

Route 2: Bernadette and the signs of Lourdes

Step 1: The Grotto

Touching the rock of the Grotto means having a double experience: that of our inadequacies and that of the strength of God.

The Grotto resembles our heart, poor and sometimes grubby, in which we can feel cramped. And yet, on this Grotto was built the church requested by the Virgin Mary. A striking image of the Church, which relies on mercy and love of neighbour and not on the power of this world.

When we touch this rock, like thousands of pilgrims, we come to experience our finiteness and the trials of our lives. When we see the spring, emerging from this dark place, our hearts are filled with hope. From our poor hearts, the grace of God can flow. Our help does not come from ourselves, but from God. Our strength – as the psalms say – is the Lord. We can build a great and beautiful life, while being aware of our poverty and wounds because the love of God stands firm.

- Bernadette’s words: “I’ll meet you at the foot of the Cross, that’s where we’ll find strength and courage.”
- Thanksgiving: Let us give thanks for the presence of God and the solidity of faith. Let us give thanks for all the moments when we were able to find our strength and our hope in God.
- Prayer intention: Let us pray for all those who have no hope and who are discouraged by the trials of our time.
- Our Father and ten Hail Marys

Step 2: Water

On 25th February, during the ninth apparition, the Virgin Mary asked Bernadette, “Go and drink at the spring and wash yourself there”. Bernadette dug in the ground at the base of the Grotto and first found only muddy water. With gentleness and obedience, she drank and wetted her face with this dirty water. With Jesus, she descended into the mystery of sin, which disfigures humankind. But in the hours that followed, the water began to flow out of the Grotto, and it quickly cleared to become this miraculous spring that has never dried up.

On 1st March, the first miracle took place, then countless healings and conversions have followed ever since. The water from the Grotto has become a magnificent sign of the grace that wells up in the darkness of our hearts when we turn to the Lord. “If you knew the gift of God...”

The Virgin Mary asked Bernadette to pray for sinners and Bernadette lived out this mission with all her heart. Let us also ask for the grace that sinners – and therefore ourselves – be converted, that is, at we let grace flow out of our limitations and our sin.

- Bernadette's words: "Let us pray a lot for these poor sinners, that they convert: after all, they are our brothers!"
- Thanksgiving: Let us give thanks for our baptism and for the sacrament of reconciliation, which comes to purify from within our hearts damaged by sin.
- Prayer intention: Let us pray for all those preparing for baptism. Let us also pray for hardened sinners, that they allow themselves to be touched by the sweet and all-consuming mercy of God.
- Our Father and ten Hail Marys

Step 3: Light

From 18th February, Bernadette went to the Grotto with a candle in her hand. Light is the baptismal sign of our faith.

On 7th April, during the penultimate apparition, Bernadette's hands were exposed to the candle's flame and, for ten minutes, the flame licked her fingers without burning or hurting her. This miracle of the candle reminds us of the burning bush, this bush that Moses watched burning without it being consumed. This fire, which burns but does not destroy, is the image of God's love which warms, illuminates, sets ablaze but never damages.

By placing a candle in the Grotto, we are invited to make an act of faith and hope in God. We want to look at the world and our life in the light of his goodness and his presence.

- Bernadette's words: "Let trust predominate in all you do and all you have to suffer."
- Thanksgiving: Let us give thanks for the love that God has for us and give thanks for all the times when we have recognised the signs of this love.
- Prayer intention: Let us pray for all those who have a distorted image of God and who are afraid to approach his light.
- Our Father and ten Hail Marys

Step 4: Personal time and meditation

- Bible text

“In you, O Lord, I seek refuge... Incline your ear to me; rescue me speedily. Be a rock of refuge for me, a strong fortress to save me. You are indeed my rock and my fortress;

for your name’s sake lead me and guide me... Into your hands I commit my spirit... you have seen my affliction; you have taken heed of my adversities... you have set my feet in a broad place.” Excerpts from Psalm 31

Questions

- Can I name the weaknesses and darkneses in my life? Am I able to lay them bare before the mercy of God and the benevolence of my brothers and sisters?
- Have I ever experienced the strength of my faith? The experience of leaning on God in a decision or an event?
- How do I experience the sacrament of reconciliation? Do I see it as a time of encounter with Christ?
- Am I burning with the desire to proclaim Jesus Christ? Do I allow myself to be attracted by the light of faith and by the love of neighbour?

