was physically very ill her entire life, we are told that she never complained nor did she ever ask for her own personal healing. She was the ultimate suffering servant. Her body never corrupted and is enshrined at her convent in Nevers.

In Lourdes, I am also impressed by the universality of the Church. Thousands and thousands of pilgrims come each day from all over the world. Here we are, all pilgrims together on our special journey. Wanting to be better and united in hope, you miraculously feel connected to these total strangers, each yearning to experience Mary's total touch.

Our days in Lourdes are very long and can be strenuous for those who are extremely ill and in tremendous pain. Never once did I hear any complaining, wailing, crying out or disruptions. Our Lady of Lourdes is also a mother and seems to soothe the suffering of her pilgrim children.

People often ask me "What's Lourdes really like?" The only response I can offer to them is "Describe a spectacular sunset to me." Most of the time, they can't find the right words but they never forget seeing one.

OUR LADY OF LOURDES, pray for us.



A Daily Reflection From Coffee With Mary

Mary, I'm blue today. I'm tired, maybe a little lonely and the weather is not great. These complaints sound too petty to mention, but I'm just having one of those days.

Mother of Sorrows is one of my titles. That title comes from my time on Calvary, but no concern is too small for us to talk about. As your Mother, I want to know how your day is and how you are. When I gave thanks to God for considering me in my lowliness that was not an expression of false humility. I was just a young girl from a small town with no great ambitions. God, in His Mercy, called me to be the Mother of the Messiah, but God has plans for you too. Be gentle with yourself today. Take some time to think about your gifts and talents. Is there some skill you always wanted to develop? Take

a walk, sing a song, look at old photos and know that God is with you, for, "we are His handiwork created in Christ Jesus for the good works that God has prepared in advance, that we should live in them."

Ephesians 2:10, Context 2:1-10

If you would like to read more daily prayers with Mary, you may order our book for a suggested donation of \$5.00 at www.thefranciscanstore.org or order by phone at 1-(646)-564-3624.

