



THE **2020**
LOURDES'
DAYS



GUIDANCE FROM LOURDES

Mgr Olivier Ribadeau Dumas, Rector of the Sanctuary of Lourdes

A few opinions at the start of my term of office

JDL – 8th February 2020

I am delighted to see you this morning at the opening of these Lourdes February days and I would like to welcome you once again by encouraging you to feel at home here. This sanctuary of Our Lady of Lourdes is not owned by anyone because it is common property that belongs to everyone, the whole Church and perhaps, even more broadly.

I hope you will allow me, as the rector who arrived here on 1st October, to pass on to you some convictions that drive me on, some discoveries that I am making, some challenges that await us all.

1 / Some strong convictions

- The message of Lourdes is more current than ever, and our sanctuary therefore has a very bright future ahead of it. This message, as you know, has its source in this amazing meeting between Mary and Bernadette in 1858. Because it was first of all a meeting between two people, between two women. To speak of Lourdes by only talking about Mary would be like walking on one leg. Bernadette, to whom the musical of the same name, has paid special tribute in recent months, was a young girl from this land of Bigorre; a young girl with a strong character but with an amazing independence. A young girl driven from within by a faith that did not close her in on herself but opened her up to her burgeoning humanity. I have come to discover, I must admit, this unique position that Bernadette holds and I think it is in our interests to highlight it because she is our neighbour here, because she is like us and because she can be an example for us.

This first meeting is the illustration of the primordial meeting between God and humanity. There are two partners in the Alliance and, although God always makes the first move, he respects human freedom immeasurably. In fact, there is nothing more evangelical than the message of Lourdes; it is nothing more than the Gospel, but I think it encompasses the entire Gospel. You recognise this and you experience it with all those you accompany during your pilgrimages.

This meeting between Mary and Bernadette means that what is important at the sanctuary and more broadly what is characteristic of this city is the idea of a meeting; here you can find a meeting between the sick and the hospitality, between the young and the not so young, between pilgrims and visitors, between priests, religious and laity, between nations and cultures, but also between socio-professionals and pilgrims, between a huge variety of different participants and stakeholders. These meetings are a great richness for us if we are willing to experience them in truth, without comparing ourselves to others but by making them, here in Lourdes, the true experience of the catholicity of the Church. Our Church is as diverse as all the faces of those who make it up. A meeting invites us to experience otherness, difference not as an end in itself but in the search for a communion which goes far beyond these differences. Developing these meeting places between pilgrims, between pilgrimages, between pilgrims and visitors is a mission that falls to all of us.

- Our sanctuary has a bright future ahead of it, because I deeply believe that the message of Lourdes is prophetic for the Church, but much more broadly for society as a whole. I suggested this at the start of my speech. The inversion of values that is experienced here by putting the sick, the poor, the disabled first is a powerful sign for societies in which very often material success and the beauty of the body count. The solidarity which is expressed in the way that each person helps the other without really knowing, moreover, at the end who will

have gained the most, is a powerful antidote to the individualism which reigns, and which becomes sterile. The meeting I was talking about between different cultures but also different pastoral ideas, sometimes between groups, is an invitation to place unity beyond division and to believe in it by living it fully. Lourdes should not be lived like Babel, but rather with the spirit of Pentecost. The existence of the Medical Bureau and its central role is also a prophetic sign. Here is where some healings are deemed to be scientifically inexplicable by current medical knowledge. It is the very sign that reason is not all-powerful and that there is still room today for the inexplicable. While we want to understand everything, analyse everything, dissect everything, we sometimes have to stop at the door of mystery! This prophetic dimension of Lourdes is something we have to bring to life and each one of us is its custodian.

- The future of our sanctuary is also promising because I believe that Lourdes responds to the fundamental challenges of our societies. Our western societies are going through major crises today, the economic and social aspects of which, not to downplay them in any way, seem to me to be only manifestations and expressions of something much deeper. There is, it seems to me today, a crisis of meaning, a crisis of transmission and a crisis of confidence. Faced with such challenges, one can be either paralysed and anaesthetised or, on the contrary, energised. I believe that we should take this second option, especially since I believe that Lourdes provides an answer to these crises.

The crisis of meaning is obvious. Many, perhaps too many, of our fellow citizens, no longer really know the meaning of life and seem disconcerted by the rapid technical advances and the ideology of progress which sometimes challenges the very foundations of an anthropology which, up until now, has been commonly accepted. But recent events also show us that the prospect of ever-increasing consumption can never be fulfilling, that inequalities are usually intolerable. The 'gilet jaune' (yellow vest) movement is not only the expression of dissatisfaction, it is also the experience of a brotherhood found between people who no longer have the chance to meet. Here, this brotherhood is experienced and here we discover that the value of a life is not in its wealth, nor in its intelligence, nor in its power but in the intrinsic dignity of every human being. When we enter the gates of the sanctuary, we are all on a par with each other. We are all poor before God, we are all looked on with tenderness by Mary, *"like one person looking at another"*. The strength of the sanctuary comes from the opportunity for everyone to stand in front of the Grotto of Massabielle just as we are, with our joys and sorrows and to simply lay down our burdens. Brotherhood flourishes in a compassion experienced in everyday life which has its source in the welcome given to each one by Mary. Here, everything is simple, and everything is beautiful. It is both an opportunity and a responsibility.

There is a crisis of meaning and a crisis of transmission too. Memories fade and what seemed so obvious to past generations becomes a strange phenomenon for the youngest. I'm not saying this to extol a particular era, just as I am convinced that there has never been a golden age for Christianity. I think that each era has its own social challenges to face. Educating is a difficult task, but we can't give up on it. To form a people, a nation in a global world where one travels from one end to the other at the click of a mouse may seem like a tall order, and it is certainly a challenge. Conveying certain standards, embodying essential values so that community life is not only possible but constructive, so that people do not lock themselves into sterile individualism is a complex issue, but it is what makes a country great, and what makes great, too, those families who pass these values on to their children. And here again, I think Lourdes has considerable advantages. From the first apparitions, through an astonishing phenomenon which at the start stemmed undoubtedly from the surprise

factor, but also from the lure of what was experienced in the Grotto of Massabielle, and from Bernadette's radiance, crowds flocked to be witnesses. They saw nothing except Bernadette; they didn't hear what she and Mary were saying but they were there, and they were talking about it. Bernadette is a great example of transmission with her sensitive yet tenacious character: "I am not here to make you believe it but to pass on the message". And over the years, the message of Lourdes has been transmitted, from generation to generation, from country to region, from region to continent. Why? Without doubt because of the very content of the message, because the world would be lacking if it did not exist, but also because of the strength and the considerable efforts of all those who, from Father Peyramale and Mgr. LAURENCE to today's key stakeholders, to the generations of pilgrimage directors, including all those who were committed to taking responsibility for the Hospitality of Our Lady of Lourdes, to all the figures in public life who have put themselves at the service of this cause. The message of Lourdes is more alive and current today than ever. I will come back to the challenges we face today in this area. But Lourdes still responds in a particular way to this crisis of transmission.

Finally, I believe that Lourdes has a particular answer to the crisis of confidence that plagues our society. Trust in public authorities and political powers, trust in institutions including the Church with sometimes just cause, trust between citizens, trust between peoples. Lourdes is a school of trust because it is first and foremost a place of kindness. I really hope that this notion of kindness is at the heart of our mutual relations. I attach a particular importance to it because suspecting the other person of plotting or scheming ruins any possibility of trust and destroys any hope of building something for the general interest or the common good. Lourdes is the place of trust that is learned, rooted and developed. Let us learn from trust that the sick have in the Virgin Mary, from the trust that pilgrims have in each other, united by the same aspiration.

I hope you can see, dear friends, how profoundly I believe in the relevance of this message and therefore in the future of our sanctuary. I know you share this same enthusiasm because otherwise you would not be here. My mission as rector, which I received from the apostolic delegate on the mandate of the Holy Father, my responsibility for all the sectors in the life of the sanctuary, in collaboration with all the chaplains who play a unique and irreplaceable part in the implementation of the pastoral approaches that I wish to put in place, in collaboration with all the employees of the sanctuary who are its wealth, my mission is to allow all those who cross the threshold of the sanctuary to feel welcomed so that they may discover the beauty of the message of Lourdes and let themselves be illuminated by the smile that the Virgin gave to Bernadette. Three verbs illustrate this mission for me:

- Welcome: all those who come; visitors, pilgrims, believers and non-believers, seekers of meaning, individually or in groups, able-bodied, sick or disabled, rich and poor, in pilgrimages or in groups, from France, Europe and the whole world.

- Announce: because the sanctuaries are unique places for the "new evangelisation" allowing everyone to anchor themselves in the mystery of Christ or to discover it by listening to his word and celebrating the sacraments. Bishop FISICHELLA will be telling us more about this on Monday.

- Develop: not for the sake of having enviable financial results even if we need considerable means to be able to survive, I will come back to this, but because we cannot keep for ourselves this treasure of which we are the custodians, and let new people simply knock on our door. How can the grace of Lourdes be spread throughout the world?

These missions are all challenges. I would like to spend a few moments on them.

