



Sanctuary of Our Lady of Lourdes

THEME OF THE YEAR 2025

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0. Forward

Each year, the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Lourdes presents a theme which is a basic pastoral and planning framework for pilgrimage organisers and leaders, providing ideas for the organisation of pilgrimages and events in the sanctuary during the year.

The year 2025 is a special one. It is a Jubilee year, a '*year of grace*' (Is. 61:2) in which the debts and penalties of sin are forgiven. In other words, the Jubilee is a major celebration during which all pilgrims have the opportunity to immerse themselves in God's infinite mercy.

As you know, the theme of the Jubilee Year 2025 is PILGRIMS OF HOPE. In the Bull of Indiction, entitled '*Spes non confundit*', '*hope does not disappoint*' (Rom. 5:5), the Holy Father opens by saying "*Hope is (...) the central message*" of this jubilee year, since, in today's world, "*uncertainty about the future may at times give rise to conflicting feelings, ranging from confident trust to ap-*

prehensiveness, from serenity to anxiety, from firm conviction to hesitation and doubt. Often, we come across people who are discouraged, pessimistic and cynical about the future, as if nothing could possibly bring them happiness” (SnC n. 1).

So that it can join in this symphony with the universal Church, the Sanctuary is moving away from its tradition of yearly themes, often based on the words of the Immaculate Virgin or Bernadette and is uniting with the universal Church while retaining its distinctive ‘Lourdes’ flavour, and its characteristic Marian feel. The theme that will accompany us to Lourdes this year is, ‘WITH MARY, PILGRIMS OF HOPE’.

0.1. What the words say to us

With: The word WITH, both preposition and adverb, sets the tone for our pilgrimage: it’s about ‘*being in someone’s company*’, but also about ‘*being in tune with someone*’. With Mary (who took the initiative of inviting us and being with us here in Lourdes) and Bernadette, with all the other pilgrims (in their great diversity), we are aiming for communion with God!

Pilgrims: The word here is plural. This implies that we are talking about all pilgrims. Starting with Mary and Bernadette.

Hope: Without wishing to ‘*define*’ this theological virtue, let us simply emphasise its central role in this Jubilee and in this theme, in the knowledge that “*Hope is born of love and based on the love springing from the pierced heart of Jesus upon the Cross*” (SnC n.3); it “*does not deceive or disappoint because it is grounded in the certainty that nothing and no one may ever separate us from God’s love*” (Ibidem, cf. Rom. 8:35.37-39); and, “*it is founded on faith and nurtured by charity*” (Ibidem).

0.2. An important difference between ‘expectation’ and ‘hope’

Expectation means anticipating a better future, whereas hope means welcoming a new beginning, a coming, an ‘*adventus*’. Hope, then, is not the longing for a tomorrow that promises to be better, but the welcoming of a present that is lived ‘*differently*’, with the promise of eternal life.

It is worth noting that this observation reflects the words of the Beautiful Lady, “*I do not promise you happiness in this world, but in the next.*” Bernadette is therefore a figure of Hope, who is already living eternal happiness in a life that is nonetheless fraught with many difficulties...

So, we can broaden our theme with a question: ***WHY AND HOW SHOULD WE, WHO ARE ALL PILGRIMS OF HOPE, COME AND JOURNEY TO LOURDES ON A JUBILEE PILGRIMAGE WITH MARY AND BERNADETTE?***

0.3. A ‘trptych’ approach to imparting the theme of the year

We want our pilgrimages to experience a journey...

- Inspired by the experience of the disciples of Emmaus...
- Which is reflected in Bernadette’s experience, her encounter with and her life devoted to the Beautiful Lady...
- And which becomes a source of inspiration for every pilgrimage and every pilgrim.

This approach is based on our faith in revelation, because God reveals himself in the stories of people: the disciples on the road to Emmaus, the life of Bernadette, and the pilgrims in Lourdes.

An approach that allows us to experience the “MEMORY” of

- the pilgrimage made by the disciples of Emmaus and that of Bernadette, in the past...
- our own pilgrimage today...
- a coming fulfilment of the promise, now and at the hour of our death, at the end of our earthly pilgrimage!

0.4. A biblical starting point: Lk. 24:13-35

“Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, *‘What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?’* They stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, *‘Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?’* He asked them, *‘What things?’* They replied, *‘The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see him.’* Then he said to them, *‘Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?’* Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures. As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, *‘Stay with us, because it is almost evening, and the day is now nearly over.’* So, he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, *‘Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?’* That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, *‘The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!’* Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.”

