

Saint Bernadette's 18 Apparitions at Lourdes

Thursday 11th february 1858: the first meeting

Accompanied by her sister and a friend, Bernadette went to Massabielle on the banks of the Gave to collect bones and dead wood. Removing her socks in order to cross the stream, she heard a noise like a gust of wind, she looked up towards the Grotto : "I saw a lady dressed in white, she wore a white dress, and equally white veils, a blue belt and a yellow rose on each foot." Bernadette made the Sign of the Cross and said the Rosary with the lady. When the prayer ended the Lady suddenly vanished.

Sunday 14th february 1858: holy water

Bernadette felt an inner force drawing her to the Grotto in spite of the fact that she was forbidden to go there by her parents. At her insistence, her mother allowed her; after the first decade of the Rosary, she saw the same lady appearing. She sprinkled holy water at her. The lady smiled and bent her head. When the Rosary ended she disappeared.

Thursday 18th february 1858: the Lady speaks

For the first time, the Lady spoke. Bernadette held out a pen and paper asking her to write her name. She replied; "It is not necessary" and she added: "I do not promise to make you happy in this world but in the other. Would you be kind enough to come here for a fortnight?"

Friday 19th february 1858: the first candle

Bernadette came to the Grotto with a lighted blessed candle. This is the origin of carrying candles and lighting them in front of the Grotto.

Saturday 20th february 1858: in silence

The Lady taught her a personal prayer. At the end of the vision Bernadette is overcome with a great sadness.

Sunday 21th february 1858: "Aquero"

The Lady appeared to Bernadette very early in the morning. About one hundred people were present. Afterwards the Police Commissioner, Jacomet, questioned her. He wanted Bernadette to tell what she saw. Bernadette would only speak of "AQUÉRO" ("that thing" in local dialect)

Tuesday 23th february 1858: the secret

Surrounded by 150 persons, Bernadette arrived at the Grotto. The Apparition reveals to her a secret “only for her alone”.

Wednesday 24th february 1858: «Penance !»

The message of the Lady: “Penance! Penance! Penance! Pray to God for sinners. Kiss the ground as an act of penance for sinners!”

Thursday 25th february 1858: the spring

Three hundred people were present. Bernadette relates; “She told me to go, drink of the spring (...) I only found a little muddy water. At the fourth attempt I was able to drink. She also made me eat the bitter herbs that were found near the spring, and then the vision left and went away.” In front of the crowd that was asking “Do you think that she is mad doing things like that?” she replied; “It is for sinners.”

Saturday 27th february 1858: silence

Eight hundred people were present. The Apparition was silent. Bernadette drank the water from the spring and carried out her usual acts of penance.

Sunday 28th february 1858: the ecstasy

Over one thousand people were present at the ecstasy. Bernadette prayed, kissed the ground and moved on her knees as a sign of penance. She was then taken to the house of Judge Ribes who threatened to put her in prison.

Monday 1st march 1858: the first miracle

Over one thousand five hundred people assembled and among them, for the first time, a priest. In the night, Catherine Latapie, a woman from Loubajac, 7 kilometres away, went to the Grotto, she plunged her dislocated arm into the water of the spring: her arm and her hand regained their movement.

Tuesday 2nd march 1858: message to the priests

The crowd becomes larger and larger. The Lady asked her: “Go and tell the priests that people are to come here in procession and to build a chapel here.” Bernadette spoke of this to Fr. Peyramale, the Parish Priest of Lourdes. He wanted to know only one thing: the Lady’s name. He demanded another test; to see the wild rose bush flower at the Grotto in the middle of winter.

Wednesday 3rd march 1858: a smile

From 7 o'clock in the morning, in the presence of three thousand people, Bernadette arrived at the Grotto, but the vision did not appear! After school, she heard the inner invitation of the Lady. She went to the Grotto and asked her again for her name. The response was a smile. The Parish Priest told her again: "If the Lady really wishes that a chapel be built, then she must tell us her name and make the rose bush bloom at the Grotto."

Thursday 4th march 1858: the day all were waiting for !

The ever-greater crowd (about eight thousand people) waited for a miracle at the end of the fortnight. The vision was silent. Fr. Peyramale stuck to his position. For twenty days Bernadette did not go to the Grotto, she no longer felt the irresistible invitation.

Thursday 25th march 1858: the name they waited for !

