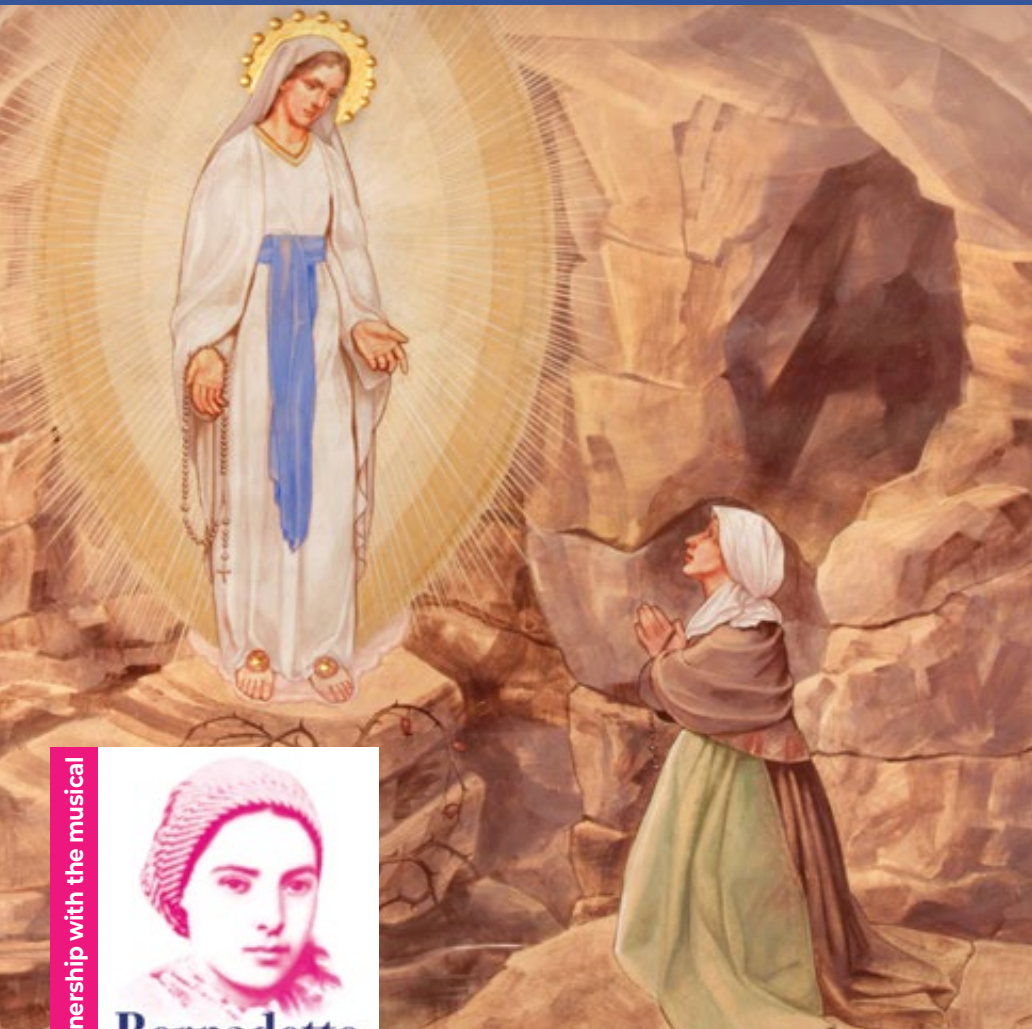


PRAYING WITH
**ST. BERNADETTE
OF LOURDES**

15 Reflections on Living a Life of Virtue



In partnership with the musical



MELANIE RIGNEY

BERNADETTE SOUBIROUS



1844-1879

ABOUT THIS BOOKLET...

The life story of Bernadette of Lourdes has fascinated millions, not only because she was a 19th-century teenager when she had a series of authenticated spiritual encounters with the Blessed Virgin Mary but that the message of Lourdes continues to this day.

