

# Extraordinary Faith & Miraculous Lives: A Pilgrimage to France

10 days / 8 nights

"The only way I can prove my love is by scattering flowers and these flowers are every little sacrifice, every glance and word, and the doing of the least actions for love" (Saint Thérèse also known as "The Little Flower of Jesus"). As we set off on a Pilgrimage through scenically beautiful and spiritually rich France to behold its holiest of places, we will have opportunity to gratefully consider the sacrifices and dedication of those who have gone before and to renew our commitment to the roots of our Catholic faith. The masses and meditations we celebrate along the way will remind us of the miraculous grace of Christ and the Church.

## **Day 1: Departure from the USA**

*A pilgrimage is a journey toward holiness (Scott Peck, In Search of Stones).*

Our pilgrimage begins with an overnight flight to Paris, France.

## **Day 2: Lourdes**

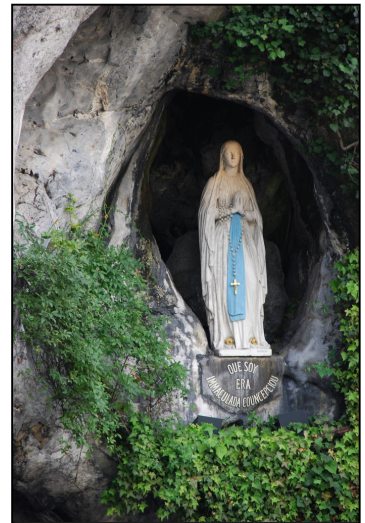
*The contents of Bernadette's reported visions were simple and mostly focused on the need for prayer and penance.*

This morning we catch a connecting flight to Pau Airport near Lourdes, one of the most important centers of pilgrimage in the world. Pope John Paul II visited the shrine twice, and in 2007, Pope Benedict XVI authorized special indulgences to mark the 150th anniversary of Our Lady of Lourdes. After we check into our hotel, we'll have the afternoon at leisure to explore this beautiful market town lying at the foot of the Pyrenees Mountains. Tomorrow we'll experience the wonders of the site of the 1858 apparitions of Our Lady.

## **Day 3: The Shrine of Lourdes**

*I am the Immaculate Conception (Que soi era immaculada concepcion) (Mary to Bernadette).*

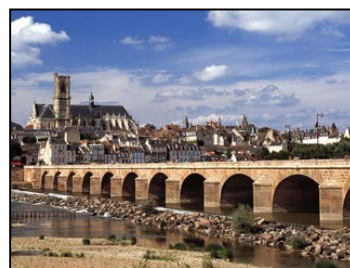
When Bernadette Soubirous was 14-years of age and out gathering firewood with her sister and a friend at the grotto of Massabielle outside Lourdes, she had an experience that completely changed her life and the town of Lourdes where she lived. It was on this day in 1858 that Bernadette claimed she had the first of 18 visions of what she termed as "a small young lady" (*ua petita damisela*) standing in a niche in the rock. We begin this morning with Mass after which we walk in the footsteps of Bernadette as we visit the Grotto of Massabielle, the site of St. Bernadette's visions of the Virgin Mary (The Blessed Virgin is said to have pointed out a previously undiscovered spring in the grotto and instructed Bernadette to drink from it. The spring water from the grotto is believed to possess healing properties which are officially recognized by the Church.), the home in which St. Bernadette and her family lived at the time the girl saw visions of the Virgin Mary, the parish church, and other holy shrines and sites related to these miraculous visions. We are welcome to participate in the Procession of the Blessed Sacrament and the Blessing of the Sick (depending on seasonal schedules) in the late afternoon, and will return to the Sanctuary for the Rosary and Torchlight Procession (beginning at about 8:30 p.m. depending on seasonal schedules) after dinner. After the day's rich events, we return to our hotel for a second night's stay in Lourdes.



#### **Day 4: Nevers**

*Living parable of stone and light, this basilica reveals to pilgrims' eyes the 15 mysteries of the life of Christ, thus revealing the profound meaning of the rosary. Led by the Virgin Mary, this prayer, which contemplates the redeeming Incarnation, enables us to participate in the acts of the Savior. We journey in the history of salvation with this most pure Mother and, by meditating on the mysteries of the rosary, receive the love of God, manifested sublimely in the gift of the Incarnate Word (From Pope John Paul II's papal letter issued November 5, 2001, to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Rosary Basilica).*

The Virgin Mary was described by St. Bernadette as holding a rosary in her hand when she appeared at Lourdes. The Basilica of the Rosary is dedicated to this theme with its three arches depicting the joy, sorrow and glory of the mysteries (events in the lives of Jesus and Mary). It is here we celebrate Mass before transferring to a train that will take us to Tours. From there we continue east by coach to Nevers, which is situated on the slope of a hill on the right bank of the Loire River, to visit the convent at St. Gildard built on the ruins of the priory of St. Gildard. This is the motherhouse of the Sisters of Charity of Nevers, where in 1866 Bernadette of Lourdes entered to do her novitiate and where she died in 1879. Her body was buried on the convent grounds, in a special crypt, separated from the graves of the other sisters. Tonight we enjoy dinner and an overnight stay in Nevers.



