

Letter N°97 July 2025



Every person is a sacred story; every life is a sacred story...

My thoughts still turn to Bernadette and to Nevers!

The life of Bernadette, from Lourdes to Nevers, beautifully reflects the two essential stages in the relationship between humanity and God.

This pattern unfolds in the lives of many biblical figures: God breaks unexpectedly into someone's life. Just look at Abraham, Moses, Samuel in the Old Testament, and Paul, the Apostles, and others in the New Testament, they all experienced this divine intervention that changed everything.

On the morning of February 11, when Bernadette leaves the Cachot, she's simply going about a chore entrusted to children. It's reminiscent of the Bible's protagonists: fishermen, shepherds, warriors, parents, children... engaged in their ordinary routines before encountering the Lord.

Even the Virgin Mary was betrothed and preparing to live the life of a typical Jewish woman of her time: to be born, to grow up, to marry, to bear children, and to die.

And yet, it is within this very human "normalcy" that God introduces a grace: unexpected, undeserved, and freely given. A grace that is a gift, a privilege.

A prepared heart...

God, the perfect sower, prepares the soil He chooses to plant in.

The Blessed Virgin and the biblical figures mentioned above were shaped and formed in unique ways by the Lord :

"He who is ineffable, whose ways are mercy and truth, whose will is omnipotent, whose wisdom reaches from end to end with strength and governs all things with gentleness" (Pius IX, *Ineffabilis Deus*).

And likewise, God prepares every soul to receive the gifts, graces, and missions He wishes to entrust to them.

Bernadette was such a prepared soul. Born in the century of the Immaculate Conception, her family circumstances disposed her to welcome mystery: their poverty opened her heart, the rhythm of family prayer nurtured her faith, her parents' living witness of belief strengthened her, and catechesis and religious education introduced her to the life of grace.

But Bernadette's readiness wasn't only external, it was deeply interior. She cultivated her own intimacy with the God she loved with all her heart. We remember how eagerly she longed to leave Bartrès and return to Lourdes, not only to rejoin her family, but because she yearned to receive the Eucharist and live in communion with Christ.

As in the Scriptures, so it is in Bernadette's life: every sacred story begins with a disposition of the heart. The first of these dispositions is life itself. The very breath we draw is the first grace God gives us. After that come all the gifts of society, but above all, the inner stirrings that open us to the mystery of God.

**It's not enough to receive a gift, a grace, a privilege, a vocation...
one must respond...**

Abraham, Moses, Samuel, Matthew, Paul, all of them went beyond the call.

Saint Paul, after his fall, placed himself in the hands of the Apostles, and then embarked on tireless missionary journeys.

The Virgin Mary, too, after the Annunciation, did not remain hidden in her home. She arose "in haste" and set out toward her cousin Elizabeth. Her entire life became a continuous and unwavering:

"Behold the handmaid of the Lord, let it be done to me according to your word."

To receive is to respond. To be chosen is to rise and go forth. One must engage fully. Everyone who received a grace, whether in Scripture or beyond, gave themselves so that God's will could take flesh, and what was first personal could become fruitful for the community.

Bernadette is not a saint because she saw the Beautiful Lady. She is a saint because she responded to a grace, to a gift, to a divine calling. After her eighteen encounters, she withdrew to pray, to reflect, to seek counsel, and ultimately, she made the free and deliberate decision to offer her whole life to the One she loved.

Grace, gift, privilege: these become real only through love and the free choice to give oneself entirely and forever to the God who first loved and called her to experience this encounter with the Beautiful Lady.

The two sides of my baptism: "God, who created us without us, did not will to save us without us."

In the footsteps of the Immaculate Virgin and Saint Bernadette, every Christian, every son and daughter of Mary, every member of the Family of Our Lady of Lourdes, must ensure their life reflects both aspects of the spiritual journey: the divine call, and our active, willing response.

God calls each of us in love. He pours out His grace and entrusts us with missions. But this doesn't mean we can rest comfortably on the laurels of having received a vocation, a blessing, or a spiritual gift. As Saint Augustine reminds us "God, who created us without us, did not will to save us without us."

Even the simplest pilgrimage testifies to this truth. Coming to Lourdes is first a response to a call, to an invitation "let the people come here in procession, in pilgrimage." But that grace, that call we answer by coming to Lourdes, or to any sacred place, must bear fruit. That fruit begins with conversion and penance and matures into true charity: a charity that prevents the sons and daughters of Mary from walking past the wounded, like the priest and the Levite in the parable of the Good Samaritan.

In short, the Immaculate Virgin and Bernadette teach us that we can receive many graces, mystical experiences, even divine calls. But the most meaningful and decisive part is our response, our concrete, life-giving answer to the outstretched hand of God.

Let us contemplate Mary, who said: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord." Let us contemplate Bernadette, who chose to consecrate her life entirely to God.

And let us, in turn, make the fundamental choice to respond to the call, the graces, the privileges, the gifts that God entrusts to us, by living a Christian life that becomes a true response to His eternal love.

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