2 / Some challenges to be met

- The challenge of welcome

o Mgr. HEROUARD recalled the terms of the mission that Pope Francis entrusted to him. In the directions set by the Holy Father, welcome comes first. We know that the nature of those who frequent Lourdes is changing. Fortunately, we still abide by this deep joy of welcoming diocesan or thematic pilgrimages. But recognise that it is increasingly difficult to convince the faithful to come on pilgrimage. There are of course the questions of cost, of transport difficulties, but there is also the secularisation of our Western societies and sometimes the difficulty of finding intermediaries. How do we convince people in our communities that the pilgrimage offers something extremely modern and beneficial for everyone, that here we live a shared experience, that in a difficult world, we can find in this place an atmosphere of peace and brotherhood that is not found anywhere else. How do we pass on the message that Lourdes is fundamentally a place of prayer and compassion? Together we need to find ways to explain and convince. Sanctuaries like ours certainly have to make efforts with communication to explain what happens here. What strikes me is that the new generations are no longer really aware of what they might discover in the sanctuary. With the length of the visits decreasing, the possibility of being captivated by Lourdes, if we have not done a bit of preparation beforehand, is virtually impossible even if, of course, nothing is impossible for God. But for me as rector, my goal is to ensure that visits to the sanctuary are not limited to taking a selfie in front of the Grotto but rather that, in front of this Grotto, people can experience the tenderness of God which is visible in Mary. You may say that I am only talking about individual pilgrims, but I am talking about diocesan pilgrimages too and how will we together ensure they have an ecclesial experience?

o This welcome is experienced in a very special way here by the sick, the disabled and those whose lives have been shattered. It's the grace of Lourdes, which makes our sanctuary unique. We must always be at "stretcher height" according to the expression readily used by Mgr. d'ARODES, so that our proposals ring true and that we do not think up things that would not be suitable. This is why collaboration with the NHNDL and with diocesan and accompaniment hospitalities is so crucial. We are all one family not one against the other or one without the other. I asked Daniel PEZET, President of the NHDL, to be part of my committee, because I am firmly convinced that we are living the same mission.

o This welcome of the sick is being extended. We are modernising the places made available to pilgrimages for the sick and I am pleased about this. We will continue to do so. But we probably have to think more carefully about the welcome itself. People are today more and more autonomous: how do we ensure that they can retain this autonomy in Lourdes while being surrounded by appropriate attention and care? In addition, many people have unseen illnesses; I am thinking of the mentally ill particularly. How do you welcome them in this place which is a place of healing for bodies and souls? I asked Dr De FRANCISCIS, head of the Medical Bureau, to reflect on these two subjects with you: welcome in our day and age and the welcome of the mentally ill in Lourdes. I am well aware that many things have already been done, but I hope that we continue on this path.

o Welcoming everyone and making everyone feel welcome as they are, also means taking into account the different ecclesial and pastoral leanings, but above all the differences in how people express their faith. Lourdes is a special place where popular devotion has a particular place. In Lourdes, there are no grand speeches; it is not a question of doing some great catechesis but of allowing simple gestures like touching a rock, drinking or washing, holding a candle in procession to be the expression of love. I can assure you that I am

overwhelmed by what I witness, by the beauty and the faith of the holy people of God. How beautiful! How profound! This is what we are all here to serve and we will continue to do it together.

o We, together with Mgr. HEROUARD and all the chaplains, and with you of course, want this welcome to be safe. Our era is marked by sexual abuse but also by abuse of power and spiritual abuse. We can see how Lourdes is a place where we have to pay particular attention to this aspect. Mgr. HEROUARD appointed Father BUSTILLO ofm, as the point of contact for the fight against sexual abuse in the sanctuary. We have written a code of conduct that is effective as of today. We worked on it in collaboration with different stakeholders. We all come from different horizons: the mentality may be different between north and south, but we all have to be vigilant in this respect. This code of conduct is not intended to be a list of embargoes but aims to promote the respectful treatment of all by bearing two particularly delicate places in mind: Baths and confessions. It will be distributed to you during this conference. Lourdes must be exemplary in this matter out of respect first of all for the weakest and most vulnerable who come here. We will organise the implementation of the planned measures which are not revolutionary, but which will undoubtedly lead us in the years to come to make some investments such as for example in the chapel of confessions. Thank you for your involvement in these safety procedures. I know this is an important area for all of you. It is not a question of creating an anxiety-provoking climate but rather of ensuring that the processes are clear so that things go smoothly. Thank you for the positive reaction that I know you will give to this code of conduct.

o Welcoming people properly and especially the sick also requires us to reflect on the arrivals and departures of pilgrimages. Our calendar committee, which does such a good job, was created while the means of transport used was the train. We know this is no longer so in the majority of cases. We need to rethink how we meet and greet, in particular at the Accueil Notre Dame so that the buses do not have to park up for hours before we can unload the sick and settle them into their rooms. This means we'll have to go back up the chain of operations so that the transport does not all arrive at the same time. I am sure you understand why this is necessary. But this will require flexibility from everyone for the good of all.

• The first challenge was that of welcoming, the second is that of evangelisation.

o This evangelisation is on two levels it seems to me. Many pilgrims on our pilgrimages and many visitors are not from the 1st tier of our faithful and this is a great opportunity for us! Isn't our common goal to strengthen some people in the faith, whilst helping others to discover it? It is a good thing that the visitor becomes a pilgrim and that anyone who arrives without knowing why they came, discovers the richness and beauty of the Gospel. With the "chapelains", we therefore decided to reorganise the welcome team at the Information centre. I asked the chapelains to get involved in this essential mission, especially in welcoming isolated groups and individuals. I was also keen for there not to be a youth service as such any longer, but a pastoral ministry for young people and vocations in the sanctuary, also with chapelains who would work in one team with those in charge of welcome. Pastoral care must come first, and I would like to thank them in your presence for their commitment to this mission. Collaboration between lay employees and volunteers and clerics or the religious finds a beautiful way of expressing itself here and it is essential. I am sure that this will benefit pilgrimages.

o In this same pastoral perspective of proclaiming the Gospel, we must continue to rethink the place of the pavilions, which I am sure you recognise, no longer fulfil the function for

which they were intended, for many reasons that I do not want to go into here. It seems to me that there are three dimensions which must therefore, for the moment at least, find a flexible place inside the sanctuary: the dimension of young people and vocations that I have already mentioned, supported by the presence of seminarians and young priests during the summer, but also by the young volunteers and by the experience of You cat which we will extend; then the dimension of international solidarity with the PMS (Pontifical Mission Societies) and the CCFD (Catholic Committee against hunger and for development) but also volunteers who have gone abroad, and finally the dimension of integrated ecology in solidarity with the poorest, in supporting families and in searching for peace in the world. We have to take the time to think this through but must also make some concrete proposals. Please let me know your thoughts and ideas on this.

o But, evangelisation also means allowing Lourdes pilgrims to become missionaries once they have returned home. This is the challenge of creating synergy between sanctuaries and parishes that Pope Francis has well described in his motu proprio linking the sanctuaries to the Pontifical Council for the promotion of the new evangelisation. Give me a moment to dream: that from Lourdes are born missions around pilgrims and hospitaliers who make this experience of fraternity with the sick and the poorest, of proclaiming the Gospel, of supporting popular piety, a reality in their home towns. If you want it to happen, we will make this dream come true.

- The third challenge that I see is that of development. I repeat, it is not a question of developing on an economic level but of allowing the grace of Lourdes to be experienced by the greatest possible number of people. There are undoubtedly several points to take consider here. Allow me to outline them for you very simply.

o How can we bring meaning back to our pilgrimages? How can we renew ourselves in the way we bring our pilgrimages to life? There is a big project for us to work on. We must constantly be asking ourselves what we want to bring to the pilgrims. The renewal of our pilgrimages will perhaps be through recapturing what has always made Lourdes so rich: the gestures and the celebrations that are offered here; we must give new meaning to the Eucharistic processions which some people perhaps no longer understand; the Eucharistic procession is not worship; we must rediscover the beauty and simplicity of the Marian processions, encourage the celebration of the sacraments, etc. All this is the shared foundation of all pilgrimages, which we should remember each time.

The theme of the year allows for a specific emphasis which is different each season. You know that in 2020, the theme, "I am the Immaculate Conception", will guide us. Tomorrow Father BRITO together with the other speakers, will introduce us more to this dimension, but let's say straight away that it is not a matter of developing a theological journey for our pilgrims but of allowing them to have an existential experience by discovering the name of Mary. In agreement with Archbishop HEROUARD, we wanted the forthcoming years to have continuity and unity the other sentence spoken by Mary: "Go and tell the priests to build a chapel and to come here in procession". So:

"Go and tell the priests ..." will be the theme of the year 2021 to underline the missionary aspect and to reflect on vocations during pilgrimages.

"To build a chapel..." will be the theme for the 2022 season in order to highlight the community and ecclesial dimension of pilgrimages and of Christian life.

"And to come here in procession" in 2023 to highlight the sacramental aspect and the Eucharistic and penitential dimension of the pilgrimage.

Obviously, we have not yet rolled out these three years. We want to make theologians, but also the faithful reflect, to work out with them what should be implemented. On Monday, there will be a workshop for those who wish to put their ideas forward on this subject.

- o To facilitate the organisation of pilgrimages, we want to provide directors and organisers with new resources to allow for reflection earlier and also throughout the year. Guillaume de VULPIAN will speak to you in particular on Monday about a "continuing education" programme, if you can call it that, in the form of some very lively modules. I hope this will be a real help for you.