#### **Day 5: St. Bernadette**

*Disliking the attention she was attracting in Sourdes, Bernadette went to the hospice school run by the Sisters of Charity of Nevers where she learned to read and write. She then joined the Sisters at their motherhouse at Nevers at the age of 22 and spent the rest of her brief life there (she died at age 35), working as an assistant in the infirmary and later as a sacristan, creating beautiful embroidery for altar cloths and vestments.*

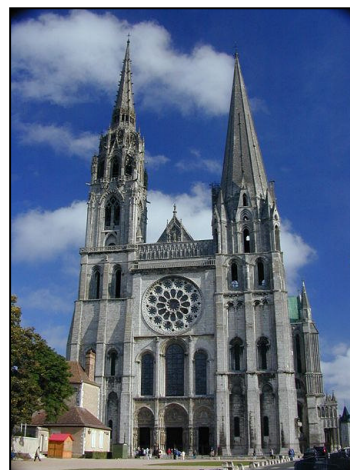
This morning at the Chapel of Saint Bernadette at the mother house of the Sisters of Charity of Nevers, we celebrate Mass at the Tomb of St. Bernadette where we can view her preserved remains in a gold and crystal reliquary. We'll have the rest of the day to explore lovely Nevers, from its narrow winding streets which lead from the quay through the town, to its many old houses of the 14<sup>th</sup> to the 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. We might see churches built in Gothic or Romanesque style, visit the Ducal Palace built in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries (now occupied by the courts of justice and an important ceramic museum), or explore remnants of ancient fortifications. Tonight we'll enjoy dinner and a second night's stay in Nevers.



#### **Day 6: Chartres**

*The north portal of Chartres Cathedral illustrates the Old Testament and the Virgin Mary as precursors and preparations for Christ. Between the doors in the central portal is a statue of St. Anne holding an infant Mary. Chartres received a relic of the head of St. Anne from Constantinople so the central statue was probably added in honor of it.*

We journey north through stretches of fruitful plain called the "granary of France" to Chartres, about 50 miles from Paris, to visit its magnificent cathedral, the spires of which are a landmark in the entire surround. Not only is Chartres Cathedral a great achievement in the history of architecture, but it is almost perfectly preserved in its original design and details. Chartres Cathedral has been





a major pilgrimage destination since the early Middle Ages and has a spirit of holiness that impresses even the most resolute of nonbelievers. Visible everywhere in the interior are splashes of vivid color (including the “blue of Chartres”) from the magnificent stained glass windows said to constitute one of the most complete collections in the world. These windows, whose subjects include biblical stories, legends of the saints, lives of heroes, and scenes of everyday medieval life, date from as early as 1140 AD and have largely escaped harm during eons of time. We continue on via motor coach to enjoy a scenic ride to Normandy so that we can pay homage to the too-brief life of St. Therese, *The Little Flower of Jesus: Les Buissonnets*. We’ll enjoy a delicious evening meal and check into our hotel.

### **Day 7: St. Therese**

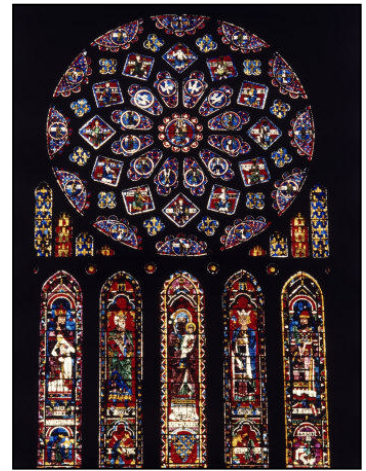
*In May 1887, Thérèse approached her 63-year old father, Louis, recovering from a small stroke, while he sat in the garden and told him that she wanted to celebrate the anniversary of "her conversion" by entering Carmelite Convent. Louis got up, gently picked a little white flower, root intact, and gave it to her, explaining the care with which God brought it into being and preserved it until that day. Therese later wrote: "while I listened I believed I was hearing my own story." To Therese, the flower seemed a symbol of herself, "destined to live in another soil."*