The vision finally revealed her name, but the wild rose bush, on which she stood during the Apparitions, did not bloom. Bernadette recounted : "She extended her arms towards the ground, then joined them as though in prayer and said *Que soy era Immaculada Concepciou* (I am the Immaculate Conception)". The young visionary left and, running all the way, repeated continuously the words that she did not understand. These words troubled the brave Parish Priest. Bernadette was ignorant of the fact that this theological expression was assigned to the Blessed Virgin. Four years earlier, in 1854, Pope Pius IX declared this a truth of the Catholic Faith (a dogma).

Wednesday 7th april 1858: the miracle of the candle

During this apparition, Bernadette had to keep her candle alight. The flame licked along her hand without burning it. A medical doctor, Dr. Douzous, immediately witnessed this fact.

Testimony of Dr. Pierre Douzous"

"Bernadette seemed to be even more absorbed than usual in the Appearance upon which her gaze was riveted. I witnessed, as did also every one else there present, the fact which I am about to narrate. She was on her knees saying with fervent devotion the prayers of her Rosary which she held in her left hand while in her right was a large blessed candle, alight. The child was just beginning to make the usual ascent on her knees when suddenly she stopped and, her right hand joining her left, the flame of the big candle passed between the fingers of the latter. Though fanned by a fairly strong breeze, the flame produced no effect upon the skin which it was

touching. Astonished at this strange fact, I forbade anyone there to interfere, and taking my watch in my hand, I studied the phenomenon attentively for a quarter of an hour. At the end of this time Bernadette, still in her ecstasy, advanced to the upper part of the Grotto, separating her hands. The flame thus ceased to touch her left hand. Bernadette finished her prayer and the splendour of the transfiguration left her face. She rose and was about to quit the Grotto when I asked her to show me her left hand. I examined it most carefully, but could not find the least trace of burning anywhere upon it. I then asked the person who was holding the candle to light it again and give it to me. I put it several times in succession under Bernadette's left hand but she drew it away quickly, saying 'You are burning me!'. I record this fact just as I have seen it without attempting to explain it. Many persons who were present at the time can confirm what I have said."

On 8 June 1858, the mayor of Lourdes barricaded the grotto and stationed guards to prevent public access. Visitors were fined for kneeling near the grotto or talking about the grotto.[\[19\]](#)

Friday 16th July 1858 : the final apparition

Bernadette received the mysterious call to the Grotto, but her way was blocked and closed off by a barrier. She thus arrived across from the Grotto to the other side of the Gave. "I felt that I was in front of the Grotto, at the same distance as before, I saw only the Blessed Virgin, and she was more beautiful than ever!"

Later developments

The grotto reopened to the public in October 1858 by order of Emperor Louis Napoleon III. Bernadette received no further apparitions after the 18th appearance (on 16 July 1858), and she did not feel any desire to visit the grotto afterwards. The people, however, kept on visiting. In 1866, Bernadette left Lourdes to join the Sisters of Charity and Christian Instruction in Nevers, France.

Response of Bishop's Commission:

"After having sought the light of the Holy Spirit and the assistance of the Blessed Virgin, we have declared and do declare that which follows -

"We judge that Mary, the Immaculate Mother of God, did really appear to Bernadette Soubirous on the 11th February 1858 and on certain subsequent days, eighteen times

in all, in the Grotto of Massabielle, near the town of Lourdes; that this Appearance bears every mark of truth and that the belief of the faithful is well-grounded. We humbly submit our judgment to that of the Sovereign Pontiff who is charged with the government of the Universal Church...

"In order to carry out the wish of the Blessed Virgin, expressed more than once at the time of the Appearances, we propose to build a sanctuary upon the ground adjoining the Grotto, which has become the property of the Bishop of Tarbes... We need therefore, in order to carry out our intention, the assistance of the clergy and laity of our diocese, of the clergy and laity both of France and of foreign countries. We appeal to their generosity and especially to all devout persons of every country to whom the cult of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary is held dear...

"This our charge is to be read and published in all churches and chapels.

Given at Tarbes on the 18th January 1862,
Festival of the Chair of Saint Peter at Rome.

"Signed,
Bertrand Severe Laurence, Bishop of Tarbes."

Several churches were eventually built at Lourdes, including the Basilicas of the Rosary, the Immaculate Conception and the Basilica of St. Pius X.

Sr. Marie Bernard was declared blessed on 14 June 1921 by Pope Pius XI. She was canonized by Pius XI on 8 December 1933. Her Feast Day is celebrated on April 16; in France and Canada, it is celebrated on February 18. The Feast of the Apparition of Our Blessed Lady at Lourdes is celebrated on February 11.