- o The challenge of development also involves taking the international dimension into account. As I said before, Lourdes does not belong to anyone because Lourdes is common property that belongs to everyone. This means that the international dimension is at the heart of the message of Lourdes which is not a sanctuary reserved for just one country. We can see how many new countries are coming to Lourdes: Brazil, South Korea, the United States and others. This obliges us to do at least two things because embracing internationalisation is not translating into other languages what has been conceived in French but requires us to "think multiculturally". You have to inculturate a message and not just proclaim it in another language. This is why I am delighted that our community of chapelains is international and I especially thank the Oblates of Mary Immaculate for allowing priests to be here on mission. Their diversity is a precious asset. But it would be pointless emphasising this dimension if each of our pilgrimages or groups did not live off this catholicity of the Church. Meetings, exchanges are irreplaceable. This also raises the question of the international mass, which is so important and so necessary. We must constantly be thinking about how we can effectively allow the greatest number of people to actively participate.

- I would like to add a 4th challenge that I think we need to embrace: that of communication.

- o This communication is of course first of all that which relates to what people experience at the sanctuary. We must talk what is happening here; we must make known the graces received because they are wonderful signs of God's goodness. Our world in search of meaning awaits answers. Isn't there an answer here? Many of our contemporaries are searching for something spiritual but their search is not a religious one. Is this not a focal point for us to help them progress? We have to communicate the action of God and the Spirit, through Mary. We also have to ensure, as I said, that people arrive at the sanctuary without being taken aback and astonished by what lives there so that they can have an authentic spiritual experience; we have so much to communicate to the world beyond Lourdes.

- o But this communication is also between us. Between pilgrimages because I am convinced that we have to learn from each other. Some have made discoveries that they can share with others. Exchanges exist between us and I am happy. The sanctuary must make it possible to promote this, to develop the exchange of good practices. It is also the whole meaning of the Orientation Village which will be open during the time of our meeting with stands but also debates, exchanges or workshops to compare our experiences and enrich each other.

- o But let me add that I want this communication to flow smoothly between pilgrimages, hospitalities and the sanctuary. We are all sailing in the same waters, we are all striving towards the same goal, we have the same objective. As soon as I arrived, I knew I needed to hear from you, to listen to you and I thank all those who have responded to the online

questionnaire attached to your registration; it is rich in lessons to be learned; I will come back to this in a few moments. This communication between us is vital because I firmly believe that we are co-constructors of a project for the sanctuary for the years to come. We won't be able to do everything, but I really hope that we will be able to enhance the ideas that we will share together.

o There is another area that we need to develop in terms of communication, that of research on the message of Lourdes. Since the apparitions, since the remarkable works of Father LAURENTIN but also of all those who have written about it, and how could I not mention here the numerous works of Father de La Teyssonnière, a lot has been brought to the attention of both the general public and learned people. But there is still more to do. We haven't finished unravelling the mystery and the fruits of this meeting between Mary and Bernadette. We need to interest priests and laity of younger generations in order to keep updating the riches of what was experienced and what is still experienced in Lourdes.

• I will end this presentation which, forgive me, has probably gone on far too long already, with one last challenge which is by no means the least important. We have to secure the future of the sanctuary economically and financially. In January, Mgr. HEROUARD met with the newly established Sanctuary Council for Economic Affairs. I, together with the members of the council, am delighted that our finances have been consolidated thanks to the efforts of everyone and the work of those who are in charge of the daily management of the sanctuary; I thank them. Our economic situation is better than a few years ago, but it is not yet flourishing. We have a responsibility to invest in preparing for the future; we have a responsibility to manage human resources in the best possible way, taking into account the age distribution and the deadlines to come in the coming years. On this subject I would like to reiterate how much the employees of the sanctuary are completely devoted to the good of the pilgrims. They know that they do not work in just any old organisation. They love Lourdes; they love the pilgrimages; they love the pilgrims. I salute their work, their availability which sometimes competes with their family life. For those of us at the sharp end, our responsibility is to ensure they can balance their family life and professional life; our duty is to respect employment law and working hours in particular. You know that you will never be told "no" at the sanctuary, but I urge you to think of those working behind the scenes who, when there is a delay or a schedule overrun, will work overtime. This comes at a cost to us and very often risks putting us at odds with employment law. I know you understand these requirements which I'm sure you have experienced elsewhere. Thank you very much for being vigilant in this regard.

o The economic model of the sanctuary is largely based on donations. Donations fluctuate and therefore do not allow us to predict the future. Our fixed resource is the so-called "Euro-pilgrim" who gives us assured returns. This contribution of 2.50 euros per person per day is what allows us to meet our expenses. If all the pilgrimages paid, we would be more relaxed, I assure you, and less worried at times. I readily admit that we may not have explained enough in the past why this contribution was necessary, why it has increased in recent years. It was a failing on our part. It is not a tax but a resource to meet our expenses and in particular the wage bill. Having witnessed how the budget is drawn up, I can tell you how detailed, thorough, and carefully monitored it is. Pilgrims' money is not wasted. But if I may reflect; those who do not pay this contribution are penalising all the others and risk putting our future at risk. It would be unfair if the contribution increased simply because pilgrimages do not pay it. For 2020 it was kept at the same rate as in 2019 but for that, it is really necessary that all pilgrimages pay. Guillaume de VULPIAN will come back to this subject during our meeting, but I am in complete agreement with this requirement because, contrary



“ BERNADETTE, THROUGH POPULAR PIETY TO HOLINESS ”

Father Horacio Brito, Sanctuary Chaplain, Chaplain of the Hospitality of Our Lady of Lourdes

THE SANCTUARIES AND POPULAR PIETY

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Speech by Horacio BRITO, then Rector of the Sanctuary Notre-Dame de Lourdes, during the meeting “Evangelii Gaudium – a Pastoral Project” in the Vatican on 19 September 2014

First of all, I wish to thank His Excellency Monsignor Rino FISICHELLA, President of the Pontifical Council for the New Evangelisation, for having invited me to this meeting.

My address will consist of highlighting the missionary dimension of the fostering of popular piety as it has been presented to us in nr. 122-126 of *Evangelii Gaudium*. Monsignor Victor MANUEL FERNÁNDEZ tells us: “The topic of *Evangelii Gaudium* is not evangelisation in general, but the proclamation of the Gospel. And it is not the teaching of the Church either” (cf. *Ce que nous dit le Pape François*, p. 31).

This applies particularly to popular piety, because it has a missionary dimension. On another note, Pope Francis invites us, as pastoral workers, firstly to convert so that “from the affective connaturality born of love we can appreciate the theological life present in the piety of Christian peoples, especially among their poor” (EG, 125). The Holy Father also asks us “not to claim control of the missionary power of popular piety” (EG, 124).

In the first part of my speech I shall make a distinction, which seems necessary to me, between popular piety and popular religiosity.

In the second part I shall deal with some essential points that concern the life of a Sanctuary as a privileged place for the expression of popular piety.

Finally, I shall draw some conclusions on the basis of these two statements.

POPULAR PIETY AND POPULAR RELIGIOSITY

Pope Francis tells us in *Evangelii Gaudium*: “Once the Gospel has been inculturated in a people, in their process of transmitting their culture they also transmit the faith in ever new forms; ... Herein lies the importance of popular piety, a true expression of the spontaneous missionary activity of the people of God. This is an ongoing and developing process, of which the Holy Spirit is the principal agent” (n. 122).

The Holy Father thus draws on the content of the Aparecida Document, which highlights the qualities and virtues of popular piety, which can be outlined in the following key elements:

- a legitimate way of living the Faith;
- a way of feeling like a fully-fledged member of the Church;
- a way of being a missionary;
- a powerful manifestation of the living God in a secularised world;
- a channel for transmitting the Faith;
- a treasure that contributes to the historical and cultural distinctiveness of the poor and is the result of a synthesis between cultures and the Christian faith.

The term “popular piety” had already been used by the Second Vatican Council (cf. SC, 9.13; LG, 66-67), but it is Pope Paul VI who, in *Evangelii nuntiandi* (n. 48), asks the Church to use the term “popular piety” instead of “popular religiosity”.

Consequently, it is not by mere chance that Pope Francis employs the term “popular piety” instead of “popular religiosity”. In fact, the latter mainly refers to sociological circumstances, while “expressions of popular piety have much to teach us; for those who are capable of reading them, they are a *locus theologicus* which demands our attention, especially at a time when we are looking to the new evangelisation” (EG, 126).

Christian piety resides in human being’s ability to respond in a concrete way to the Covenant that God asks us to establish between each other collectively. In humankind, this “ability to be merciful” is manifest as a gift of the Holy Spirit seeking to glorify God from the most noble expressions of his existence.

The word “popular” refers to three elements: it refers to the people in their entirety, to the poor or to anything without an official status. Having clarified this point, we can now add the following sentence from *Evangelii Gaudium*: true popular piety “manifests a thirst for God which only the poor and the simple can know and it makes people capable of generosity and sacrifice even to the point of heroism, when it is a question of bearing witness to belief. ...popular piety is a precious treasure of the Catholic Church” (EG, 123).

Finally, it should be added that this merciful ability of the people of God, which the Latin-American bishops call “popular spirituality” or “spirituality incarnated in the culture of the lowly”, is essentially missionary.

