

## Route 1: In the Footsteps of Bernadette – From the family mill to the Grotto

### Step 1: The Boly Mill or the joyful mysteries of Bernadette.

This was Bernadette's birthplace. She was born here on 7<sup>th</sup> January 1844. Her parents, Louise Castérot and François Soubirous, had married the previous year, on 9<sup>th</sup> January 1843. They came from simple backgrounds. François was a miller. Together, Louise and François ran the Castérot family mill.

Bernadette called the Boly Mill, “The mill of happiness”. Why? Because here the family knew happy times. The Soubirous were welcoming to everyone. Many friends came to visit. There was a lot of joy and laughter. This was a united family, which prayed together every evening.

However, these years were far from easy. The family suffered several hardships and difficulties: the death of several young brothers and sisters, Bernadette's illness, a work accident for François Soubirous which rendered him blind in one eye, and the “industrial revolution” which meant it was difficult for the family business to make a profit.

In June 1854, unable to pay the rent, the Soubirous were forced to leave the Mill.

When we visit the Boly Mill in the footsteps of Bernadette, we might meditate on the joyful mysteries of Jesus' life and on the joyful times in our lives. These “times” of joy are not necessarily easy or comfortable. But they are times when love and faith, joy and prayer, have guided our lives to greater unity.

- Bernadette's words: “Let us not forget that the way to obtain new graces is to thank Our Lord and the Most Blessed Virgin for those which have been granted to us.”
- Thanksgiving: Let us give thanks for our families and for the love of God recognised in friendships and family ties.
- Prayer intention: Let us pray for broken families or those going through the ordeal of bereavement.
- Our Father and Hail Mary

### Step 2: The Cachot or the Sorrowful mysteries of Bernadette

In just a few years, the Soubirous family's circumstances would plummet. They moved four times and each time they grew poorer and poorer until the day they moved into this small, dark and cold room called the Cachot.

This room served as a prison until 1824. Subsequently, it belonged to André Sajous, a cousin of the Castérots, who occasionally rented it out to passing workers.

The six members of the Soubirous family lived there for two full years: François and Louise, Bernadette, Toinette, Jean-Marie and Justin. Bernadette had never fully recovered from cholera and she had bad asthma that woke her up every night. A few months after their arrival in the Cachot, the unjust arrest of François Soubirous, wrongly suspected of stealing sacks of flour, left its mark on the family. He spent several days in prison before being released.

The family became increasingly poor. Louise worked and the children too. They sold bundles of wood and scrap, which they found round about. Bernadette was a waitress in her aunt's bistro for a few months.

Sometime before the Apparitions, Bernadette returned to Bartrès, to her former wet-nurse, Marie Laguës, where she became a farmhand. While she was there, she tried to study a bit of her catechism so that she could catch up with the others and prepare for her First Holy Communion. It was something she very much wanted to do.

At the beginning of January 1858, the priest of Bartrès suddenly left. Bernadette decided to return to the destitution of the Cachot so that she might prepare for her First Holy Communion in the parish of Lourdes. She returned three weeks before the first Apparition.

When we visit the Cachot, we might remember the Sorrowful mysteries of Bernadette and Jesus: the humiliation of men and women, suffering, loneliness... We can also confide our inadequacies and ordeals to Bernadette and entrust her with our own Sorrowful mysteries.

- Bernadette's words: "Let us carry and kiss the Cross that our good Jesus presents to us."
- Thanksgiving: Let us give thanks for the support we have found in difficulties and failures. Let us give thanks for prayer and the trust maintained throughout our ordeals.
- Prayer intention: Let us pray for all people struggling with poverty and destitution. Let us pray for those who are discouraged.
- Our Father and Hail Mary

### Step 3: Prayer at the Grotto or the glorious mysteries of Bernadette

On the morning of 11<sup>th</sup> February 1858, Bernadette, Toinette and Jeanne, a friend, went to look for wood near the Savy Mill below the chateau. They continued on their way to the where the Savy Canal met the Gave river and arrived at the rocks of Massabielle.

Toinette and Jeanne crossed the canal stream and begin to pick up the branches scattered in the Grotto. Bernadette remained alone on the other side. She was afraid of catching cold. Then, deciding to take off her shoes, she sat down and twice heard a gust of wind. Yet the poplars along the Gave were not moving. She turned around and saw a halo of light in the hollow of the rock. In this light stood a young girl, wearing a white dress, a blue belt and a white veil. She had two yellow roses on her feet. Bernadette was frightened. She took her rosary out of her pocket to make the sign of the Cross, but her arm would not move. Then the lady smiled at Bernadette and led to make a

ample and beautiful sign of the Cross. This was when her ecstasy began. Bernadette, her heart filled with great peace, prayed the rosary.

This was the first of the eighteen apparitions.

Coming to pray at the Grotto, after having visited the Boly Mill and the Cachot, enables us to enter into the astonishing mystery of the presence of God in our ordeals. The Grotto is a dark place; a dead end, which reflects Bernadette's personal and family difficulties. But in this impasse, Heaven opened up and the Lady's smile opened Bernadette's heart.

God is present in our trials. Later, the Lady showed Bernadette a spring ready to gush forth, an image of Jesus' resurrection. Praying at the Grotto means passing from the Sorrowful mysteries of our life to the Glorious mysteries. It means welcoming the grace and consolation of Jesus in our trials and our inadequacy.

- Bernadette's words: "When I have the pleasure of going to the Grotto, this is where I pray for all your intentions."
- Thanksgiving: Let us give thanks for the presence of the Lord in our difficulties and in the impasses of our lives. Let us give thanks for the maternal presence of Mary at our side.
- Prayer intention: Let us pray for all those who do not know the goodness of God or the hope that his call holds.
- Our Father and ten Hail Marys

#### Step 4: Personal time and meditation

- Bible text

"I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleanness, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my spirit within you, and make you follow my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances." Ezekiel 36:25-27
- Questions
  - o Can I identify the Joyful, Sorrowful and Glorious mysteries in my life? What are the joys in my life? What are the trials and sufferings that I carry today? What are the moments of grace that I have experienced, when have I been able to recognise the presence of God in my life and in the life of my neighbour?
  - o Have I ever experienced being freed from an ordeal or visited by God's comfort in a time of difficulty?

- How should I announce the presence of Jesus at my side to those around me?