Sometimes, we mistakenly think of saints and heroes of the faith as possessing extraordinary personal powers that allowed them to do great things for God. Yet, in most cases, the opposite is true. Their holiness is the fruit of their bringing their own will into conformity with the will of God, allowing God's grace and God's plan to have room to work in their lives. The simple life of Bernadette, lived in concert with God's grace, has brought hope and healing to many who struggle with their faith and life.

Bernadette is now a saint of the Roman Catholic Church. Her feast day is celebrated on April 16, and Our Lady of Lourdes is commemorated on February 18. Lourdes remains a remarkable place of peace and pilgrimage for seekers and believers from around the world.

In this booklet, you'll find an introduction on the life of Bernadette Soubirous and her marvelous and often difficult spiritual journey, followed by fifteen days of reflections with themes drawn from our need for the virtues and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Each day's reflection is anchored by Scripture and a quote from the saint herself, Bernadette of Lourdes.

INTRODUCTION

She was nobody special. She knew it. Her family and the whole community of Lourdes knew it.

On February 11, 1858, fourteen-year-old Bernadette Soubirous and her parents and two siblings were living in Lourdes, France, in a one-room basement that once had been a jail. They had a place to live due to a relative's kindness. The irony was not lost on those who knew the family; the father had been charged with larceny but acquitted.

Bernadette was asthmatic and perpetually sickly. She grew to a full height of just four feet, seven inches. Her illnesses also had limited her formal education.



Bernadette Soubirous, circa 1858

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On that day, Bernadette, her sister Toinette and a friend were gathering firewood. The other two crossed a small stream. Bernadette, who frequently had trouble keeping up, couldn't find a place where she could cross without getting wet. She asked the other girls to toss some stones to create a makeshift path; they refused. So Bernadette sat down to take off her shoes and stockings and wade across.

It was then she heard the sound of wind and saw **dazzling light**, followed by the appearance of what she called “a small young lady” in a niche in the wall of a natural cavern, or grotto.

In the next five months, Bernadette saw the small young lady in the grotto eighteen times. The lady’s requests were few, mainly focused on prayer and penance. In the months that followed, much local attention was paid to Bernadette and these unusual events taking place that only she could see. One day, the lady asked Bernadette to drink, wash from a spring and eat an herb. Onlookers scoffed. But the next day, clear water flowed from the site.



Appearance of Virgin Mary to St. Bernadette in Lourdes by A. Nicholas (1932) in the church Chiesa di San Francesco d'Assisi.

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DAY 1

FAITH

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us.

ROMANS 8:18

As Christians, we're in this for the long haul. With God's help, we can endure whatever comes our way—chronic illness, the loss of loved ones, the judgment and scorn of others—for we believe in the promise of eternal life. If we open our eyes and hearts, we can see the Lord's presence and assistance in helping us through every trial.

Bernadette befriended another Sister of Charity, assisting her with eye and skin treatments as well as religious philosophy. **“Accept willingly what the good Lord sends,”** Bernadette counseled her. Perhaps this advice is how Bernadette maintained her faith when others tried to trap her in contradictions or when her asthma and other ailments made it difficult to breathe. Perhaps she remembered that God wants only good for us and not to let the flaws of the world and its people get in the way of our gratitude and love.

Bernadette, you accepted suffering as part of earthly life and did not wallow in the injustice others showed toward you. Help me to keep focused on the glory to come instead of the pain of today.

DAY 2

HOPE

For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

ROMANS 8:24-25

We all know earthly happiness: time spent with family and friends, the taste of a great meal, the treat of an hour or day without obligations. We capture those moments in photos and journal entries and the like, and we hold fast to them because the memories help us to guard against despair when happiness disappears. We hope for more. In the same way, we cannot even imagine the glories of heaven—or that we deserve any of them. But with Christ’s help, we hope those glories will be granted to us eternally.

In 1859, while recovering from an asthma attack, Bernadette was questioned at length by a priest and a seminarian. At one point, they noted that people said the lady had told Bernadette she would suffer very much. **“Yes, but she promised me I would be happy in the next life,”** Bernadette was quick to reply.

Bernadette, you knew earthly happiness and suffering are temporary and nothing compared to what we hope for after our time on earth is complete. May I increase my dependence on Christ and my hope to see him in heaven.

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