Since this is an international meeting of pastoral workers, I take the liberty of insisting on an aspect of primary importance that the Holy Father has invited us to pursue: our own conversion. “To understand this reality [i.e. the missionary aspect of popular piety] we need to approach it with the gaze of the Good Shepherd, who seeks not to judge but to love. Only from the affective connaturality born of love can we appreciate the theological life present in the piety of Christian peoples, especially among their poor” (EG, 125).

Sanctuaries and popular piety

The following considerations are the result of my personal experience as priest and Rector of the Lourdes Sanctuary, and they can perhaps be helpful for other Sanctuaries, which are all privileged places of popular piety.

It is very difficult to define a Sanctuary in just a few words. It is also very difficult to define them on the basis of their most evident features, namely: prayer, processions, the presence of sick people, their internationality or their thousands of volunteers.

The truth is that the Sanctuary is all that, and at the same time it is not, very simply because – starting from its founding event, whether it is an apparition, a cure, a providential circumstance or something else – a Sanctuary is first and foremost a grace, and like all graces it is a gift of God, a grace that manifests itself in various forms, including popular piety.

A sanctuary is established in a specific place, but the grace of the Sanctuary goes far beyond its geographical borders. It is not necessary to be physically present in *Fatima*, *Loreto*, *Luján*, *Aparecida*, *Lourdes*, *Guadalupe*, *Itatí*, etc. to experience the grace of each of those Sanctuaries. Millions of Christians live off them every day, even if they have never been to these sites. I was in charge of the pastoral care of the high mountain communities in the diocese of Tucuman (Argentina) at the foot of the Andes for twenty years. Those villages, more than two thousand metres above sea level, can only be reached by donkey, after a two-day trip. I can assure you that it was there that I felt prompted by the testimony and prayers of

those Christian communities to make the grace of the three great French devotions my own: the Sacred Heart, Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus, and Our Lady of Lourdes! To those Christians, the sites of Lisieux, Paray-le-Monial, Lourdes are there, in the small earthen chapel sheltering the image of their patron saints. It is the result of a very long missionary endeavour. At the beginning, in the 19th century, pastoral work was carried out by just a few French priests, then came some catechists, and eventually the whole community. One does not have to be in Palestine to experience the grace of the Good News...

The grace of a Sanctuary is quite simply the first grace of the Gospel. “Repent and believe the good news!” (Mk. 1:15). This grace possesses something original, something primeval, something fundamental and kerygmatic. Usually, it is a call to conversion. In the language and gestures of popular piety, conversion takes on countless descriptions: cure, miracle, inner healing, search for forgiveness, sharing, help, thanksgiving, prayer, walking, meeting, etc. But if our heart as shepherds is alert and possesses the “affective connaturality” that the Holy Father expects from us, we will realise that a pilgrim is always searching for some change in his life.

Just as the Eucharist is the source and summit of Christian life, conversion is the result of a pilgrimage to a sanctuary. As pastoral workers, we are duty bound to be at the service of this conversion which manifests itself through countless gestures of popular piety.

Accepting grace begins with a discovery of humanity. If we look closely at the crowd gathering around the Lourdes grotto, we indeed find that they speak to us first and foremost about humanity. Each person comes with his/her sufferings, expectations, lost causes, joys, sorrows and wounds. Even the pilgrims’ gestures in the grotto unveil the nakedness and poverty of our humanity. How could we not be moved or touched when we see a mother rubbing her sick child against the rock! It is perhaps the last act of hope! And it is a common gesture in popular piety.

However, the same gesture, i.e. touching the rock, also reveals another reality. As a matter of fact, this rock “touched” by the Mother of God puts a pilgrim in contact with a fundamental element of life, which constitutes his/her very essence and which cannot be affected, distorted or destroyed by anybody and can never be negotiated or sold: his/her dignity as a living being made in the image and likeness of God.

Consequently, the fact of “touching” what is sacred speaks to us both of our humanity and of God’s sudden entrance into the very heart of that humanity. This is a beautiful depiction of the words of the Apostle, Paul: “Where sin increased, grace increased all the more”.

At the same time, the crowd standing by the grotto allows another reality gradually to appear; this reality exists, but it is not visible to the naked eye. Thus, after seeing that crowd, after mingling with that multitude to the point of becoming a part of it, after realising that the humanity of which we are all made “is certainly that”, suddenly each one will discover that it is not a mere juxtaposition of human beings, but that this humanity is the Church – the Church that appears not only as a hierarchy centred around a small group of men, but also the Church that shows us the maternal face that I am seeing and of which I am not afraid. In Lourdes, the presence of the Blessed Virgin allows us to encounter the Church and to love it.

The visibility of humanity and of the Church are two important encounters in a pilgrim’s experience, but they will also help him/her open up to a third encounter: the encounter with Christ. And since Lourdes is a Marian sanctuary, it is necessarily a church sanctuary. And since Lourdes is a Catholic sanctuary, its heart is Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world.

Humanity, the Church and Jesus Christ are the way which leads to the experience of grace, to its acceptance and to the fruit it continues abundantly to bear.

On the basis of these facts, we understand that the pilgrimage experience implies different levels and stages. And I say, “pilgrimage experience”, because the various stages intersect in a pilgrim’s heart. It is not a question of categories of pilgrims: this notion does not exist and should not exist in the heart of a shepherd.

A first, very important stage occurs at the level of humanity, by the act of touching the rock, lighting a candle, drinking and washing with the water from the spring.

The second stage is connected with the ancestral and traditional devotions of the Church: praying the rosary, praying the Stations of the Cross, participating in the processions.

The third stage concerns the sacraments: celebration of the Eucharist, and Reconciliation. This is the experience of those who are drawn in by the grace of the Sanctuary.

As pastoral workers, we must put ourselves at the services of these three facts:

- by proclaiming and spreading the Word of God. The sanctuaries need good preachers.
- by celebrating the sacraments, especially the Eucharist and Reconciliation.
- by ensuring the welcome of the poorest and the sick suffering in body and mind. In a certain way, the Sanctuary’s credibility is founded on the organisation of charity.
- by accompanying and guiding personal and community prayer.

If the Church does not accomplish this task, a sanctuary can turn into a museum or a conference centre. We are actually at the service of the grace of the sanctuary, which is the reflection of the grace of the Gospel. It is a grace that transcends us and that no-one owns.

We can already draw a very important pastoral lesson from the above finding. Regardless of whether we are speaking of the bishop, the rector, the priests, the religious, the volunteers or the staff of a sanctuary: the only possible attitude is to be at the service of the grace of the Sanctuary itself, which finds its expression through countless gestures of popular piety. In this respect, I wish to talk about a personal experience. I was a parish priest for several years, and I constantly asked myself the following question: what do we need to do to proclaim the Gospel in the parish?

Today, the question I am asking myself as Rector of the Sanctuary is: what must we do to give all pilgrims access to the grace of Lourdes?

However, we also have to be very prudent and farsighted, because we can conceal, or simply divert, ignore or extinguish the grace of the Sanctuary without even being aware of it. We are only the servants of this grace that will always be reverberating, because it is deeply missionary. “Let us not stifle or claim to control this missionary power!” (EG, 124).

1. We have to avoid drawing a very sharp and firm separation line between popular piety and institutional religion. God’s action can take on forms that we can neither anticipate nor forecast. God often works outside of our structures. The Christian mission is not necessarily a rational communication of the Gospel.

2. Popular piety teaches us to interact seriously with culture. This is the reason why we have to be attentive and generous towards the movements that best respond to the “thirst for God” that so many people experience.

3. We have to rediscover the presence of the Holy Spirit in popular piety: arguably under thousands of different names. It is the Holy Spirit who guides popular piety into the fullness of truth, i.e. to the centrality of the Easter mystery, to Jesus, to his Church. Popular piety must not be “instrumentalised” as the subject of a pastoral strategy; it must rather be appreciated in itself, as the presence of the Holy Spirit.

4. Popular piety must be understood and strengthened on the basis of the Word of God; it may be purified only through the great narrative of the Spirit. Only on this basis can minor narratives make sense.

5. Popular piety must be focused on the experience of the Covenant with God. It is evident that popular piety and liturgy are closely connected; they speak to us about God’s Covenant with his People, with humanity, with creation: they have to be in line with one another.

6. We must transform the popular movement into a great community movement, switch from the individualist nature of a Christianity without allegiance, a social-cultural Christianity, to the Christianity convened by the Church. We must move from discontinuity or intermittency to continuity, from pilgrimage to conversion.

7. We need to realise that popular piety represents an opportunity for the New Evangelisation, since it can be a space for dialogue between faith and reason, between natural, pagan appearances and faith revealed.



“ BERNADETTE, THROUGH POPULAR PIETY TO HOLINESS ”

Sister Loiri Lazzarotto, Superior General of the sisters of the Immaculate Conception of Lourdes

Good morning all!

First of all, I thank the organizers of this event for inviting me to this opportunity to share my thoughts here, in this sacred land of Lourdes. It is an honour to be with you today. You, the representatives of the life, animation and momentum of the Sanctuary of Lourdes, you continually bring Mary's request to Bernadette to life: "Build a chapel and come in procession".

As a Sister of the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady of Lourdes, I belong to an Institution which was born in this diocese of Tarbes, like a tree planted on the edge of the Gave which extends from its roots to the Grotto of Massabielle and there, in the serene encounter with Mary Immaculate, finds reason, strength and vitality to keep its leaves always green (according to the book of Jr. 17,8).

