



# Lourdes

# 2020

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# Lourdes – the beating heart of Mary

## "I AM THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION."

### A - IN SUMMARY

Three different perspectives are suggested, along with concrete actions for their implementation:

#### 1 - THE FACE OF MARY, THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

A being, not a goddess, nor an intermediary between God and man. A woman completely open, from start to finish, from her conception until her death. She was conceived without sin, without obstacles to love, Immaculate: otherwise God would have stayed knocking on her door. Love was able to take flesh in her, so as not to remain just an empty word. She conceived the gift of God, her Son, her Only-Begotten, her All. She signs up for this mission: the conception of the Son of God. On 25<sup>th</sup> March after three weeks of Apparitions and three weeks of silence, she declared to Bernadette, "I AM the Immaculate Conception."

That is why the Christian people love to be close to Mary, our beautiful Mother. In our communities, her image is venerated. We invite you to bring your images of her to Lourdes, as a sign of joy and gratitude.

*We bring our images of Mary to Lourdes.*



## 2 - THE APPARITION THAT CAME AFTER THE ONE ON 25<sup>TH</sup> MARCH OCCURRED ON EASTER WEDNESDAY, 7<sup>TH</sup> APRIL.

**Bernadette**, after a while, ended up no longer holding in her hands the wax but the flame of the candle. She became the paschal candle, the burning bush, the sign of the burning presence of this Love that wants to fill us completely. Each one of us was chosen before the foundation of the world to be holy and immaculate in the presence of God in love. It is Mary's privilege to tell us what we are, and our vocation.

**Each of us** receives a white pebble and a new name, the secret of our heart in the very heart of God: a name and a mission. We receive this in the grace of our baptism: "You are my beloved child. You are a marvel!" And the grace of the Sacrament of Reconciliation brings us back to the joy of our new birth in God. We have an instinctive appetite for sin, but Mary gives us an appetite for God, an appetite for adoration, for listening to her Word, an appetite for a life wholly given to us.

*I receive a white pebble on which I write the name received during a time of prayer and sharing.*

**3 - THE CHURCH IS THIS FAMILY**, this maternal place where we are reconciled to God, where we find our brothers and sisters with whom we share the gift of God. An isolated Christian is a Christian in danger! Mary, the Mother, wants us to be together, with Jesus our elder brother. We also come to realise that an untold crowd of witnesses has gone before us, all of whom have welcomed the light into their lives. These are the saints, and we can choose the one who we feel will help us especially on our path of faith.

We carry to Lourdes many intentions that have been entrusted to us. We come back from Lourdes rich with a new commitment: perhaps water from the Grotto, memories ... We might also have found the grace of a Christian fraternity, a prayer group, a service, an action. In addition, so that we remain in the grace of Mary's meeting with Bernadette, we might receive the scapular of the **Family of Our Lady of Lourdes**. There is a monthly newsletter for reflection, with others if possible, so that we form small Cenacles, homes of missionary disciples, apostles of a new Pentecost.



In Lourdes, we would like to mark the Marian feasts, the month of Mary, and to make the sanctuary and places that are connected with her **“schools of the Immaculate”**, always reminding us that Mary leads us to Christ. It is he who gives her to us: “Here is your Mother!” And she keeps us alert: “Do whatever he tells you.”

*I choose or I receive the name of a saint who will support me.  
We make an act of trust or consecration  
to Mary, the Immaculate Conception.*

PRAYER OF CONSECRATION  
TO MARY

**St L-M Grignon de Montfort**

In the presence of all  
the heavenly court  
I choose thee this day  
for my Mother and Mistress.  
I deliver and consecrate  
to thee as Thy slave,  
my body and soul,  
my goods, both interior  
and exterior,  
and even the value of all my  
good actions,  
past present and future;  
leaving to you the entire  
and full right of disposing of me,  
and of all that belongs to me,  
without exception,  
according to Thy good pleasure  
to the greatest glory of God,  
in time and in eternity.

