

4. Forgive us our trespasses
Lead us not into temptation
Deliver us from evil

The last requests of the *Our Father* bring us face to face with our human frailty, wounded by sin and only to ready to turn away from God. But these requests are even more an act of faith in the love that God has shown us, a love greater, stronger, and more powerful than our sinfulness, our suffering, and even our eventual death.

When, after having turned away from him, God's People recognized that they had sinned, **Moses** interceded for them. When God responds and tells Moses what action he should take, God also pardons, heals and brings liberation to his People. (See Nb 21, 8)

Jesus is strong in the words that the Father has pronounced about him at the moment of his baptism, "You are my beloved Son on whom rests all my favour." (Lk 3, 22)

When Jesus himself was tempted in the desert, he refers to his Father saying, "It is written: you must do homage to the Lord your God, him alone you must serve." (Lc 4, 8)



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At the moment of his betrayal, humiliation, and greatest suffering, Jesus once again turns to the Father and asks forgiveness for his persecutors, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." (Lc 23, 34)

When **Bernadette** was very young, she experienced her own limitations. So she was able to accept correction from her parents without rebelling.

It was in this context that the light of the first apparition brought Bernadette to the confessional of Father Pomian to receive for the first time the sacrament of penance. It was after this first confession, the words of Mary resonated profoundly in Bernadette's heart, "Pray for the conversion of sinners." "Penance, Penance, Penance." "Go to the spring, drink and wash there."

In a manner that sheds light for the pilgrim of Lourdes, it is important to point out that Bernadette included herself in this message of penance. She identified with it to the point that there was an echo of this message in the last words that she spoke on earth, "Pray for me, a poor sinner." Thus, Bernadette expressed her life-long quest of forgiveness.

Like all humans, Bernadette knew the trials of temptation. In her simplicity, but also in her desire to live as a *daughter of the Father*, she shares with us the secret of her life, "The first impulse doesn't come from us. The second one does." If the first impulse is characterized by the weakness of our natures in which the tempter has insinuated himself, the second impulse is according to her lived in union with Jesus, the Son of the Father. Through this moment by moment conversion Bernadette responded to the invitation to penance that had been addressed to her.

In Bernadette, these two states of prayer and penance were ample means to bring about a deliverance from evil. For in delivering us from evil, the Father doesn't return us to what we were before. Instead he opens new life to us. This is the meaning of Mary's words, "Go to the spring, drink, and wash there." The action of water announces and prefigures the sacrament whose glorious fruit is to make us members of the *family of the Father*.

Today we come to Lourdes wounded in our human nature, and we find as we contemplate the Immaculate One that grace is stronger than sinfulness, that love is greater than our selfishness, and

that reconciliation is available for those who open their hearts to it.

Questions to ask ourselves

- Am I aware that human nature is tainted by sin? Am I aware of my own sins? Can I name them?
- Am I convinced that with the grace that the Father gives me through the Son and in the Holy Spirit I can conquer temptations? Go beyond my sin? Experience life without giving in to evil?
- What experiences have I had of being freed? From a vice? From a bad habit? From relationships that have become too complicated?
- What importance do I give to forgiveness? With my spouse? In my family? At work? With my neighbours? Within the Christian community?
- What place does the sacrament of penance and reconciliation have in my life? How Do I prepare myself for it?

Suggested actions

During the pilgrimage:

- At the beginning of Mass, the celebrant will invite you to make a gesture of mutual pardon before the prayer, "I confess to almighty God..."
- The sprinkling of water will take place "in the Church" as a gesture of penance.
- The sacrament of penance and reconciliation will be made available, if possible with catechetical instruction preceding individual confessions.

After the pilgrimage

The words of Jesus will continue to guide us after leaving Lourdes so that, in the light of the *Our Father*, we may continue to grow in faith. Thus, we may be able to say with the Apostle Paul, "There where sin abounded, grace was even more abundant." (Rm 5, 20)

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With Bernadette, praying the Our Father

Pastoral Theme 2011

Prayer is an expression of our relationship with God. To pray to the Lord is to be with Him. For many people, however, prayer means asking God for things. But God is well aware of our needs. That's why in the *Our Father*, Jesus teaches us to ask for what God wants to give us, what we need, and what is good for us.

Thus, it can be said that our requests in the *Our Father* are answered before our eyes.