For this time of sharing, I would like to give you an introduction to our institutional identity, the charism, the spirituality of our religious family and also, certain aspects of our way of embodying the Message of Lourdes in our life and in our Mission.

Monseigneur Laurence, Bishop of Tarbes, wanted to found a Congregation whose goal was the relief of souls in Purgatory, the opportunity for spiritual retreats, the formation of young poor people and the admission of people, who in adulthood, wanted to consecrate themselves to God in religious life. He entrusted this project to Father Jean Louis Peydessus, Missionary of the Immaculate Conception: he, on a parish mission in Tournay, met Eugénie Ducombs and later became her spiritual director.

When he learned of her desire to consecrate herself to God in religious life, Father Peydessus invited her to participate in this project which was about to begin. Sometime later, Eugénie Ducombs joined Elise Abadie, also from Tournay and Marie Maudret, from Aureillan. The seed germinated slowly, it took 20 years for it to materialise.

On 15th December 1863, during a celebration presided over by Monseigneur Laurence at the Notre-Dame de Garaison Sanctuary, the three young women made their Religious Profession. This is how the *Congregation of the Suffering and Immaculate Heart of Mary* was born in the diocese of Tarbes. On the same day, led by Father Peydessus, the three sisters went to Lannemezan, where they established the community. Eugénie Ducombs, received the name of Mother Marie of Jesus Crucified and took on the mission of Superior of the new foundation.

In the first years of the Community in Lannemezan vocations abounded. The Bishop was worried because he did not see how he could "keep so many people busy", but Mother Superior was already thinking of Lourdes. In this place, she saw all the advantageous conditions that would make her religious family prosper and open up other horizons for her. The Work of Spiritual Retreats, for which the Institute was founded, gained strength thanks to the prevailing spiritual climate and the flow of pilgrims who sought places of silence and prayer near the Grotto.

After the death of Monsignor Laurence in January 1870, during the appointment of Monsignor Pierre Anastase Pichenot, the Mother spoke to the new Bishop about the plans to found the Institute, the difficulties in which the Community found themselves and her desire to transfer to Lourdes. That was all it took. The bishop, courteous and determined, immediately replied, "I believe that your place is in Lourdes."

Thus, on 2nd July 1870, the feast of the Visitation of Mary, Mother Marie of Jesus Crucified, and four other Sisters, arrived in Lourdes and settled in a property very close to the Grotto,

in what we today call the Little Convent, the mother house of the Institute. They thus dedicated their work to Our Lady of Lourdes and promised to rejoice in their Immaculate heart.

On 8th December of the same year, on the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, Monsignor Pichenot, introduced the Sisters celebrating the Office of Vespers in the crypt to the rest of the congregation and officially gave them a new name: "*Sisters of the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady of Lourdes*", thus dedicating them to the Immaculate of Lourdes.

The change of name

The change of name to *Sisters of the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady of Lourdes* did not change the charismatic content, because the Immaculate has an Immaculate heart. This new name did not expunge the content of the original *Congregation of the Suffering and Immaculate Heart of Mary*, but rather deepened its mystagogical dimension.

"I am the Immaculate Conception" is the culmination of the Message of Lourdes and guides our hearts towards the mystery of love, that is to say, it invites us to recognise the presence of God in creatures and in the world. The Immaculate, the first loved one, the "New Woman", reminds us of the first love of God: the love that generates fertility in Mary, in Bernadette and in each of us. It's a message full of life, hope and mercy, which invites each person to a gesture of brotherhood and universality. Mary received the immense gift of the Immaculate Conception and responded to it in a faithful and consistent manner. Her adherence to the plan of God is nourished by an intense love, which burns in her heart thanks to her immaculate life.

This new name gave each Sister a permanent memorial of the events of Lourdes, as Father Peydessus reminded us: "The life of the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception must be entirely imbued with devotion to Mary. In my opinion, the name they bear is the only prompt they need ...".

Lourdes broadened the perspectives of the founders and helped them realise that the purpose of the Institution could spread far and wide without losing its origins. The Sisters were well aware that they had been called to Lourdes to live and propagate devotion to the Immaculate and to the worship of the Eucharist, in order to spread the message of the Apparitions.

Eucharistic and Marian Spirituality

The Eucharistic dimension of our spirituality is closely linked to the Marian dimension. Indeed, ecclesial practice, yesterday as today, maintains a close relationship between these two devotions. Evident in the personal piety of the Founders, they received an intense input in Lourdes so that they could flower.

Lourdes, the city of Mary, is also a "Eucharistic land". All the visible signs of Lourdes are a source of spirituality for our Institution. The presence of Mary radiating from the rock of Massabielle, the centrality of the Eucharist, uninterrupted prayer and pilgrimages with crowds from all over the world: Everything is an expression of love and opens the way to conversion.

Charisma

All those who come to Lourdes because of Mary do not stop at her, because she herself leads us to Jesus. For the world, she is the unique sign of the first love of God. This is the essence of the Message of Lourdes and our Charism: *“To be a sign of life and hope testifying to the saving love of God manifested in Lourdes”*.

To testify is to transmit an experience, that is to say to speak of an event that we have seen, heard or experienced; it is to commit to a truth.

From the beginnings of the Institution, we have discovered that the Spring in Lourdes is having a lasting and fruitful action in us; gradually we have imbued ourselves with the Spirit of simplicity and joy present in the apparitions by making known the realities of faith which are manifested in this place.

We can say that in Lourdes we have found our roots and our missionary force.

Mission

Welcoming is one of the strongest characteristics of the Message of Lourdes, from the first Apparition to the present day.

The way Mary welcomed Bernadette at the Grotto of Massabielle, treating her like a person, with kindness and respect, the construction of the Basilica with its open arms recalling the loving embrace of God who wants to gather all of his children, without exception, the Grotto open to all: All this encourages people to come here, people who feel welcomed and open to accept the grace of God in their lives.

Mary Immaculate, who came barefoot on the cold rock in the middle of winter, reminds us that we should be more aware of reality of where we walk, where God reveals himself; barefoot, she showed her respect for the sacred ground that is each person.

As in the relationship between Mary and Bernadette, we are called to announce and bear witness to the Love that saves, by welcoming and helping people to discover their dignity as children of God, in a spirit of *Simplicity and Joy*.

We express this welcome through our apostolic activities, which are focused mainly on education. Both in formal and informal education, through the different projects that we have and the pastoral care that we take on.

Our educational practice seeks to reflect the pedagogy of Mary Immaculate in Lourdes and to promote a transformative education which trains citizens engaged in the construction of the “other world”, the world that God desires for his sons and daughters, where truth, peace, love, justice, tenderness and good-will reign.

To foster the prayer and simplicity that reigns in the Grotto, we have revised the wish of our founders, by offering people who are looking for our Spiritual Retirement Homes a space for silence, and prayer, for listening to and sharing the Word of God.

In our various communities, we welcome elderly people, young students, as well as, in the Saint Bernadette orphanage, children in vulnerable situations, waiting to be reintegrated into their families or to be adopted.

The Sisters of the Communities introduced into the midst of the people, following the example of Mary Immaculate, bear witness to the free and saving love of God for each person, with apostolic fervour and fidelity to the Institution's Charism, working in emerging pastoral ministries, open to the calls and challenges that the Church and the world show us.

In the social pastoral care that we take on, we are called to contemplate the face of Christ and to bear witness to his love in solidarity, selflessness and generosity towards the poor.

In this regard, many have enlightened us in our current thoughts on the advocacy of Women in the Apparitions and the Message of Lourdes.

The Immaculate Virgin and Saint Bernadette were the protagonists of history, women open to the action of the Holy Spirit and full of faith. They represent icons of hope and trust in God.

Both were young women in a similar social situation who received a specific mission: the Immaculate Virgin, to give birth to and be the mother of the Saviour; Bernadette, to remind humanity of the infinite, selfless and saving love of God for all, especially the marginalised, the sick and the poor.

The first witnesses to the Apparitions were teenage girls, the aunt and the other women wanted to see what was happening at the Grotto of Massabielle. The crowd of believers, which was gradually increasing at the Grotto, was made up of women. Simple women, at the beginning, but also women of the noble classes, who were illuminated by the light which came from the Grotto and who become illuminators in turn of their brothers and sisters.

Mary, Bernadette and the women present at the first Apparitions, are feminine forces that have transformed life and realities, time and history, leaving each one with a message of Love and Hope, a path to follow. Companions of those who live on the margins of society - the poor, marginalised women, the voiceless, the abandoned - still today they reveal to us the Spring that continues to bring forth life: Jesus Christ.

It is with this inspiration that we take on very concrete work with women on the margins of society whose basic human rights are not respected and who are not treated or looked at as a person.

In Burkina Faso, we are helping a group of women to regain their dignity, their creativity and their feminine strength, through human advancement, through an interreligious group: With Christian and Muslim women, it is possible to help them discover their dignity as women, generators of life and hope, beloved daughters of the Father.

In Manaus, Brazil, we are part of an inter-regional project which combats human trafficking, in particular women and child victims of sexual exploitation. Many adolescent girls are raped, sold, with no one to help and defend them. Our work is awareness and prevention.