I. A sadness that makes people give up and walk away

➡ The disciples/pilgrims are talking amongst themselves about everything that has happened; they talk, they ask questions, they are sad, preoccupied, confused, distressed and at a loss. They comment on the sad events they have just experienced while on their way to Emmaus. But in the meantime, they are talking amongst themselves... Their sorrow prevents them from recognising this 'stranger' who has approached them and is walking with them...

"But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel." Their 'hope' is shattered. They are so disappointed by the course of events... *"it is now the third day since these things took place"*.

They don't even recognise the good news announced by the women because of the sadness in their hearts: "Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see him." The disciples don't see things the way they want to see them, so they don't believe...

➡ Bernadette also set out, for the grotto at Massabielle, to fetch wood. She was ill and had to leave the cachot, where not only the winter cold had set in, but she was also experiencing extreme poverty and the prospect of a very bleak future. So, she went to the grotto in search of wood to heat her soup (literally).

➡ Our pilgrims often leave home carrying the weight of various challenging situations: to the point where they don't recognise even the smallest glimmer of hope given by others, as was the case with the disciples. Perhaps a 'first announcement' has failed for them... This is the starting point for many of the pilgrims you are accompanying.

In the Bull of Indiction for the Jubilee, Pope Francis also acknowledges that the world wavers between fear, discouragement and doubt. He recognises that, *"Often we come across people who are discouraged, pessimistic and cynical about the future, as if nothing could possibly bring them happiness."* (SnC, 1). In another meditation, he asked these questions: *"Did hope die? Did the world remain definitively without light, and life without purpose?"*

• Pastoral suggestion:

In this Jubilee Year, the Pope reminds us of the issues facing the world today:

- the tragedy of war (SnC, 8),
- the desire to transmit life and the joy of living (SnC, 9),
- prisoners and those deprived of their freedom, or at least their loved ones (SnC, 10),
- the sick (SnC, 11),
- young people (SnC, 12),
- migrants (SnC, 13),
- the elderly (SnC, 14),
- the poor (SnC, 15).

Let us enable our pilgrims (like Jesus with the disciples of Emmaus) to share their anxieties about events in their lives and in the world, and to pray for them. With them and as Pope Francis says, let us go on pilgrimage and invoke Mary, Mother of Hope: *"Thus you remain in the midst of the disciples as their Mother, as the Mother of hope. Holy Mary, Mother of God, our Mother, teach us to believe, to hope, to love with you."*

II. An encounter that opens a window of hope

"Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?"

➡ During the disciples' pilgrimage to Emmaus, Jesus himself comes, walks WITH them, asks questions and teaches them. He interprets the Scriptures and gives them new meaning so that they can understand. More than ever, he is Emmanuel: God with us.

➡ In Lourdes, the Immaculate Conception approached Bernadette and taught her to make the sign of the Cross and to pray the rosary with dignity, putting an end to her anxiety and fear.

➡ As a pilgrim, Bernadette draws us together in Lourdes because she is like us. Through her, we are offered the closeness of heaven in the person of Mary and her divine Son. They come near to us, inform us, teach us and reassure us.

Each pilgrim is the son or daughter of a world that doesn't believe because it hasn't seen... It is sick with all manner of illnesses; suffering from all types of trials... and yet faith is *"the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."* (Heb. 11:1).

The pilgrimage then becomes a journey of faith. Like our Christian life in general, it is a *"journey calling for moments of greater intensity to encourage and sustain hope as the constant companion that guides our steps towards the goal of our encounter with the Lord Jesus"* (SnC, 5), the encounter that Bernadette also had in her own way at the grotto of Massabielle, and one that every pilgrim will be invited to repeat during the Jubilee Year.

Every facet of life has to be touched by the closeness of God and the Immaculate Virgin here in Lourdes.

Coming to Lourdes means leaving behind your fears and regaining your dignity. Then all pilgrims will be able to say, like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, *"Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road?"* Or maybe they will say, as Bernadette did:

- *"she spoke to me as one person speaking to another"*
- *"the grotto was my heaven"*
- *"How happy my soul was, O good Mother, when I had the joy of contemplating you. How I love to remember those precious moments spent under your gaze, full of goodness and mercy for us."*

Pastoral suggestion:

In this Jubilee Year, the Sanctuary and individual pilgrimages are asked to focus particular attention on all the challenging situations mentioned in the first part of this document.

To create *'the encounter that opens a window on Hope'*, it is up to the leaders to reach out to and support each pilgrim, paying particular attention to the most vulnerable *'sheep'* in the group.