ACT OF TRUST IN MARY

**Family of Our Lady of Lourdes**

Blessed be God, our Father  
for having created Mary  
so beautiful  
and for having given her to us  
as Mother  
at the foot of the Cross of Jesus.  
Blessed are You for having called us,  
like Bernadette,  
to see Mary in Your light  
and to drink from the wellspring  
of Your Heart.  
Mary, you know the misery  
and the sin of our lives and the life  
of the world.  
We want to trust ourselves  
to You today,  
totally and without reserve.  
From you we will be reborn  
each day  
by the power of the Spirit.  
We will live the life of Jesus as little  
servants of our brothers.  
Teach us, Mary,  
to bear the life of the Lord.  
Teach us the “yes” of your heart.

## Act of consecration to the Immaculate of St Maximilian Marie Kolbe

Allow me to praise you, O blessed Virgin,  
O Immaculate, Queen of heaven and earth,  
Refuge of sinners and our most loving Mother,  
God has willed to entrust the entire order of mercy to You,  
I, an unworthy sinner,  
cast myself at Your feet,  
humbly imploring You to take me with all that I am and have,  
wholly to Yourself as Your possession and property.  
Please make of me, of all my powers of soul and body,  
of my whole life, death, and eternity, whatever pleases You.  
If it pleases You, use all that I am and have without reserve,  
wholly to accomplish what has been said of You:  
*"She will crush your head",*  
And  
*"You alone have destroyed all heresies in the whole world."*  
Let me be a fit instrument  
in Your immaculate and most merciful hands  
for introducing and increasing Your glory to the maximum  
in all the many strayed and indifferent souls,  
and thus help extend as far as possible  
the blessed Kingdom of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus.  
For, wherever You enter,  
You obtain the grace of conversion and sanctification,  
since it is through Your hands that all graces come to us  
from the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus.

*In a field in the village of San Miguel Los Lotes, Guatemala, a small plant emerges from the earth covered with ash after the eruption of the Fuego Volcano.*

*Life is stronger than death!*



**Lourdes**  
**2020**

## B - REFLECTION ON THE THEME

### 1 - "HAIL MARY ..."

#### *a) The grace of an encounter, in the shadow of the Cross*

Here we are at the Grotto, with Bernadette, to encounter Mary. In fact, during the Apparitions, nobody saw Mary, but they wanted to see Bernadette: it was she, the little girl spurned in Lourdes, who was found in the Light. She is the one we wanted to get to know in 2019, for the double anniversary of her birth and death.

In the year 2020, we would like to bring in the mystery of this face that reflected a brightness from the other world. Perhaps firstly, to follow the path that the Lady has shown to her, in answer to the question asked on 18<sup>th</sup> February, "Madam, would you be kind enough to put your name in writing?" "It is not necessary," she replied with a smile, and using the same courteous phrasing used by Bernadette, she sought her commitment in a promise: "Will you do me the honour of coming here for a fortnight?" I cannot give my name in the way that we might give a label, an official document, but I will open my heart to you, and that requires you to open yours ... Do you want to engage in this exchange?

This is a time of familiarisation, a mutual revelation. No advertising material would have the power to make us enter this free exchange, this communion of grace. For it is not a question of taking, but of giving, of giving oneself, knowing that only by doing so will we enter into the grace of existing as a person. The bodies, the minds, the hearts of other people so easily become commodities to be exploited. We are invited to visit, to discover, to trigger this Mystery revealed in confidence at the Encounter.



To want to know Mary's name is to be willing to listen to her heartbeat, to be silent enough to make room for the breath that she wants to transmit to us, to come to see little by little where she dwells, to dwell there too, in union with her inclinations, her ways of thinking, to return to our beginnings to be reborn in our turn to a new life, to a shared existence.

Bernadette, from the first moment when she was surprised to see the light in the Grotto, had already been led to put the encounter in context with a sign that was quite normal for her, a sign which should be treated with the respect it deserves: the Sign of the Cross: "In the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit". In the Name of a God in three Persons who reveals himself on the Cross, the Cross of suffering, the Cross desired by a Love that gives meaning even to suffering and death. The Cross that reveals the Mystery of God, a relationship of Eternal love, one who would be willing to die for the one he loves.