Mission with the Laity

Our charism is a gift from the Holy Spirit, it is not our exclusive property: The effectiveness of the evangelising mission of the Institution is enriched by sharing and living our spirituality with the laity, in reciprocal collaboration and mutual communion.

Today we have a large number of lay people engaged in different cities and countries. God has clearly encouraged many men and women to participate in our religious family, in the experience of Charisma and Spirituality. More than 300 people committed their time to us.

They are called lay Missionaries of Our Lady of Lourdes, Messengers of Lourdes or “Bernarditas”, depending on the context of each country.

We are grateful to the Lord who continues to call men and women to the service of the Kingdom and to everyone who works with his “yes” so that others may discover the beauty of the lay vocation in the Church and live the charism of the Institution and the spirituality of Lourdes.

Together, our vocations enlighten one another, we are strengthened on our journey, we are encouraged in our faith, we promote solidarity, brotherly love and charity.

On 2nd July, we will be celebrating the Jubilee of the 150th anniversary of our presence in Lourdes. It is a time of grace that the Lord has granted us; a time to renew the gift of our Consecration and to bear witness, with dynamic and creative faithfulness, to the saving love of God which manifests itself in Lourdes.

May Mary Immaculate, present from the first moment of our Institution’s foundation, who welcomed us at the Grotto of Massabielle, continue to be our inspirer, our mother and our steadfast guide who helps us to open new horizons of hope and to “know the place that religious women occupy in the Church and in the heart of God so as not to be satisfied just with faithfulness on the outside”, as our Founding Mother said.



“ THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION BY THE SIDE OF THE SICK AND THE HOSPITALITY ”

Daniel Pezet, President of the Hospitality of Our Lady of Lourdes

"Mary Immaculate in my Life as a Hospitalier"

Introduction:

I am the president of the Hospitality of Our Lady of Lourdes.

I said "yes" a year ago (day to day). As this beautiful hymn goes;

The first on the path, Mary you risk our "yes" to the unexpected plan of God.

How can we say No to Lourdes?

The mission of the Hospitality of Our Lady of Lourdes is clear:

- Welcome pilgrims and especially sick pilgrims
- Facilitate their pilgrimage
- Transmit the message of Lourdes. During their engagement, each member of the hospitality undertakes to delve further into the message of Lourdes.

How does the message of Lourdes give meaning to my actions, meaning to my life as a Hospitalier?

What is the place of Mary Immaculate in my life as a Hospitalier with sick pilgrims with the most vulnerable?

I believe the answer lies in the purity of her heart, in her humility and in her intercession.

I) The purity of Mary's Heart

Between 11th February and 16th July 1858, there were 18 apparitions, 11 were silent. Mary spoke very little, each word, each sentence had its own importance, its own relevance. She did not speak of the sick, the most vulnerable. She invited us to follow her son.

"Go and drink at the spring and wash there." Jesus Christ, the everlasting spring.

The Message from Lourdes is a message of love. Mary is there at the Grotto. She is close to us. "Mary's purity makes her closer to us" said Benedict XVI in Lourdes in 2008.

She looks at us. A look full of love.

Here then arises the question of the way we look at others and especially the most vulnerable.

In a magnificent book "The way of weakness" written by Jean-Christophe Parisot and Philippe de la Chapelle this question is raised.

"We live in a civilisation which has not yet decontaminated its way of looking at the disabled person".

The great suffering of a sick or disabled person is the feeling that no one is waiting for them, no one is welcoming them, no one is looking at them.

The welcome of the sick begins with a look, a gesture, a word. This first meeting for any hospitalier is a meeting of love.

"She looked at me like a person ..."

The dignity of the other does not come with his/her age, his/her social status, his/her education. It is "deep in his/her heart" which has been altered, neither by age, nor by illness, nor by handicap, nor by appearance, indeed by anything ...

Within the Sanctuary, near the Saint Michael gate, the Christian Office for the Disabled (OCH) runs a welcome service.

Whatever your situation, sick, disabled, close friend, caregiver, alone or in a group ...

Martine, Anne or other members of the OCH team will be happy to welcome you for training in an approach to people with disabilities. An encounter such as this will prove most useful.

My mission as a Hospitalier begins from the first second. I come towards the Other person, I see them as they are, very different from my standards and norms.

With humility, I place myself at their service.

II) Mary's humility

Mary Immaculate in my life as a hospitalier is this example of humility.

"To enter the kingdom of heaven", Saint John Paul II tells us, "one must make a conversion to lowliness".

Every hospitalier is in service. Just listen to Saint Bernadette:

"I am the broom which the Virgin used. What do you do with a broom when you're done using it? We put it behind the door. This is my place and I am fine with it. I'm staying there".

She said everything "our" Bernadette. I'm in my place and I'm staying there.

All the missions undertaken by members of the hospitality are noble, in the Baths, meeting and greeting at the station, the airport, missions of service by doing the dishes and the cleaning in Accueils. Even if I am in the shadows so that the pilgrims do not see me. I serve in the Sanctuary, I participate in its organisation, in its life, in its beauty. I help pilgrimages be successful. I'm in my place and I stay there ...

"The maternal love of the Virgin Mary disarms all pride" Benedict XVI reminded us in 2008.

Saint Paul asks the Ephesians to practise humility (a sentence that could be addressed to all hospitaliers):

"I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. ² Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love."

I would add that our love, the charity of the hospitaliers must be a smiling one.

To respect someone is to pay attention to what they can feel, to have consideration for them and to take care of their person. Respect for the person for a Hospitalier:

It means welcoming them with joy. We are happy to meet them, and we were waiting for them.

It means talking to them calmly even if they're annoyed, panicked, angry. It can happen. We also welcome all the bitterness of the world ...

It means never touching it without gentleness, like grabbing them by the arm, or pushing them away suddenly.

It means to see in them, a brother or a sister in their humanity.

These requirements relating to respect for the person do not date from today. If you need to be convinced, you just need to re-read what Monseigneur Théas, Bishop of Tarbes and Lourdes said to the hospitaliers in 1969, a little more than 50 years ago:

"The problem is to ensure the primacy of love over all regulations and all instructions ... When an instruction is necessary, it must be observed with love, which implies respect for people ... which implies gentleness in our gestures, warmth in our words and as much as possible, the smile that makes faces bloom and spreads joy in hearts."

All those qualities which have their source in humility, and which are manifest in brotherly and sisterly charity. Yes, the love of the hospitalier must be smiling.

III) The intercession of Mary

Finally, Mary Immaculate in my life as a hospitalier is intercession.

The first intercession of Mary to Jesus her son is undoubtedly at Cana.

"They have no more wine"

A single sentence is enough. Jesus understood.

Allow me a brief digression on the Mysteries of Light as illustrated by the mosaics of Father Rupnik on the facade of the Rosary Basilica.

Father Rupnik is a Jesuit priest of Slovenian origin. He is as much an artist as a theologian, nourished by the tradition of oriental iconography.

He chose to locate the Wedding at Cana on the large central door topped by the Institution of the Eucharist. Mary is next to her son.

For the Artist, Mary's words: "They have no more wine" meant "They have no more love".

There are also other intercessors in the Gospel, like Martha and Mary, who appealed to Jesus for their brother Lazarus.

"Lord, the one you love is sick". One simple sentence was enough. Jesus understood.

The Hospitaliers are also privileged intercessors for the weakest and most vulnerable. There is a passage in the Gospel "the healing of the paralytic" which describes the first stretcher bearers in history (both in the Gospel of Mark and Luke). They are also represented in one

of the mosaics on the facade of the Rosary Basilica (on the first landing on the right staircase).

You definitely remember those people who broke through the roof to present a sick person to Jesus.

“Some men came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. ⁴ Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus by digging through it and then lowered the mat the man was lying on, in front of Jesus.”

In front of Jesus, a mission that we accomplish daily by placing the blue voitures in front of the altar of the St Pius X basilica or in front of the altar at the Grotto or in the church of Saint Bernadette.

But caring for those who are suffering is not limited to bearing them in front of Jesus.

But the most beautiful act was yet to come.

“When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, “Son, your sins are forgiven.”

Seeing, their faith. Jesus took into account the faith of the carers, these first stretcher bearers. Here we have the illustration that the hospitality mission does not stop at service, it continues with prayer, through our intercession. We are privileged intercessors, we intervene to Our Lord Jesus Christ for the person we serve.

We must take up the prayer of Martha and Mary:

"Lord, the one you love is sick". A single sentence is enough. Jesus understood.

Naturally, the hospitaliers do not have a monopoly on the service of their sick or disabled brothers and sisters. It is a service that constitutes the Grace of Lourdes. All become Servants.

Pilgrims and Servants!

The Sick and the Hospitaliers are united. A partnership. United by very strong ties.

The first time, the hospitalier comes to Lourdes to answer a call and give. Self-giving. Freely.

But they come back because they realise that they receives much more than they give.



“ THE SANCTUARIES AND THE NEW EVANGELISATION ”

Mgr Rino Fisichella

President of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelisation

The sanctuary and the new evangelisation

Lourdes, 10th February 2020

From the moment we say the word "sanctuary", our minds start working and demand an historical overview. It would be very short sighted of us to stop only at what we see today, without having the story that comes before. And we need to do this, because it leads us to be actively responsible for keeping past traditions alive, whilst also going through a process of renewal, to transmit a continuity of content to future generations, even if it is reinterpreted according to the spirit of our time.