Where God's children are assembled, there God the Father fills them with his blessings.

And this is visible for all to see. We have only to open our eyes to witness how the requests contained in the *Our Father* are fulfilled concretely in the lives of men and women today. Through those blessings, it is God the Father who becomes visible.

Bernadette's life was profoundly marked by two relationships which, while united, remained very distinct. Bernadette was "a child of Mary," and Mary was above all "the daughter of God the Father." Thus, Mary's joy in seeing Bernadette's growing filial devotion to God the Father, corresponded to the Father's joy in seeing Bernadette living as "a child of Mary."

There are seven requests in the *Our Father* which can be divided into four categories. These requests throw light on the words and the gestures of Mary and Bernadette during the apparitions. Those words and gestures, like that of our own as we experience Lourdes, help us to enter fully into the prayer of the *Our Father*.

1. 1. Hallowed be thy name Thy Kingdom come

Right from the beginning, the *Our Father* re-centres us. Hallowed be Thy Name actually means that this Name is not to be treated like any other. It is to have a special place, a place apart. We must "let God be God." The consequence follows immediately: the coming of the kingdom of God. Thus, to turn toward the Father opens us, not only to a new perspective, to a change in behaviour, but leads us at the same time to the threshold of a new reality.

Moses experienced this. Even before receiving the Name of God, he heard a voice saying, "Don't come any closer. Remove your sandals, for the earth under your feet is holy ground." It is therefore with complete awareness and an elemental understanding of God's holiness that Moses is able to welcome the One who reveals Himself in the burning bush: "I am He who is." (Ex 3, 14).



At the time of the third apparition, **Bernadette** gathered her courage and spoke to the mysterious visitor whom she saw at the Grotto: "Madame, would you be kind enough to tell me your name?" But the only response received by the young girl

was a wide smile and the words, "It isn't necessary." It was not what was most important for Bernadette at that moment. She needed first to purify her desires, to prepare her heart. "Would you do me the favour of coming here for a fortnight days?" Bernadette is asked to make a pilgrimage in order to be ready to receive, to welcome, and to communicate the name of the creature closest to God: "I am the Immaculate Conception." (March 25, 1858)

The attitude of those who come on **pilgrimage** is therefore not only to choose carefully the context, but also to be mindful of the necessary preparation. Moses prepared to receive and welcome the Name of God, Bernadette prepared to receive the name of Mary, and Jesus prepares his disciples before inviting them to name God as Father, in the *Name of the Father*. That Name is thus hallowed and is given its true place. The hallowed Name announces the coming and the presence of the Kingdom of God.

At Lourdes the eyes of many people are opened to the truth that "here heaven and earth touch one another." There is an atmosphere of prayer, there are processions, and celebrations. There is the tireless activity of volunteers helping the sick and the disabled. But it quickly becomes apparent that in the midst of the volunteer's attentive service to others, each one is conscious of God. And these two attitudes go well together. Evident in this way of living is *the Name of the Father* that is hallowed by words and actions. The Kingdom of God is thus announced and made present.

Questions to ask ourselves

- Who taught me to say the *Our Father*? How old was I? Where was I?
- When do I say the *Our Father*? At Mass? When saying the rosary? Each day? Alone? With others?

- What thoughts do I have when saying the *Our Father*? Do I think of myself as a son? or daughter of God who is my *Father*? Is that important or even essential to me? Is it a life-giving or a painful thought for me?

- What importance do I give in my life to the *Name of the Father*? In my decisions? In my choices? In my commitments? In my contacts with others? In managing my goods?

- How do I hallow the name of the Father? By what thoughts? By what actions?

Suggested actions

At the beginning of your pilgrimage, then at the start of each celebration, at the invitation of the celebrant:

- close your eyes and bow your head and recognize that you are the son or daughter of the *Father*.

- Turn toward those beside you in mutual welcome as children of one *Father*.

After the pilgrimage

The words of Jesus can guide us in our life after Lourdes, because, in the light of the *Our Father*, the Lourdes Pilgrimage gives a new sense to all of our life: "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given you besides." (Mt 6, 33).

2. Thy will be done

The theme of the *will of the Father* reminds us that God comes first. We are created by him and for him. To do the *will of the Father* is, therefore, another way of praying to become the person God means us to be.

