

### **Mass of St Bernadette - Homily**

On Thursday, at the Ukrainian Church in Lourdes, we celebrated a Mass of St Bernadette; without Bernadette, we would not be here; she responded to the call of Our Lady, to visit her; she uncovered the spring of water in which we have washed ourselves; she passed on the messages of our Lady to the Church; her faith, her love, her persistence, she is simple and yet profound. She is poor, yet in God's eyes she is rich; At Lourdes, the fact that Mary had appeared in a dirty and obscure Grotto, in the place called Massabielle tells us that God comes to join us where we are, in the midst of our poverty and failures. The Grotto is not only a place where something happened - a geographical place - it is also a place where God gives us a sign by revealing his heart to us. It is a place where God leaves us a message, a message which is at the heart of the Gospel. God comes to tell us that he loves us, - this is the heart of the Message of Lourdes, and he loves us as we are, with all our wounds, our weaknesses and our limitations.

Bernadette could not have known much of God's word, nor could she have understood the scriptures as parts of it were read when she was as Mass - she could not read or write, she did not have the scriptures available to her, and of course the Mass readings were Latin. We can give thanks that we are now able to hear and understand the word of God as it is proclaimed to us in our own language. Nor could Bernadette have known and understood much of the teaching of the Church, or her doctrines. She could not have known what "I am the Immaculate Conception" meant. But still Our Lady chose her to give this message to the priests. Because Bernadette was a person of deep faith, and extraordinary love, devotion and persistence.

She kept on returning to the cave where she had seen the Lady, "Aquero", she called her, she could have made many excuses for not going back; and she also had complaints and criticism, even from her own family, and from many of the townspeople of Lourdes - but she kept going back; she persevered in her desire for this time of communion with the Lady; despite interrogations by the local police, and advice not to go back, she stuck to her story, and many were won over by her truthfulness and humility;

Despite, or perhaps because of her position in life, and her utter simplicity, God chose Bernadette to be the means by which his grace has been communicated to many millions of pilgrims in over 150 years - and we this week are privileged to be part of that great movement of love and devotion, which brings honour to Jesus and his blessed Mother, following her request, made through Bernadette in 1858 - let a chapel be built and let the processions come.