A historical recollection

The sanctuary refers to a particular place of worship and all religions have them. The first testimonies take us back to three thousand years before Jesus Christ. Ancient Mesopotamia had its sanctuaries and the Semitic population too; in Phoenicia and Syria, one can still find remains of sanctuaries from the Hellenistic period (300 BC). And, we cannot take the Sacred Scripture into our hands and read the names of Shechem, Siloam, Bethel, Beersheba ... without getting carried away by what these names indicate. Abraham's first stop at Canaan was at Shechem (Gen. 12: 6-7); here he stopped at the "great tree of Moreh", where he received an oracle. This is where God appeared to Abraham, promising the land to him and his descendants, and Abraham built an altar there. After him, Jacob, returning from Mesopotamia, encamped within sight of Shechem, bought the land and erected an altar dedicated "To, God of Israel" (Gen. 33: 18-20), while he buried the foreign idols, as testimony to his choosing faith in the one God (Gen. 35,4). Also, in Shechem, Joshua placed a large stone as an altar, testifying to the alliance between Yahweh and the tribes (Jos 24,25-28). Here, Abimelek was proclaimed king (Judges 9,6); and still in the same place, Rehoboam broke with current politics (1 Kings 12,1-19). Likewise, the sanctuary of Beersheba reminds us of the "well of water" (Gen. 21,23-31), when God appeared to Isaac confirming the promise made to his father Abraham (Gen. 26,23-25); his son Jacob offered sacrifices to God and he appeared to him (Gen. 46.1-4). Samuel himself established his children at Beersheba as leaders (1 Sam. 8,1-2), in memory of what he himself had done for all of Israel.

These examples, in short, only bear witness to the ancient tradition of sanctuaries and the history of salvation that they help us to understand. What is striking, however, is the fact that these sacred places are not chosen by humans, but rather refer to a theophany, a divine communication, which is followed by an act of worship. This historical dimension allows us to draw an important lesson from pastoral action: the primacy of God in the life of the Church and in our personal life. It is God who chooses the place, the time and what is necessary to reveal himself and make himself known. For our part, we only need to find the silence for listening, so that his word and the signs that accompany and explain it, can become instruments of salvation.

So, God chose the way in which he would dwell among his people. His *sacramental* presence today is signified by the choice he makes to dwell among his people. In short, there is a place that becomes the sign of God's "dwelling" among his people and this is where he wants to dwell. A place that is "desired", and "desired" by God. In this context, we could easily read, in reverse, the beautiful expression of Saint Augustine when he wrote at the beginning of his *Confessions*: "You created us for yourself and our heart is restless until it rests in you." It is as if the heart of God is restless until it dwells among us, knowing that its dwelling and its life with us are sources of serenity and peace for humanity.

So that's why the story of salvation is dotted with shrines. Relegating them to the periphery of theology and pastoral care, as if it were a boring appendage, would not do justice to their nature and to the role they have played and continue to play today. The sanctuaries are still charged with meaning because they bring the history of the people, the culture and the religious identity of entire generations up to date.

All this does not mean we should yield to an outdated and anachronistic triumphalism but means that we should seriously reflect on how we prepare for the future with the different challenges that should prompt our pastoral action.

The recollection of God in the midst of his people

We have a great enemy who is constantly attentive to smallest actions, our desires and our thoughts: it is forgetfulness. Caught in the frenzy of time and the thousand worries that affect our day, we forget what we know to be important and essential. The signs bring back to mind the meaning they contain and urge us not to forget. It's easy to think of signs in people's lives; just think of the ring placed in the left ring finger to remind the spouses of the promise of fidelity and eternal love that they exchanged on their wedding day. Everyone's life is full of signs; some are more visible, others less so, but all represent an underlying meaning.

The sanctuary is a *sign*. It comes to meet us to challenge our forgetting and to bring our minds continually back to the recollection of God and to his presence among us. Now is the time to clarify our thinking. For a holy place to be recognised as a "sanctuary", it must be a pilgrimage destination. It is the presence of the pilgrim that determines the nature of the sanctuary. It is equally important to remember, at this stage, that a semantic derivation recognises in the Latin "*sanctuary*" also the relics of the saints and the bandages which touched them. The sanctuary, therefore, increasingly stands as the destination of pilgrims who come to pray at the tomb of the saint where the presence of something extraordinary is affirmed, made complete by their invocation.

It is in this sense that the sanctuary is a sign of *hope*. It becomes the place where the desire of those who are thirsty and hungry for grace finds access and is welcomed, begging for the mercy of God. We do not go to the sanctuary to force God to do our will, but to learn to pray that everything will be accomplished according to his will. It is, if you will, the price we pay to have our prayer accepted. Closed off as we often are in our little world, we cannot see beyond ourselves and our opposing desires. Being a pilgrim in the sanctuary is like learning to come out of yourself to meet the grace which transforms us. This is where the heart truly opens to Christian hope. Indeed, it is full confidence and unshakable certainty that our well-

being is always and only as much as God wants for us. The thirst for God which drives pilgrims to set out on their journey, opens us up to the acceptance of his will which becomes food to keep us walking despite the tortuous events of life.

A horizon of common engagement

The fragmentation, to which the culture of our time is a victim, must be overcome. Suggesting a common and participatory commitment does not mean that we are moving towards a form of approval which does not belong to the church of Christ. On the contrary, it can become an effective sign of the presence of the Spirit, which constantly indicates new paths to follow, so that the Gospel knows no obstacle.

The words of Gabriel Marcel, in his most famous work, *Homo viator*, provide a common foundation that goes beyond simple religious experience. A profound philosopher, at the height of the Second World War he wrote: "Perhaps a stable order can only be established. Can a stable earth order be established if man is acutely aware of his condition as a traveller ; that is to say, if he perpetually reminds himself that he is required to cut himself a dangerous path across the unsteady blocks of the universe that has collapsed and seems to be crumbling in every direction ". This vision of the future that the French philosopher cites, anticipates in many ways the condition of the great fragmentation that is experienced today.

But it is the apostle who strongly reiterates that the Word of God "spreads rapidly" (cf. 2 Th 3: 1) and for this reason the disciples cannot feel any fatigue as evangelisers. In fact, the messages coming from our sanctuaries are indeed the key witnesses of the task that falls to us at the pastoral level. To be distracted from this objective would not allow us to keep alive the memory which brought about *the sanctuary itself and which our people experience daily through its presence. In short, evangelisation is not peripheral content in the pastoral ministry of sanctuaries, but its primary objective.* Helping pilgrims to rediscover the meaning of being a disciple is equivalent to supporting a commitment to evangelisation, because meeting with the Lord cannot be delegated. If we had to identify an urgency for our time, it would be unquestionably to restore fully our loyal enthusiasm for mission. It is no mystery that the sense of mission has decreased more and more, to the point where the responsibility for the transmission of the faith within the Christian family is no longer felt.

It is therefore not a question here of strategies to be adopted, but of a new mentality to be acquired so that the believer's identity does not fall victim to individualism, losing the feeling of belonging to the community and with it the ecclesial life. Pope Francis' call should not fall on deaf ears when he writes: "Pastoral ministry in a missionary style is not obsessed with the disjointed transmission of a multitude of doctrines to be insistently imposed. When we adopt a pastoral goal and a missionary style which would actually reach everyone without exception or exclusion, the message has to concentrate on the essentials, on what is most beautiful, most grand, most appealing and at the same time most necessary. The message is simplified, while losing none of its depth and truth, and thus becomes all the more forceful and convincing." (EG 35).

It is easy to check whether this symbiosis between evangelisation and pastoral action occurs in sanctuaries. Following the interpretative horizon of Pope Francis, the sanctuary highlights,

first of all, to what extent the Gospel has been enculturated in a particular context. This means, first of all, to what extent the work of evangelisation has been able to integrate into the culture of the people and expresses the newness of the Gospel. Just think of the language used by those who appear to the seer, if you want to understand the first element of enculturation. The language used in the apparitions, like the signs which are revealed, recalling the "prophetic" value which they conceal, highlights the extent to which they have entered the culture of the people and their desire to be understood by them.

It is easy for me to cite the example of Bernadette where, during their first conversation, the Virgin Mary addresses her in Occitan: "*Que soy era Immaculada Counceptiou*", "I am the Immaculate Conception". As at the time, in the XIXth century, Occitan was the language mainly spoken in Occitania whereas French was mainly used in towns and by the bourgeoisie, it goes without saying that the Virgin Mary had to be part of Bernadette's culture and had no choice but to speak the young shepherdess in patois.

This dimension is fundamental for the new evangelisation. It is part of a particular cultural context, and ecclesial traditions, which deserve to be mentioned at risk of misunderstanding evangelisation itself. It is true that today we are part of a globalisation process which looks to plan and certify everything; however, the new evangelisation is carried out through its originality which is specific to it, because it is called to respect the cultural and ecclesial context that it is called to stir.

A second element emerges from the teaching of *Evangelii Gaudium*: " To understand this reality we need to approach it with the gaze of the Good Shepherd, who seeks not to judge but to love. Only from the affective connaturality born of love can we appreciate the theological life present in the piety of Christian peoples, especially among their poor. I think of the steadfast faith of those mothers tending their sick children who, though perhaps barely familiar with the articles of the creed, cling to a rosary; or of all the hope poured into a candle lighted in a humble home with a prayer for help from Mary, or in the gaze of tender love directed to Christ crucified. No one who loves God's holy people will view these actions as the expression of a purely human search for the divine. They are the manifestation of a theological life nourished by the working of the Holy Spirit who has been poured into our hearts (cf. Rom 5: 5) " (EG no 125).

