

## The life of St. Bernadette

• Bernadette Soubirous was born in Lourdes (France), on the 7<sup>th</sup> of January 1844 (exactly 50 years to the day before the birth of St. Maximilian Kolbe – the 7<sup>th</sup> of January 1894).

• From the age of six she showed symptoms of the respiratory ailment that later became a chronic affliction (a similarity with St. Maximilian who had tuberculosis).

• At the age of thirteen she was sent to the home of her foster mother. Little Bernadette made herself useful in the house and in the fields. Her life was a lonely one. The worst suffering for her was that she had not yet made her First Holy Communion and she longed for that day.

• When Bernadette went back to Lourdes, she was admitted to the day school conducted by the Sisters of Charity and, under Abbé Pomian, she continued to prepare for her First Communion.

• From the 11<sup>th</sup> of February to the 16<sup>th</sup> of July 1858, in the grotto of Massabielle in Lourdes, Our Lady appeared to the 14-year old Bernadette.

• The Sisters of Charity of Nevers, who ran a hospital at Lourdes, offered to care for Bernadette, whose health was greatly impaired. She lived there from the age of sixteen to twenty-two.

• On the 8<sup>th</sup> of July 1866, Bernadette entered the novitiate of the Sisters of Charity, at Nevers.

• After twelve years of model religious life, she made her perpetual vows on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of September 1878. A few days after her final and solemn consecration to God, she was obliged to go to the infirmary, where she remained until her death.

• On the 12<sup>th</sup> of December 1878, Sr. Mary Bernard (as she was by then known) made a last and solemn testimony about the marvels which the Immaculate Virgin had revealed to her at the grotto, in front of the representatives of the bishops of Tarbes and Nevers, in presence of the Superior General of the congregation of Nevers and his council.

• She died on the 16<sup>th</sup> of April 1879 at the age of 35. Her body has not been embalmed or specially treated in any way, however it remains uncorrupted until now and reposes in the convent chapel of the Sisters of Charity in Nevers.

• On the 8<sup>th</sup> of December 1933, Bernadette was canonized by Pope Pius XI. Her annual Feast Day is on the 16<sup>th</sup> of April. In France it is celebrated on the 8<sup>th</sup> of February, the date of the third apparition, when Our Lady first spoke to her.

## An exemplar for the Knights

• Mary promised that Bernadette would make her happy, not in this world, but in the next.

• Saint Maximilian gave St. Bernadette Soubirous as an example of somebody completely devoted to Mary and capable of suffering enormously for God and our Heavenly Mother.

**Saint Maximilian upheld St. Bernadette as an exemplar for the Knights of the Immaculata.**



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# Saint Bernadette



## The simplicity of the refined soul

## Simplicity and Humility

- At the time of the visions she experienced at Massabielle, Bernadette revealed two sides of her character. Humbly aware of her family's poverty and her own backwardness, she was extremely modest and respectful in her manner. On the other hand she was invariably straightforward, honest and direct when interviewed.

- Bernadette had a simple faith in God. It was typical of her that when she first saw the Lady in the grotto she instinctively pulled out her rosary and began to pray.

- When the Bishop of Nevers proposed entry to a convent she regretted that as well as always being ill, she was too poor to provide the dowry, adding, "**Besides, I know nothing and am good for nothing.**"

- After the apparitions Bernadette always referred to herself as "**the broom placed behind the door once it had been used.**"



- When the Reverend Mother in Nevers asked her on admission, "What can you do?" her simple answer was: "**Nothing very well.**"

- Of great comfort to her was the knowledge that she lived in a spirit of close intimacy with Jesus, whose love knew no limits. "**He is sufficient for me**" she once said.

- Bernadette never complained of the severity of the mistress of novices. "**She is right – I am proud – I shall work at trying to improve myself.**"

- Her last words were: "**Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for me, a poor sinner, poor sinner, poor sinner!**"

## Our Lady in the Grotto

- When Bernadette left Lourdes to enter into the convent, she took a last look at the Grotto, and walked quickly towards the town. The Sisters asked her why she was so affected, and if she did not know that the Blessed Virgin was her mother everywhere. She replied: *O yes, I know it, but*

*my Heaven is the grotto of Lourdes.*



- Bernadette often deplored the fact that too many people love to skim over the surface of things. About the apparitions she remarked:

*It would like to see emphasis placed on the apparition during which the Blessed Virgin declared her identity: the Immaculate Conception.*



## Sacrifices of the Soul

- Before the death of Sr. Mary Bernard, the demon attacked her soul with tortures of conscience, which are like the torments of hell for generous souls who offer themselves as victims for the sins of the world. She had never forgotten Mary's recommendation, in the grotto, to pray for sinners, and to do penance for them.

- Holy week of 1879 came, and with it a share in the sufferings of her Master. "What will do you at Easter?" someone asked her. She answered: "My passion will last till death."

- On Wednesday of Easter week the devil tempted her violently, as he had tormented God's saints. She was heard to say several times: "Begone Satan!" She confided to her spiritual director that when she pronounced the name of Jesus all her fears at the devil's attacks disappeared.

- A Sister who attended her before death said to her: "I will ask our Immaculate Mother to give you consolation." She replied: "No, not consolation, but fortitude and patience."

- Pope Pius X said: "This life can be summed up in three sentences: Bernadette was faithful to her mission, she was humble in glory, she was valiant under trial."

- The chalice of bitter suffering was offered to her, and she drank deeply. Like all of God's faithful servants, she had the cross for her portion. The crown followed. Mary's promise has been realized, and she has long since made Bernadette happy in the Kingdom of her Master.