This is where we will always have someone waiting for us. Bernadette knows this, even at the moment of her death she has the Crucifix attached to her heart: she exists, too, to love. "I will not live for a moment unless I can spend it loving." At the Grotto, Bernadette experienced an ordinary meeting, yet at the same time it was unlike any other: "She looked at me like someone talking to another person." If the expression is taken literally, it implies an infinite respect for the unique mystery with which all human beings are invested, but which they themselves do not understand. Human beings are not objects, or animals guided by their instincts, they are these unique beings with whom God wants to enter into a relationship. One freedom speaks to another freedom, in the breath of the Spirit of Love.

We will probably get a better understanding of this meeting if we include the beginning and the end of the Gospel, the way in which Mary was addressed by the angel Gabriel sent from God (Lk 1, 28), and the way Jesus addressed the women who found the empty tomb, "Greetings" (Mt 28:9). This is the respectful approach of God who addresses the freedom of his creature so that he can entrust her with a mission: to give birth to Christ, to give birth to the Church, to give birth to the new world. Women are thus called to enter into the very thoughts of God, to create life.

## b) "Who are you, Immaculate Conception?"

Mary is none other than the perfect solution finally given to God's desire, and by her offering she is united with the joy of eternal Love. In this humble woman of Nazareth, the Father recognises the being who trusts him; with no reserve, the Son is given over as a small embryo in the womb of his mother, like the child totally dependent on the good will of his parents. She is thus the Temple, the icon, "the Bride" of the Holy Spirit, to use images loved by the Second Vatican Council, by Popes and by saints.<sup>1</sup>

"Who are you, Immaculate Conception? This was the question that Father Kolbe posed during his pilgrimage to Lourdes in 1930. It was still the subject of his meditation on the day of his arrest on 17<sup>th</sup> February 1941, while he was being taken to the concentration camp at Auschwitz. He then relived the wonder of the angel Gabriel, contemplating in this little unknown house in Nazareth the mystery adored in heaven: the birth of the Only-begotten Son. In her body, a woman carries the life of God who gives himself. She is the perfect echo of God's eternal "Yes", which from then on resonates throughout the history of the world.

The Spirit of trust and love was driven out of paradise by the sin of man, and earth became a hell; the Spirit then approached some privileged people, patriarchs, prophets or kings, who welcomed it, but also proved to be unfaithful; now the Spirit lives among us: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, the power of the Most High will overshadow you", for you are the tabernacle, the tent where the gift of God comes to dwell.

God reveals himself by making himself human. He recognises himself in his created being, who is totally open to and reflecting of his Love. And Mary, who does not take pleasure in this incredible beauty she possesses, lets the God who humbles himself, sing through her: she is his humble servant, they are alike. And she is invited in her turn to cast her gaze on

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1 - Mary is named by the Council as "Mother of the Son of God, and therefore beloved daughter of the Father and Temple of the Holy Spirit". Her quality as wife of the Holy Spirit should not be placed on the same level as her mission of Mother of Jesus but it is an image loved by Francis of Assisi in his Marian antiphon, by Father Kolbe, used by Paul VI in his Exhortation *Marialis Cultus* 26 and by John-Paul II in the Encyclical *Redemptoris Mater* 26.



a humble girl from a small village in the Pyrenees, a contemporary Nazareth, this Bernadette who looks like her. She will recognise and awaken in her the same openness, the same availability to her mission, which is to give birth to Christ in souls.

Pilgrimages are thus invited to bring about the communion of people around Mary and Bernadette: to illuminate the faces of our brothers and sisters, the face of the world, the face of God. It would be lovely for each group to bring to Lourdes an image of Mary venerated in their diocese, or in their country. It could be carried with the banners during the Torchlight procession indicating the presence on our paths of this Mother who brings the life of God to birth in us. We show her all our affection, guided by the Lord himself, when we say, "Hail, Mary ..."