The quote refers to the daily experience of our shrines: that is, the simple prayer of our people that we are called to support and make more consistent to the Word of God. The new evangelisation is, moreover, an opportunity offered to the Church to renew its faith in the risen Lord and to awaken in believers the desire to participate in the joy of the resurrection. The Easter celebration opens with a prayer of thanksgiving, because God has fulfilled his promise. Witnessing the resurrection implies the zeal which stirred the first disciples, and which is reflected in the expression of Peter: "As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard" (cf. Acts 4,20). The strength of the encounter with Christ is such that the disciple truly becomes a witness to a unique happening which cannot remain enclosed within the walls of a house or in the secret of a heart. Easter leads to Pentecost and forces the doors to be opened wide to announce to all who are waiting, the Good News

of salvation. It is by the way in which our shrines become a key space for evangelisation that the very nature of their manifestation can therefore be understood.

First of all, I am thinking in particular of the manner of leading pilgrims to rediscover their profession of faith. The profession of faith is an act which recalls the baptism we have received and the choice to enter the Church. The two expressions of faith lead to verification of the identity of the believer and the feeling of belonging to the community. This dimension is especially reflected in the pilgrimage. In a period like ours where everyone goes on a journey, discovering the meaning of pilgrimage is an opportunity for evangelisation. People of today are already restless and need to be reminded of the meaning of silence, of fatigue, of walking, of conversation with those who share the same path, of looking at those who suffer, hope, love ... in short, the meaning of life is not foreign to the work of evangelisation, but constitutes its essence.

We need to find ways to show those who come to the sanctuary that the path they have travelled was a "pilgrimage". It therefore becomes a direct form of evangelisation, because it sheds light on aspects of the faith often considered obvious or ignored. The prayer of the Psalms commemorating the pilgrimage of the ancient Israelites to the temple of the Lord can help. It is an incredible opportunity for our shrines to make Psalms 120 to 134 an instrument of personal prayer and catechesis. As we know, these Psalms accompanied the pilgrim to discover that his ascent to the temple was certainly to "see" God, where he had decided to dwell; but it is more than just this because the Psalms particularly ordered the pilgrim to be "seen" by God. Even today, it is the purpose of our pilgrimage to the sanctuary: to be looked at by the Lord; to be under the gaze of the Virgin Mother; to be certain of a relationship so personal and intimate that we feel understood and comforted, so that when we return home, we are convinced that we have been heard. Nourishing the personal prayer of pilgrims with the prayer that is concentrated in the Psalter, or with numerous other prayers that follow the biblical tradition, is a great help that the shrines can offer to support the journey of faith and personal prayer.

Tradition

The dimension of *tradition* is also a fundamental element for our shrines. Allowing pilgrims to understand the history of the sanctuary, to encourage their entry into the mystery of God, is a necessary and essential undertaking. Showing how well the message conveyed by the sanctuary conforms to the core of the Gospel is essential in order that we don't let people simply have a squint at the faith. The Christ-centredness of the faith must never be overshadowed. Everything in our shrines should bring out the centre to which we are heading and from which full meaning flows. It is not always easy, but it is a commitment to evangelisation that allows us to grasp the will of God.

In addition, evangelisation lives in the *liturgy*, which is the prayer of all the holy people of God. The celebration of the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation requires special attention, because the pilgrims are stirred by a deep feeling of conversion. You can't improvise penitents or even confessors. Often a rather clerical point of view tends to focus only on the first term, taking the second as obvious. However, both require a deep sense of

what is celebrated. Of course, pilgrims need some time to review their life and present themselves alone before God. The confessor must be aware of this path and know that when he approaches the confessional, he is himself a sinner who has been forgiven. Mercy is not one of the many words we hear in the confessional of a sanctuary, but it is at the very heart of every celebration. Mercy then becomes a thanksgiving which, from the confessor, transforms the penitent, and makes them merciful. It is not rhetoric, but a message of evangelisation that penetrates the hearts and minds of pilgrims, allowing them to rediscover the joy of being a Christian.

In the same way the celebration of the Eucharist, where the homily plays a leading role in evangelisation, through which God himself reaches the hearts and minds of those who listen through the word of the priest. As Pope Francis recalls: "The preacher has the wonderful but difficult task of joining loving hearts, the hearts of the Lord and his people. The dialogue between God and his people further strengthens the covenant between them and consolidates the bond of charity. In the course of the homily, the hearts of believers keep silence and allow God to speak. The Lord and his people speak to one another in a thousand ways directly, without intermediaries. But in the homily, they want someone to serve as an instrument and to express their feelings in such a way that afterwards, each one may choose how he or she will continue the conversation." (EG no 143).

For the homily to fulfil its aim, the priests must have a familiarity with the Word of God without becoming shameless improvisers. In our sanctuaries, the homily, precisely because it is delivered to an ever-changing community, requires a greater preparation and becomes a challenge not to be underestimated. Certainly, the words of the priest can touch the hearts of many who feel nostalgia for God and who feel more willing to listen.

Sacred song is not incidental in the celebrations in the shrines. Especially in international sanctuaries, finding music and songs in which everyone can participate, helps to make everyone feel part of a community that does not recognise the limits imposed by national borders because it can express itself in a universal language like music does. The song is an opportunity to praise the Lord and to awaken feelings that remain tinged with the experience of faith lived. The song is the capacity to give voice to joy and pain, consolation and the desire to start again, this is why the dimension of the popular song ensures that the pilgrims feel at home and are nourished by this religiosity that they carry in them unconsciously, but that is still a deep prayer that rises to the altar of the Lord.

Evangelisation is nourished by charity. "We incarnate the duty of hearing the cry of the poor when we are deeply moved by the suffering of others". (EG. 193). With this simple expression, Pope Francis highlights the very heart of the mission of the sanctuaries: to be a key space for the poor. For the Church, the option for the poor is primarily a theological category rather than a cultural, sociological, political or philosophical one. God shows the poor "his first mercy".^[163] This divine preference has consequences for the faith life of all Christians, since we are called to have "this mind... which was in Jesus Christ" (Phil 2, 5). Inspired by it, the Church made an option for the poor, understood as "a special form of priority in the practice of Christian charity as evidenced by the whole tradition of the Church". (...) Not only do they share in the *sensus fidei*, but in their difficulties they know the suffering

Christ. We need to let ourselves be evangelised by them. The new evangelisation is an invitation to acknowledge the saving power at work in their lives and to put them at the centre of the Church's pilgrim way. We are called to find Christ in them, to lend our voice to their causes, but also to be their friends, to listen to them, to speak for them and to embrace the mysterious wisdom which God wishes to share with us through them.

Our commitment does not consist exclusively in activities or programmes of promotion and assistance; what the Holy Spirit mobilises is not an unruly activism, but above all an *attentiveness* which considers the other "in a certain sense as one with ourselves". This loving attentiveness is the beginning of a true concern for their person which inspires me effectively to seek their good. This entails appreciating the poor in their goodness, in their experience of life, in their culture, and in their ways of living the faith. True love is always contemplative, and permits us to serve the other not out of necessity or vanity, but rather because he or she is beautiful above and beyond mere appearances:

(...) Since this Exhortation is addressed to members of the Catholic Church, I want to say, with regret, that the worst discrimination which the poor suffer is the lack of spiritual care. The great majority of the poor have a special openness to the faith; they need God and we must not fail to offer them his friendship, his blessing, his word, the celebration of the sacraments and a journey of growth and maturity in the faith. Our preferential option for the poor must mainly translate into a privileged and preferential religious care. (EG 198-200)

Spirituality of return

From the sanctuary, we return to everyday life. It is the horizon on which evangelisation must focus its pastoral attention. The Sanctuary is of course the goal that the pilgrim wants to achieve. However, the person in charge of the sanctuary cannot escape the fact that helping the pilgrim to get home is the real pilgrimage to aim for. Insofar as you can welcome and offer a testimony of faith and prayer, you can also support the pilgrim's journey in their return to daily life, reinforced by the experience of the grace they have experienced. On the other hand, evangelisation is not a parenthesis in the life of the believer, but a choice of life. "I am a mission on this earth; that is the reason why I am here in this world." (EG 273). The rediscovery of a lifelong calling is the goal at which pastoral engagement cannot fail at this historic moment. To be an evangeliser is not an "extra" or just another moment in the life of the Christian, but it is their very identity.

If the sanctuary has evangelised, there is no alternative; the pilgrim becomes an evangeliser. In this sense, perhaps, we could think of the way in which our celebrations prepare pilgrims for returning home and to everyday life. In this way, the sanctuary would have fulfilled its mission completely, because the pilgrim understands that their stay at the sanctuary has been a fruitful and effective stage in their daily life, in the community and in the world.

It is really through prayer and mutual listening that we can get to know each other better and identify the ways that can foster a commitment to the new evangelisation among our people. It is a service that, together, we give to the Church so that through our sanctuaries, She will always be a sign of the living presence of the love of God among the men and women of our time.

+ Rino Fisichella