To suggest Hope, the following elements should be emphasised:

- Beauty, i.e. the balanced structure of the pilgrimage.
- Colours, i.e. the diversity and uniqueness of the pilgrimage.
- Smiles, i.e. the sick
- Enthusiasm, i.e. the young people
- Wisdom, i.e. the elderly
- Joy, i.e. service
- Spirituality, i.e. the gift of prayer.

III. The gestures and signs of pilgrimage that inspire hope

So that the '*chronological*' time of a pilgrimage assumes the value of '*opportune*' time or *kairos*, there are some simple and practical steps we can take.

➡ "When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognised him; and he vanished from their sight."

The table of the Eucharist is the unexpected destination of the disciples of Emmaus. There they witness the powerful sign of Christ's supreme sacrifice and of our salvation. They are then able to recognise the Lord in the breaking of the bread.

➡ Bernadette, too, was to find this intimacy with Christ during the period of the apparitions. She experienced this encounter through the sacraments of reconciliation and the Eucharist. By welcoming and responding to Mary's Words, her heart opened up to '*the hope of the other world*'.

The Words of the Beautiful Lady are, in short, an echo of the Gospel. In response, Bernadette performed penitential gestures, eating grass, walking on her knees, smearing her face with mud... All gestures that were not without sacrifice on her part. She said, '*If you only knew how much it cost me*'. However, the most striking aspect of her faith was her sacramental life. She went to confession after the first apparition, received the Eucharist between the 17th and 18th apparitions, not forgetting her commitment to the parish Church of Lourdes by becoming a '*child of Mary*' on 8th September 1858 and finally her consecration to religious life with the Sisters of Charity and Christian Instruction in Nevers.

➡ The pilgrimage is first and foremost a time for personal and community prayer, when each group, and each pilgrim, asks the Lord to '*stay with us*.'

This prayer helps us to distinguish between:

- good and evil,
- truth and falsehood,
- charity and selfishness,
- right and wrong,
- trust and fear,
- serenity and despair,
- certainty and doubt.

In short, it's about sorting out all the contradictory feelings that run through us. A discernment that is made in the light of the Word of God, which is capable of '*setting hearts on fire*'.

Pilgrimages must also be settings for sacramental life. The Sanctuary offers three of these in particular: the Eucharist, reconciliation and the sacrament of the sick, sacraments which show everyone the love, mercy and salvation that come from God. Sacraments which, especially in this Jubilee Year, give us the gift of conversion and the grace of an indulgence (cf. SnC, 23).

As well as the sacraments, the Sanctuary of Lourdes offers the opportunity for acts of popular piety (in particular the rosary) which enable people to experience "*the triptych of the "theological virtues"*" that express the heart of the Christian life (cf. 1 Cor. 13:13; 1 Thess. 1:3)" (SnC n. 18). All pilgrimages are therefore invited to participate actively in the pilgrimage gestures that transform reality, by transforming each one of us, through the hope that enables us to look at the darker realities of life in a different way:

- The rock reassures me and keeps me from my fear
- The candle gives me light and drives away the night
- The spring gives me water and drives away my thirst

- Processions encourage me to walk with others in the footsteps of Christ and his Mother and drive away my feelings of isolation
- The water gesture and bathing purify me and wash away all defilement
- The Eucharist nourishes me and keeps me from spiritual hunger
- Confession restores me and keeps me from spiritual decline
- The Stations of the Cross comfort me and drive away my feelings of abandonment.

In addition to all these gestures, the Sanctuary will be offering you a jubilee journey of hope for this Holy Year, which will lead us from sorrow to consolation.

Pastoral suggestion

The aim is not to invent new gestures, but to experience the sacraments and signs of Lourdes in a renewed way, in a spirit of hope:

The Eucharist, as an anticipation of the wedding feast, in Eternity.

Reconciliation, as the promise of entry into the Kingdom, through forgiveness.

The Rock, as a sign of God's eternal strength in our moment of weakness.

The candle, as a sign of everlasting light in the darkness of our struggles and suffering...The Eucharist, as an anticipation of the wedding feast, in Eternity.

Reconciliation, as the promise of entry into the Kingdom, through forgiveness.

The Rock, as a sign of God's eternal strength in our moment of weakness.

The candle, as a sign of everlasting light in the darkness of our struggles and suffering...

IV. Missionary pilgrims of hope

"and he vanished from their sight. (...) That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, 'The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!' Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread."