## 2 - "YOUNGER THAN SIN"

### *a) God gives himself as a little child*

On 25<sup>th</sup> March 1858, Bernadette finally knew that the Lady of the Grotto, Aquero, is none other than Mary, the Mother of Jesus. The name she gave herself, however, may surprise us. It evokes the dogma defined by Pope Pius IX four years previously on 8<sup>th</sup> December 1854: Mary was conceived without original sin. But in Lourdes, it was no longer simply about recalling a quality already recognised in the prayer of the miraculous Medal: "O Mary conceived without sin, ..." It was Mary saying who she is, revealing the secret from her heart. She joined her hands and looked up to heaven, saying, "I am the Immaculate Conception."

We might think that she meant she was absolute Purity, but conception is not a quality, it is an action. The 25<sup>th</sup> March,



nine months before Christmas, marks the conception of Jesus. Mary's whole being is thus connected to her mission, of conceiving for the world a little being, barely formed in her womb, the Son of God: she has no existence other than this maternity, shown here in its very root, the conception of the child. If she was conceived without sin, it is not so that we stop and admire her, it is rather so that we can follow the example of her "yes", her acceptance of the gift of God. "I AM," she tells us, completely caught up in this madness of love that leads God to give himself to us as a little child.

Father Kolbe attempted to explain this further: In God, the Father is the one who conceives, the Son is the one who is conceived, the Spirit is the conception, the shared love of the Father and the Son.<sup>2</sup> And God wants to offer the earth this love: for that reason, he has lovingly created the heart of his being to receive his Spirit without reserve. If she had not said yes, he would not have been able to force the door open, he would have remained knocking. But he knew how to find this humble woman of Nazareth, totally unhindered by any notion of self, by any claim to an autonomous existence: she is full of grace, filled with the Holy Spirit; she shines very brightly.

### *b) The success of God*

**For God, nothing is ever lost.** Sin does not have the last word in history. We are rooted in a Love which bears us always, and which sin has failed to erase from the depths of our hearts. In the hollow of our history, under all the layers of violence and mud, more true than all our defilements, there is this song of spring rising from Mary's heart, there is this "yes", this "Fiat" which is said in the light, and frees us from the night of nothingness.

When the Lord wanted to create the world, he knew that he could simply say, "Fiat Lux," "Let there be light," because he already knew what his creation would answer: "Fiat mihi secundum Verbum tuum", "Let it be done to me according to your Word ". He hears the heartbeat of those who allow his creative Word to take flesh in them. Existence is not imposed on us. It is up to each one of us to let this Marian part of our being rise in us, to dare to say "yes". "Blessed are you, Lord, for having created me" was the prayer of Saint Claire, and it is ours, too, when we free ourselves from our pride or our fears, and we open ourselves to Life.

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2 - Maximilien Kolbe, *Immaculate Conception and the Holy Spirit*, texts translated by J.-F. Villepelée, Paris, 1974, p. 47-51.

The “Fiat”, the “Yes” of Mary is the “yes” of a freedom that brings us back to the origins of Grace. Eve let the Serpent instil suspicion in her, whereas Mary saw the trust of Him who would give His life in his fidelity to the Father. Mary lives by obedience to Jesus. In our earthly chronology, she existed before Jesus her Child, but in the heart of God, she was always the first disciple of the Word, “Daughter of her Son”.<sup>3</sup>

From her own experience, little Therese of the Child Jesus can also help us understand Mary’s dependence on her Son, possibly better than great theologians. She was aware that, without the action of God who preserves her, she would be the greatest sinner: “I recognise that without Him, I could have fallen as low as Mary Magdalen [...] but I also know that Jesus has given me

more than he gave to Mary Magdalen, since he gave it to me in advance, preventing me from falling. (Manuscript A, 38 v.) Holiness is the fruit of an ever-present Mercy, it is not a quality of which a person can boast.