To accomplish the will of God, **Moses** discovered, little by little, that he had to be docile, to let himself be guided by God in the midst of difficulties, temptations, and misunderstandings. The fruit of his obedience made possible the Covenant between God and his people.

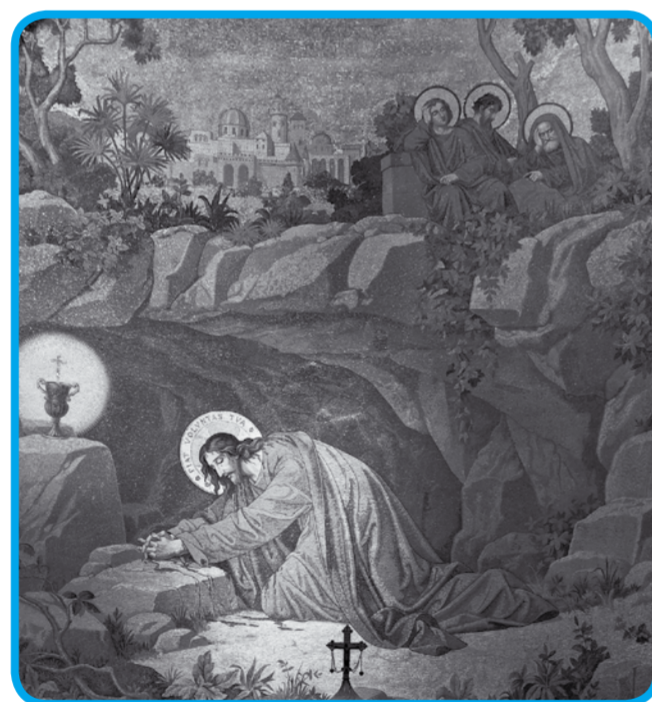
Bernadette learned from Mary how to live out that Covenant in everyday life. The young girl learned to do what the Lady asked her. Mary expresses her loving

will. Little by little Bernadette carries out that will, sometimes in joy, sometimes in uncertainty or even in pain. "I couldn't make the sign of the cross until the Lady had made it." "I promised." "I am very happy that I have done what I have been asked to do." "In what have I failed her?"

Through each of the tasks set for her, Bernadette experienced the fulfilment of an encounter with Jesus, and opened for others the possibility of undertaking a similar pilgrimage to live, in their turn, that same encounter with Jesus.

Thus, along with Moses, Bernadette became a visible sign of the *will of the Father*, manifesting that she was above all the *daughter of the Father*.

The Good News of the Gospel shows us Jesus carrying out to perfection the *will of the Father*. For in his earthly pilgrimage Jesus also experienced temptation, rejection, incomprehension, and suffering. But in every circumstance he chose his Father: "Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me. Nevertheless, let your will be done, not mine." (Lc 22,42)



A **pilgrimage** to Lourdes is a special time for discernment in prayer and dialogue. Each one is thus invited to rediscover in one's own experience that the *will of the Father* is an expression of Love. God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is Love. God created men and women in his image that they might live with one another and with him in love. Such is the will of the Father of Jesus and our Father in whom love originates and whose love is expressed in his will.

Questions we can ask ourselves

- How much importance do I place on what I want for myself? Do I take into account what others want? Do I take into account the *will of the Father*? Do I pay attention to what the people around me want?

- How do I manifest the *will of the Father*? In my own life? In the lives of others? In the lives of all earth's people?

- How do I go about discerning the *will of the Father*? Through listening to my conscience? Through prayer? Through reading the Bible? Through opportunities for recollection? Through spiritual direction? Through involvement in the Church? Through involvement in social action?

- In order to live the *will of the Father*, am I faithful to my state in life? My Baptismal Promises? My marriage? My priesthood? My religious life? My consecrated life?

- In the important decisions of my life, how much does my desire to do the *will of the Father* count? Discerning my vocation? Marriage? Education of my children? Ethics in my professional life?

Suggested actions

During the pilgrimage, perhaps during the celebrations:

- recognize in the secret of one's own heart the obstacles that exist to doing the *will of the Father*. (Each person could write for him/herself the chief obstacle to doing the *will of the Father*, then tear up the paper after having asked the Father, through the Son and in the Spirit the grace do be able to do the *will of the Father*.)

- Make a small resolution with regard to the Father, and before the gaze of the Father, do something for another, in the desire to carry out the will of the Father.

