

With Bernadette, let us make the sign of the Cross – 2010 Pastoral Theme

The sign of the cross was particularly important in the life of Bernadette. From the beginning of the 18 apparitions Our Lady taught her to make the sign of the Cross. From then on, her great love of Jesus was enlightened, nourished and directed by it. From her first encounter with Our Lady the life of Bernadette became joined to Jesus in the mystery of the cross.

FOUR GUIDES FOR PILGRIMS IN 2010:

1. MAKING THE SIGN OF THE CROSS

At the Grotto, even before speaking with Bernadette and saying her name, Mary taught her to make the sign of the cross, to make it well and to make it often. Everyone who saw Bernadette make the sign of the cross understood the importance of that simple action for her.

When she became a nun, Bernadette was asked by one of her sisters, "What must one do to be sure to go to heaven?" Without hesitating, Bernadette answered, "Make the sign of the cross well. That in itself is already a great deal."

A few moments before her death, Bernadette called on her remaining strength and made her last sign of the cross. The she died. It was with the sign of the cross that she entered eternity.

The first stage of our pilgrimage is going to consist in making the sign of the cross well, doing it in the way that Bernadette learned to make it with the Virgin Mary.

WHAT CAN I DO?

As you enter the sanctuary by St. Michael's Gate, stop in front of the Breton Cross and make the sign of the cross, slowly and in a recollected manner. Then do the same thing in front of the Grotto, and in front of all the other places of celebration. At the beginning and the end of each prayer, recollect yourself and say in your heart who God is for you. Then make the sign of the cross saying "In the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen."

2. WHAT IS THE SIGN OF THE CROSS?

There is nothing romantic about the cross. The cross represents what is most negative in human experience: violence, suffering and death. It is on this cross that God chose to manifest his Love for us. Not only did Jesus Christ take on the worst of human suffering and the most ignominious of deaths, but He, the Son of God, made of it the meeting place of God and mankind. For it is in the reality of the cross that we become children of God.

For us as for Bernadette, the sign of the cross is the sign of what we are. By making this sign, we acknowledge our misery, our suffering, our sinfulness, our human condition. But at the same time the cross is a proclamation of the Love of God manifested through the life-long sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Making the sign of the cross "in the Name of the Father, the Son, and of the Holy Spirit," we show that we are loved by God, and by his Love, we are called to see beyond our suffering and embrace love.

WHAT CAN I DO?

At Lourdes, the three actions of the pilgrimage are first, to enter the Grotto and touch and venerate the rock. Then, pilgrims go to the fountains (or the baths) to drink and to wash. Finally, at the evening procession, each person carries and holds aloft a candle when the Lourdes hymn is sung. These three actions are human gestures, but for Christians, rock, water, and light are related to Christ Jesus, for He is the Rock, He gives the Water of Life, and He is the light of the world. To perform these actions can lead us to prayer, prayer which becomes a meeting with Jesus, who makes us pass from our reality to His own.

Since these actions immerse us in the easter mystery, we can, before performing them, make slowly, reverently, and with all our heart, the sign of the cross, "In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." In this way, we say to Jesus, to ourselves, and to others, what the actions of our pilgrimage mean for us.

3. RECOGNIZING THE SIGN OF THE CROSS

Our world is marked by a rejection of God. Because of sin no one escapes weakness or suffering in one form or another. We are called to constant conversion. In situations where there is simultaneous sinfulness and conversion, misery and solidarity, suffering and charity, death and the presence of the Saviour of the world, there is found the sign of the cross.

The spirit of the relationship that exists between someone who is ill and someone who cares for them reveals the great mystery of the cross. In that relationship, characterized by a mutual gift of self-giving, in a reciprocal welcome of one another, is made present the mystery of the cross and its sign.

WHAT CAN I DO?

Each one of us recognizes more easily our own cross. Being exposed to charitable deeds at Lourdes is going to change the behaviour of each one of us in our relationships. This change will show itself first in small deeds: letting others pass in front of us, to serve another before serving ourselves, helping another to succeed in the actions of daily life, in short giving preference to others before thinking of ourselves. Each one of these attitudes, each one of these actions, presents us with occasions to experience, in small ways, that of which the cross is the sign.

4. MAKING THE SIGN OF THE CROSS VISABLE

When we make the sign of the cross, “in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,” we sum up the whole of our faith – expressing who God is, who we are and how God unites us.

Making the sign of the cross visible does not consist in performing it many times over, but rather it is in the fact that the gesture is never separated from the invocation of the Trinity which accompanies it, which gives it its meaning, which makes it effective.

WHAT CAN I DO?

To make the sign of the cross visible is related first, to our decision to give God his rightful place in our lives,

and second, to our desire to love. Let us strive to live lives of complete Christian love.

Let us dare each day to be inventive, imaginative and creative. Then living “in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,” our thoughts, our words and our actions will make visible the sign of the cross.

“Love is always patient and kind; love is never jealous; love is not boastful or conceited; it is never rude and never seeks its own advantage, it does not take offence or store up grievances. Love does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but finds its joy in the truth. It is always ready to make allowances, to trust, to hope, and to endure whatever comes” (1 Co 13, 4-8).

*Adapted from Frs. Regis-Marie de la Teyssonnière and
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