➡ The pilgrimage to Emmaus is over and they have to return *'that same hour'*. Without wasting any time, like the Virgin Mary who goes *'with all haste'*, they are going to get up and return to Jerusalem, the starting point, the city where they live, where the other disciples and the whole community of believers who did not make the journey to Emmaus are waiting, to recount, announce and bear witness to what they have experienced during their pilgrimage. The presence-absence of the Risen One inspires them to become missionaries.

➡ After the Beautiful Lady had left, Bernadette was no longer afraid of the cold water (which even felt quite warm to her) and helped her sister Toinette and their friend, Jeanne Abadie, carry their firewood. After leaving the grotto, she quickly told the priest the name of the Beautiful Lady and what she expected of the priests (that they should come here in procession and build a chapel); she knew that she was responsible for speaking out and bearing witness... After the apparitions, she left Lourdes for good and became a consecrated missionary, a bearer of hope...

➡ There is an *'after'* part to the pilgrimage... we have to leave Lourdes, to go home, to our families, our parishes, our lives... to witness, to become missionaries of hope... Saint Peter tells us, *"For this very reason, you must make every effort to support your faith with goodness, and goodness with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with endurance, and endurance with godliness, and godliness with mutual affection, and mutual affection with love."* 2 Peter 1:5-7. This is the hope that every pilgrim to Lourdes bears in this Holy Year.

As Pope Francis says, we must all be anchors of hope: *"The image of the anchor is eloquent; it helps us to recognise the stability and security that is ours amid the troubled waters of this life, provided we entrust ourselves to the Lord Jesus. The storms that buffet us will never prevail,*

for we are firmly anchored in the hope born of grace, which enables us to live in Christ and to overcome sin, fear and death. This hope, which transcends life's fleeting pleasures and the achievement of our immediate goals, makes us rise above our trials and difficulties, and inspires us to keep pressing forward, never losing sight of the grandeur of the heavenly goal to which we have been called. (...) May the witness of believers be for our world a leaven of authentic hope, a harbinger of new heavens and a new earth (cf. 2 Pet. 3:13), where men and women will dwell in justice and harmony, in joyful expectation of the fulfilment of the Lord's promises." (SnC n. 25).

Pastoral suggestion

Just as we bear home, to our families, the water drawn from the spring at Massabielle, pilgrims are also the bearers of hope and life. Pilgrimages could find symbols (objects, images, prayers, etc.) to support pilgrims in their mission as witnesses and missionaries of hope, following the one commandment: love of God and neighbour. (cf. Mark 12:30-31). As Bernadette said: To love is enough.

Conclusion

To summarise, in a symphony with the whole Church, coming to Lourdes on pilgrimage during the Jubilee Year, is to set out on a journey. Despite life's difficulties, we will journey with others, and especially with Mary and Bernadette, through sacramental and devotional gestures.

This will not only give us the opportunity to embrace Hope, but also to become its witnesses and missionaries. We will thus be Pilgrims of Hope with Mary, here in Lourdes, in this jubilee year of 2025.

APPENDIX

01. The Jubilee Hymn

Conference of the bishops of France.

Pilgrims of hope, English version of the hymn for the Jubilee 2025

REFRAIN: LIKE A FLAME MY HOPE IS BURNING, MAY MY SONG ARISE TO YOU: SOURCE OF LIFE THAT HAS NO ENDING, ON LIFE'S PATH I TRUST IN YOU.

1. Every nation, tongue, and people find a light within your Word. Scattered fragile sons and daughters find a home in your dear Son.
2. God, so tender and so patient, dawn of hope, you care for all. Heav'n and earth are recreated by the Spirit of Life set free.
3. Raise your eyes, the wind is blowing, for our God is born in time. Son made man for you and many who will find the way in him.

02. The Jubilee Prayer

Father in heaven, may the faith you have given us in your son, Jesus Christ, our brother, and the flame of charity enkindled in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, reawaken in us the blessed hope for the coming of your Kingdom. May your grace transform us into tireless cultivators of the seeds of the Gospel. May those seeds transform from within both humanity and the whole cosmos in the sure expectation of a new heaven and a new earth, when, with the powers of Evil vanquished, your glory will shine eternally. May the grace of the Jubilee reawaken in us, Pilgrims of Hope, a yearning for the treasures of heaven. May that same grace spread the joy and peace of our Redeemer throughout the earth. To you our God, eternally blessed, be glory and praise for ever. Amen

P. Emmanuel MVOMO, CFIC, 'Chaplain'

Ab. Hervé REME, 'Chaplain'