



The Holy See

JOHN PAUL II

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Wednesday, 11 August 2004

Pilgrimage to the Marian Shrine of Lourdes

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. Next Saturday and Sunday, I will be making an Apostolic Pilgrimage to the Marian Shrine of Lourdes. In that blessed place, I shall have the joy of celebrating the Solemnity of the Assumption into Heaven of Mary Most Holy.

The reason for my pilgrimage is the *150th anniversary of the dogmatic definition of the Immaculate Conception of Mary*, proclaimed by Bl. Pope Pius IX on 8 December 1854. Four years later, the Virgin appeared to St Bernadette in the grotto at Massabielle, introducing herself precisely as "the Immaculate Conception". I therefore consider this opportunity to return to Lourdes in consonance with this luminous truth of faith as a special gift of Providence.

In a single act of praise to God and to the Virgin, I will embrace *the two great Marian mysteries*: the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption into Heaven in body and soul. In fact, they constitute the beginning and the end of Mary's earthly life, combined in the eternal present of God who called her to take part in a very special way in the saving event of the Redemption brought about by Our Lord Jesus Christ.

2. The pilgrimage will have *three public moments*: on Saturday afternoon, the recitation of the Holy Rosary; in the evening the traditional *aux flambeaux* (torchlight) procession; lastly, on Sunday morning, the solemn Eucharistic Concelebration. In addition, on arriving at the Shrine and before leaving it, I will have the opportunity to pray in silence at the Grotto. On every occasion *I will carry*

in my heart the thanksgiving and supplication of the whole Church, and, I would say, of the whole world, which can find peace and salvation in God alone.

Indeed, what message did the Lord want to address to humanity through Our Lady of Lourdes? Briefly, it can be summed up in a famous saying from Sacred Scripture: *God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from their ways and live* (cf. Ez 33: 11). In addressing young Bernadette, Mary wanted to recall this fundamental Gospel message: prayer and penance are the way through which to affirm Christ's victory in every individual person and in society.

3. To change our conduct, however, we must listen to the voice of our conscience in which God has inculcated the sense of good and evil. Unfortunately, in a certain way modern men and women sometimes exhibit a loss of the *sense of sin*. It is essential to implore for them *an inner reawakening* that will enable them to rediscover to the full the holiness of God's law and the moral commitments that derive from it.

I am preparing to depart for the Shrine of the Virgin Mary in Lourdes with these intentions in mind. I ask you all to accompany me in spirit, so that the pilgrimage of the Successor of Peter may bear abundant fruits for the entire People of God.

To special groups

I extend a special welcome to the English-speaking pilgrims here today, including groups from Scotland, Ireland, Malta and the United States of America. Upon all of you I invoke the grace and peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and I wish you many blessings during your stay in Rome. Happy vacation!

I address a cordial welcome to the Italian-speaking pilgrims. I greet you in particular, dear faithful of Bergamo, who have gathered here with your Bishop on the occasion of the centenary of the Ordination to the Priesthood of Bl. John XXIII. As I once again recall the fruitful ministry of my venerable Predecessor, a distinguished son of the Bergamo region, I hope that his teachings will continue to give rise to new resolutions of Gospel witness, especially in the people of his own province.

In greeting the pilgrims from Latin America, I particularly remember today Venezuela, and I ask the Lord to bless and guide all her citizens by granting them a future open to progress and hope. Moreover, I call for a serene climate of peace and reconciliation in this dear Nation, which I will commend to the Virgin Mary in the coming trip to Lourdes.

My cordial thoughts are now addressed to the *young people*, the *sick* and the *newly-weds*. Today

we are celebrating the memorial of St Clare of Assisi, a shining model of a young woman who knew how to live courageously her total attachment to Christ. Dear friends, imitate her example, so that you may be ready, like her, to respond faithfully to the Lord's call.

I extend a special welcome to the English-speaking pilgrims here today, including groups from Scotland, Ireland, Malta and the United States of America. Upon all of you I invoke the grace and peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and I wish you many blessings during your stay in Rome. Happy Vacation!