After the pilgrimage

The words of Jesus can light our paths after leaving Lourdes as our wills, more and more united to that of the Father, will become a source of life. "My food is to do the will of the one who sent me, and to complete his work." (Jn 4, 34)

3. Give us this day our daily bread

This central request in the *Our Father* reminds us of our filial bond, our vital dependence in relation to God.

Our human nature corrupted by original sin, however, impels us unceasingly, like our first parents, to want to take the place of God, "to be like unto gods." We believe ourselves to be the centre of the world. We forget our dependence on God and others. Hardening our hearts, we become capable of all sorts of compromises in order to obtain what we covet because it seems to us to be necessary.

In the desert after having encountered God at the summit of the Mountain, **Moses** discovers that the People have rejected the Lord and are worshipping a golden calf. Soon after, when they have nothing to eat, the People cry out against God proclaiming their preference for slavery in Egypt rather than the way to freedom that the Lord has opened for them to cross the desert.

God's response to this betrayal of his People is found in the gift of manna. "Look, I shall rain down bread for you from the heavens. Each day the people must go out and collect their ration for the day." (Ex 16, 4)

In the Gospel, Jesus makes a distinction between two types of bread, the bread from the earth and the bread from heaven. "You are looking for me not because you have seen the signs, but because you had all the bread you wanted to eat." (Jn 6, 26) And Jesus then added, "Do not work for food that goes bad, but work for food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of man will give you, for on him the Father, God Himself has set his seal." (Jn 6, 27)

On February 11, 1858, **Bernadette** was searching for bread. It was above all her desire for the bread of heaven which made her return to Lourdes a few weeks previously to continue her preparation for her First Communion. It was also the need for daily bread which sent her to the grotto to search there for wood which could be exchanged for money to buy a little nourishment for her family.



In the one case as in the other, Bernadette's unshakable confidence in God's providence in all things is manifested. She expresses it simply in this beautiful prayer:

"Give me, I pray, the bread of humility, the bread of obedience, the bread of charity, the bread that will give me the strength to replace my own will with yours, the bread of interior discipline, the bread of detachment from all that is not you, the bread of patience that I may bear my heart's pain. O Jesus, you wish me to be crucified in your image, may your will be done! Give me the bread which strengthens me to bear well my suffering, the bread that will help me to see you and only you always and in everything."

On June 3, 1858, just a few weeks before the last apparition which took place July 16, Bernadette made her First Communion. Her deepest wish was fulfilled. She became completely the *daughter of God* who loved her to the point of giving her his own Son. (Jn 3, 16)

Today, millions of pilgrims come each year to Lourdes following the example of Bernadette. They come for many different reasons. Some, finding themselves faced with material problems, come to express their anxiety. Others cry out in physical suffering. Still others search for spiritual healing, through conversion and reconciliation.

In reality, it is through others that each individual opens him/herself to God's gifts. It is thus that many people discover the daily bread that the Father gives us, that of the presence in our lives of others.

Questions to ask ourselves

- Am I conscious of my dependence on God the Father? How is the conviction of my dependence manifested concretely? By my faithfulness to prayer? By my frequent reading of God's word? By my participation in Sunday Mass?

- Am I dependent on others? How? Do I see my dependence in a positive light? In my relationships with others, do I know how to listen? Do I enter into dialogue? Do I ever ask others for advice?

- Do I value the bread that nourishes me? Am I careful not to waste it, to share it? What is my reaction to the fact that hundreds of millions of people today are without bread to nourish them?

- What in my life is essential to give meaning to my existence? To give me a sense of fulfilment? To give me a sense of success?

- What is it that really nourishes me? That makes me grow? That strengthens me? That fills me with joy?

Suggested actions

During the pilgrimage, you will be asked to:

- take a piece of paper and write a few words of thanksgiving to the Lord for all that nourishes us, and keeps us alive; the pieces of paper will be collected, put in a basket and placed at the foot of the altar during the offertory of a mass for a large group of pilgrims.

Also during the pilgrimage, those who would like:

- could make a resolution to help someone in some small way by a doing something special for him/her.

After the pilgrimage

After we leave Lourdes the words of Jesus will guide us on our path with the light of the *Our Father*. In saying "Human beings live not on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God," (Dt 8, 3/Mt 4, 4) Jesus will enable us to continue to live in our homes what we have experienced at Lourdes.