Mary, being conceived without original sin, seemed to theologians to be an exception to universal redemption through the death and resurrection of Christ. She would not have needed to be redeemed. But she is most perfectly redeemed, not in retrospect, as if God could only repair what he had created once it was damaged, but from the beginning, she is “the Woman in Grace finally restored, ... the being that emanates from God in the dawning of her original splendour.”<sup>4</sup>



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3 - Dante Alighieri, cited by John-Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater* 10.

4 - Paul Claudel, *La Vierge à midi*, *Œuvre poétique*, Poèmes de guerre 1914-1915, La Pléiade, Gallimard, 1957.

“Duns Scotus<sup>5</sup>, to enable our understanding of this retention of original sin, developed an argument which would subsequently be adopted also by Pope Pius IX in 1854, when he solemnly defined the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of Mary. And this argument is that of “Preventive Redemption”, according to which the Immaculate Conception represents the masterpiece of the Christ’s Redemption, because by the power of his love and his mediation, he enabled his Mother to be preserved from original sin. Mary is therefore totally redeemed by Christ, even before her conception ... ”<sup>6</sup>

### *c) A hidden source, a new hope*

It was neither the magisterium of the Church nor theologians who came up with this doctrine. “Theologians of great value such as Duns Scot, with regard to the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception have, with the contribution of their unique ideas, enriched what the People of God already spontaneously believed about the Blessed Virgin, and manifested in acts of piety, in artistic expressions and, in general, in Christian experience. Thus, faith in both the Immaculate Conception and the Corporal Assumption of the Virgin was already present among the People of God, while theology had not yet found the key to interpreting it in the totality of the doctrine of faith. The People of God thus precede theologians, thanks to the supernatural “sensus fidei”, that is to say, the capacity bestowed on us by the Holy Spirit, which makes it possible to embrace the reality of the faith, with our humble hearts and minds.

In this sense, the People of God is a “magisterium which precedes”, and which must then be deep-



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5 - This Franciscan theologian of the XVIII century was officially recognised as “Blessed” by John Paul II in 1993. His Marian doctrine, centred on the power of Christ’s redemption, marked out his religious family, who honour their patron and their queen in the Immaculate Conception of Mary.

6 - Benedict XVI, General audience of 7<sup>th</sup> July 2010.

ened and intellectually supported by theology. May theologians constantly listen to this source of faith and retain the humility and simplicity of the little ones!"<sup>7</sup>

The people would not have been able intellectually to develop the doctrine of original sin: what they saw was the certainty of a maternal presence, the tenderness of a love, from which true life springs, not stained or condemned, but pure and beautiful for always and forever. This is what faith teaches us: faith, that is, **the original confidence** that draws us from nothingness, and makes us open to do God's work.

Mary conceived without sin lacks nothing; she is not less human than sinners. On the contrary, she is the being who does not flee from the hands of God, but who remains obedient to grace. She is always ready to listen, and therefore free from the prisons of selfishness, pride, or fear. Empty of all the clutter of an ego, concentrated on itself, she absorbs the love offered, and is able to carry it to the world.

Mary, an exception in our humanity? Statistically, but the truth cannot be found in statistics. Mary is true humanity and she testifies at the heart of our history that God is always accessible. And in Lourdes, with Bernadette, she draws us to him. She allows us to discover who we are in the heart of God. It is true that we exist through the look that shows we are alive. I do not give myself life, I receive it and transmit it, I live through and in an exchange of love.

It is therefore we who are the exception, we who feel this complicity with evil, fear, suspicion, and who try to escape into artificial paradises. But in Jesus Christ, his firstborn Son, God enables us to be born again as his children. "He chose us, in Christ, before the foundation of the world, to be holy, immaculate before him, in love." (Eph. 1:4) He brings us to rebirth in his Church family: "Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through

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7 - Benedict XVI, General audience of 7<sup>th</sup> July 2010.

the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless." (Eph. 5:25-27)<sup>8</sup>

Let us then take on the trustful humility of Mary, and the simplicity of Bernadette who thwarts the traps that were set for her. Let us welcome this child whom God gives us, "younger than sin, younger than the race from which she springs, and although Mother by grace, Mother of graces, the youngest of the human race".<sup>9</sup>

"She had blue eyes," the colour of birth. This is how Bernadette concluded her narrative of the Apparitions<sup>10</sup>.



