

This is our most unusual Holy Week ever, as we “shelter in place”. While doing so, I invite you to pray at home, pray the Rosary, and also to participate with Catholic Mass offered online. Check LOURDESWESTORANGE.ORG for audio + video postings, Mass, prayer. I offer this Holy Week and Easter message, considering our altar-icon and the grotto with Bernadette on RIGHT praying her rosary and Blessed Virgin Mary on LEFT.

THE TRAIL TO LOURDES On February 11, 1858, Bernadette of Soubirous went out to collect firewood, a good idea, in winter in southwestern France. Bernadette was of a very poor family, living, essentially, in a debtor’s jail, unable to pay the money they owed.

On her way, Bernadette saw a vision, describing, in her dialect, a *petito damizelo*, a petite damsel, or "a small young lady" or “beautiful girl.”

Despite her insistence, no one (including family, local parish church) believed Bernadette at first as she did not command respect with her youth and lack of education. But, Bernadette insisted on what she saw, that she saw a beautiful lady.

THE TRIAL OF BERNADETTE

While not believing Bernadette, they also decided to test her, asking her to ask the beautiful lady for her name.

So, Bernadette, at the next appearance, asked the *petito damizelo*: who are you? Bernadette was told: “I am the Immaculate Conception.” This caused more problems – at least in the short term – for Bernadette – because no one had spoken of Mary and the Immaculate Conception in quite that way.

At that time, no one said: “Mary is the Immaculate Conception”, but would have said Mary was immaculately conceived or:

“please open your church hymnal to number 783, *Immaculate Mary*.” ☺ !

It may be awkward to us, but was even more so in the 1800’s. Yet, Bernadette insisted. I think the townspeople wanted Bernadette to “shelter in place” or do “social distancing”!

THE TENACITY AND FAITH OF BERNADETTE (and us!)

This tenacity made Bernadette believable. Others recognized that the only way for Bernadette to know “Immaculate Conception” was for this to have been divinely revealed in an apparition of our Blessed Mother. While Bernadette’s vocabulary may have been limited by lack of schooling, her faith was not.

Later, as attention came to Bernadette at Lourdes, as pilgrims and visitors came to Lourdes, Bernadette spurned all fame and notoriety due to the apparitions.

Bernadette exemplified the humble disciple, the light of the world and salt of the earth.

Bernadette could also see what others could not see and feel what others could not feel.

In God’s Word, we read “faith is the realization of what is hoped for and the evidence of things not seen.” (Hebrews 11:1) Bernadette manifested that faith.



Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom! (Luke 23:42)

THE LITTLE PRINCE

Around the time I entered the seminary, I read the novella, *The Little Prince*, by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry. Also, a favorite of our beloved pastor of many years, Monsignor Joe Petrillo.

With illustrations and large print, *The Little Prince* appears to be a children's book but certainly is not exclusively for children and has much wisdom for grown-ups. One famous quotation: "*The most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or touched, they are felt with the heart.*"

Bernadette saw what others did not see, expressed what others could not express – yet.

A LITTLE FAITH Sometimes, I am asked: "why did you become a priest? How did you know?" I wish I could tell you there was one single a-ha moment or Thomas-Edison-light-bulb over my head.

That is not how it happened; that's not really how life works. Mine was a gradual experience of being called; even being called when I did not know.

During college, for example, I remember we had a Catholic Mass on campus every Saturday afternoon. A priest from the local area would come. We would take a break to go there. (I was not thinking about being a priest at this time).

One friend, Victor, wanted to go to Mass, but could not remember. This was because he was pre-med and absorbed in molecular biology, organic chemistry, etc. So, I would invite him: "want to go?" At one point, he told me that he wanted me to remind him, "Jim I want you to remind me." To be invited, interrupted. This reminded me that my witness mattered to someone else. *You are called to invite others*

to pray, to come to church here at Lourdes. I hope we can all gather again soon.

FAITH: A LITTLE MEANS A LOT! Your witness – your testimony – your prayers – matter, which others perhaps cannot see or do not see, matter.

Your witness, now hidden "sheltering in place" matters! It matters to me as your pastor and priest, your family and friends, your neighbors. It matters on days when we can come to church and days we cannot.

The most beautiful things in the world, those we cannot see, matter to God, matter to those who see you and those who do not.

It matters to me that you continue to pray, for health care professionals, nurses, medical assistants, physicians, cleaning staff all those who are working to care for us "seen and unseen". Each one takes up the cross each day. We pray for our own West Orange police, firefighters, EMS and first responders everywhere.

It matters to those around you that you are here. It is beautiful that you are here, that we are here together, that this witness matters to our world and helps to build up the Body of Christ in the world.

It reminds us that: "faith is the realization of what is hoped for and the evidence of things not seen." (Hebrews 11:1)

"The most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or touched, they are felt with the heart." (*The Little Prince*)

Notre-Dame de Lourdes, priez pour nous!
Our Lady of Lourdes, pray for us!

Hope to see you soon! Blessed Easter to you.