### 3 - "HERE IS YOUR MOTHER"

#### a) A new name, a new birth

All privilege in God is made to be shared. Mary does not come to be admired by Bernadette, she gives her a mission, that of offering a sinful world this proclamation: "I AM the Immaculate Conception." Bernadette does not just repeat this statement, she appropriates it and makes it her own. Thus "the priests" to whom she is sent will know that in their turn they must "build a chapel", God's dwelling among men, but beyond already known paths, as in the desert. Something new is about to be born, people are summoned to a virgin land to receive the grace of a new creation.

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8 - I like to contemplate the holiness present in the patience of God's people: in those parents who raise their children with immense love, in those men and women who work hard to support their families, in the sick, in elderly religious who never lose their smile. In their daily perseverance I see the holiness of the Church militant. Very often it is a holiness found in our next-door neighbours, those who, living in our midst, reflect God's presence. We might call them "the middle class of holiness". (Pope Francis, Exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate* § 7). Holiness is the most attractive face of the Church (§ 9). We are all called to be holy by living our lives with love and by bearing witness in everything we do, wherever we find ourselves (§ 14). Do not be afraid to set your sights higher, to allow yourself to be loved and liberated by God. Do not be afraid to let yourself be guided by the Holy Spirit. Holiness does not make you less human, since it is an encounter between your weakness and the power of God's grace. For in the words of León Bloy, when all is said and done, "the only great tragedy in life, is not to become a saint" (§ 34).

9 - G. Bernanos, *Journal d'un curé de campagne*, in *Œuvres romanesques*, La Pléiade, 1961, p.1194.

10 - R. Laurentin, *The Life of Bernadette*, DDB, 1978, p.187.



The Pharisee Nicodemus will ask Jesus the same question that Mary had asked the angel Gabriel when he told her that she would be the mother of the Messiah: "How can this be?" (John 3) Can a man who has grown old again enter his mother's womb to be reborn? This is exactly what it is about. Our birth on earth opens up a space that gives us the memory and taste of another world. We are made for the happiness of another world, not to escape from the one we inhabit, but to awaken in us an openness to grace. "Master, where do you live?" two of John the Baptist's disciples ask Jesus: they discover the beloved Son who lives in the bosom of his Father (John 1: 38-39).

We have in Mary the model of the chapel to be built, the house in Nazareth and the Cenacle, the house inhabited by prayer and open to the gift of the Spirit. The Cachot in the Rue des Petits-Fosses can show us the way. Prayer and family love, that was Bernadette's food every day. Love of God and service of the poor would be her vocation among the Sisters of Charity in Nevers. Burning with a flame sprung from the tomb on Easter morning, Bernadette would reflect the smile, the light of Mary's gaze and heart. She carried out her mission, not as a postman who is ignorant of the content of the message, but in the same way as the first witnesses of the Good News, who were themselves transfigured by it.

Bernadette, coming out of her ecstasy, could not explain the meaning of the lady's statement, but she welcomed it as a seed in her heart: "I AM the Immaculate Conception". Mary was thus the first to be admitted to the family of God. Not by nature, but by grace, by the work of the Holy Spirit in her, she participated in the birth of the Son of God. Bernadette would also take on this mission. We mentioned this in 2019 when we saw her teaching the Charity of God to one of the young girls who entered the convent in Nevers but did not feel able to look at the repulsive wound of a sick sister.<sup>11</sup> "I AM the Immaculate Conception." I let myself be burned by the flame of the candle, and I become the burning bush: I am nothing by

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11 - "One day Bernadette asked me to walk with Mother Anne-Marie Lescure, who was blind. She said to me:- Take care of her as if she was God Himself. I answered:- Ah, but there's a difference. I asked her why this sister was not wearing her habit. She said to me:- You'll see this evening. So, I went back, and I saw the sister's wound crawling with worms which Bernadette was collecting in a dish. I couldn't bear to look. Bernadette said to me:- What kind of Sister of Charity will you be! You have little faith!" (Testimony of Sister Julie Garros, in R. Laurentin, *The Life of Bernadette*, DDB, 1978, p. 185)

myself but a poor thorny plant, but a manifestation of love enlightens me from within and spreads through me.<sup>12</sup>

No, Bernadette, you are not “good for nothing”, you are a marvel, and you will bring to birth in your fellow pilgrims, the desire to find the forgotten source of their conception in the very heart of God, the source of their vocation as children of God.

### *b) The name and mission of the Church*

The name of Mary is the mission of the Church, not simply one of its many activities, but a mission that defines it, which gives it its name. She welcomes in, she bears, she gives birth to the Only-begotten Son, the perfect expression of the Father’s Love. “Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give that person a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to the one who receives it.” (Ap 2:17) It would be lovely if, during your pilgrimage, each participant could receive a white stone on which they could write the mission entrusted to them, a unique mission that they engage with fully and for always. I think of this sister who, on the day she took on her habit, received the name of “shared joy”: without being aware of it, she radiated in a whole host of circumstances a joy on which others could feed.



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“I AM the Immaculate Conception.” The Lord is not possessive of his privileges, he gives up everything for us, even the life of his Son, his only one, the one he cherishes (Gen 22: 2). Unlike Abraham who retrieved

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12 - This is the meaning of the miracle of the candle, on Easter Wednesday, 7<sup>th</sup> April 1858.



his son, Isaac, and was exempt from the sacrifice, the Father follows his offering to its conclusion, and Mary, the Mother, plays a part in it. We are then shown that this Love can cross the abyss of rejection, suffering and death, finally to bring about a “yes” from the being who recognises it: God shows that he can turn sinners into pilgrims reconciled to the life he gives us.

Let us enter this dialogue that gives birth to the Church in the garden of the empty tomb. The woman was still crying. She hears someone calling her, “Mary!” and she recognises the speaker: “Rabbouni!” (John 20:16) Jesus, in a way, “immaculises” the Magdalene, giving her the name of the one who no longer has a name, since in the Gospel of John she is simply called “the Mother of God”. The nameless one of the 4<sup>th</sup> Gospel exists only through the grace that fills her, and the mission entrusted to her: she is open to God’s grace, and she radiates it with the same magnitude at which it is given to her, that is, totally.

Mary Magdalen, given the title “Apostle of the Apostles”, is also part of the Church’s mission, she “exists to evangelise<sup>13</sup>”. Finally, the humble fishermen on the shores of the Sea of Galilee are transformed completely into “fishermen of men”. They will carry Christ as a mother carries her child. “My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you,” cries St. Paul in his Letter to the Galatians, just after confessing the Mystery: “But when the fullness of time came, God sent forth His Son, born from a woman... that we might receive the adoption as sons.” (Ga 4, 4:19).



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13 - Paul VI, Exhortation apostolique Evangelii Nuntiandi (8 décembre 1975), § 14.

The Church must regain her name and mission, she must constantly resist the temptation to be her own reference, to set herself up as independent to become a system of thought, a humanitarian organisation, one religion among others: she is the place of a shared life, the very life of God who ignites it. Her only security is in her God who says again, "I called you by your name, you are mine" (Is. 43:1), "I have engraved your name on the palm of my hand" (Is. 49:6), "You will be called by a new name that the mouth of the Lord shall name" (Is. 62:2). "Then you shall say in your heart, "Who bore these for me, since I have lost my children and am barren, a captive and a wanderer? And who has brought these up? I was left alone; from where did these come?" (Is. 49:21)

Before this great mystery of the free choice of God, of the salvation offered and the mission entrusted to us, you will then be able to cry out with gratitude to the One who loves you: "You, Lord, are our Father, our Redeemer from of old is your name" (Is. 63:16). You understand that if you are adopted, favoured, chosen, it is so that all might understand that they, too, are wanted, loved, chosen through you; if you have been able to be led by the Lord despite your offences and your prostitution, as the Holy History of the Jewish people and the first Church testify, there must be room for the sick and the sinners, the prostitutes, the publicans, in the Kingdom of heaven.

Thus, we see the Church, our Mother, in the image of Mary, participating in the birth of the children of God. The Church is not an association that we create, she is a family that welcomes and supports us. Mary, her model, is also her mother, in the sense that the Church lives by the faith of her immaculate heart, totally open to the gift of God. Mary adds nothing to the work of salvation, yet she contributes in welcoming it in a perfect way, allowing nothing of it to be lost, while left on our own we flee, and we leave Jesus alone. But "the Mother of Jesus was there," at Cana and at the foot of the Cross, at the "beginning of the signs," and when Jesus finally says, "All is accomplished."

### *c) Children of Mary, missionaries of the Gospel*

In Lourdes, with Bernadette, we can take Mary **"unto our own"**, to experience more fully the grace of our baptism, to let us be reborn through this accepting heart that carried Jesus: thus, Bernadette was received as a Child of Mary on 8th September 1858. We can we, too, enter the Family of Our Lady of Lourdes, and come to know the joy of the Apparitions. We then receive the blue scapular of Mary and Bernadette: with them, we are "clothed with Christ" (Gal 3:27).

With our white stone, blue scapular, we become other Christs in the heart of Mary, missionary-disciples of the Spirit of life, at the service of a society of Love. Such is the Mission of the Immaculate: Mary Immaculate, the one who is "full of grace", is the way through whom Jesus, who in her, assumed our humanity, still comes today, into the heart of every person. As a result, she is also the path by which everyone comes to her son and, through him, to the Father. Saint Maximilian-Marie Kolbe guides us on the path already followed by Saint Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort: "If then we are establishing sound devotion to our Blessed Lady, it is only in order to establish devotion to our Lord more perfectly, by providing a smooth but certain way of reaching Jesus Christ. If devotion to our Lady distracted us from our Lord, we would have to reject it as an illusion of the devil. But this is far from being the case. As I have already shown and will show again later on, this devotion is necessary, simply and solely because it is a way of reaching Jesus perfectly, loving him tenderly, and serving him faithfully." (Treatise on True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin n ° 62)

We would have to go back to Chapter VIII of the conciliar Constitution on the Church, to rediscover that by ourselves, we seek Jesus by following



the meanderings of our reasoning, our inadequate feelings, very quickly diverted from the good intentions or good resolutions that we make. Only Mary, by her pure faith, leads us on a direct path to the heart of God. Therefore, “the salvific influence of the Blessed Virgin on men... in no way does it impede, but rather does it foster the immediate union of the faithful with Christ<sup>14</sup>.” Thus, Mary is a mediator, a “maternal mediation<sup>15</sup>”, like a matrix who shapes us and brings us to birth in the image of our elder brother.

And this is where Marian prayer takes root, it brings us to the Magnificat of Mary, to the foot of Calvary, to the paths of the Church, among people of all times, all places, in the breath of the Spirit of Jesus given on the Cross for a new Pentecost. Bernadette recognised him in front of the Grotto of Massabielle. So, we now need to welcome him as well, and to enter into the grace of the gift that is given to us.

“The future of Lourdes is the Immaculate Conception,” said Father Duboe, one of the first chaplains, at the time of the inauguration of worship at the Grotto in 1866. We might also add, from 2008: “The future of humanity is the Immaculate Conception,” it is the joy of birth and a new beginning<sup>16</sup>.



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14 - Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium* 60.

15 - This is the title of the third part of the Encyclical *Redemptoris Mater*.

16 - Father Régis-Marie de La Teyssonnière, citing Paul Duboé summarises his comments by saying, “Lourdes is [for] sinners”, that is, for everyone. See the Lourdes Conference 2005, p. 151, and the 2008 Conference in which Father Brito concluded, p.44: “In all human beings, however disfigured they might be by their sin, the mark of God is always present. This is why no one should have reason to despair, of themselves or of their fellow man. Thus, in the person of Mary, a great hope opens up for the whole world.”