So dear to the heart of millions of Catholics is Saint Thérèse (1873 –1897) also known as *The Little Flower of Jesus*. Therese felt an early call to religious life and at the early age of 15 became a nun in the enclosed Carmelite community of Lisieux. We begin our day by celebrating Mass at the Tomb of St. Therese in the Chapel of the Carmelite Monastery. We’ll also visit the family house (containing the original furniture and furnishings of the Martin family) where she lived until she entered the Carmel Convent. After some time on our own for lunch, we’ll visit the great Basilica of Saint Therese to ponder the beautiful mosaics that illustrate her message and to pay respects to the tombs of her parents, located in the Crypt behind the basilica. Because Louis and Azelie Martin raised five daughters, all of whom entered the religious life; their lives are currently under consideration for canonization. Toward the end of an unforgettable day, we drive to one of the most beautiful and vibrant cities in the world, Paris, known as "The City of Light" or "The Illuminated City". Center of politics, education, entertainment, fashion, culture and the arts, Paris is also an important site of pilgrimage and will become our home for the next three nights.

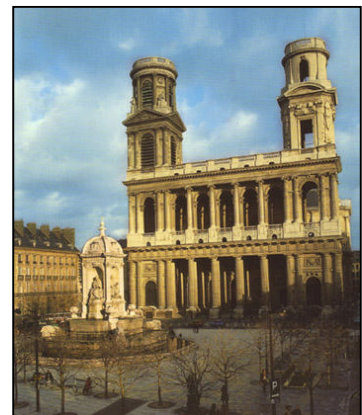
### **Day 8: Miraculous Medal, St. Vincent de Paul, Notre Dam & Sacre Coeur**

*God has plans for you (The words spoken by St. Vincent-de-Paul in St Catherine Labouret’s dream).*

A day in “The Illuminated City” awaits us! We’ll first attend Mass at The Chapel of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal, site of three apparitions of the Virgin Mary in 1830. The Virgin Mary showed Catherine a design for what would become known as the "Miraculous Medal" and further instructed her to *have a medal struck on this model. All those who carry this will receive Grace in abundance, especially if they wear the medal around their neck and say this prayer confidently, they will receive special protection from the Mother of God and abundant graces*. Many miracles were reported in connection with the medal and some 10 million medals were sold during the first 5 years of its creation. Just



around the corner on rue des Sevres is the Church of St. Lazare where we visit the Tomb of St. Vincent de Paul, a shining example of love for the poor. Next we'll relish a panoramic tour of Paris where we'll see such thrilling sights as the Eiffel Tower (Built as the entrance arch to the 1889 World's Fair, it the most-visited paid monument in the world and named for its designer, engineer Gustave Eiffel. In the newspaper *Le Temps*, Eiffel said: "Now to what phenomenon did I give primary concern in designing the Tower? It was wind resistance! Well then! I hold that the curvature of the monument... 'will give a great impression of strength and beauty.'"), the L'Arc de Triomphe (the triumphal arch honors those who have fought for France, particularly during the Napoleonic Wars and World War I.), and one of the most famous streets in the world: the *Avenue des Champs-Élysées*. We continue our tour with a visit to Notre Dame, a beautiful cathedral begun in 1163 and mostly completed by 1250, and an important example of French Gothic architecture, sculpture and stained glass. Where Notre Dame now stands, the Romans once built a temple to Jupiter. We'll also see Montmartre, an officially designated historic district which has limited its urban development to maintain its historic character. We'll see the Basilica of the Sacred Heart (Sacré-Cœur) located at the summit of the *butte Montmartre*, at the highest point in the city. Sacré-Cœur is built of travertine stone which constantly exudes calcite and ensures that the basilica remains white even with weathering and pollution. A mosaic in the apse, entitled *Christ in Majesty*, is among the largest in the world. The basilica complex includes a garden for meditation, and the top of the dome is open to all who wish to view a spectacular panoramic view of Paris. Before dinner and another overnight stay in the "Illuminated City", we'll explore the quaint area where many famous artists had studios or worked such as Salvador Dali, Amedeo Modigliani, Claude Monet, Pablo Picasso and Vincent van Gogh.



### **Day 9: St. Sulpice & Versailles**

*In the wake of the popularity of The Da Vinci Code, the church of Saint-Sulpice posted the following note in English: The "meridien" line materialized by a brass inlay in the pavement of this church is part of a scientific instrument built here during the 18<sup>th</sup>. This was done in full agreement with Church authorities by the astronomers in charge of the newly-built Paris Observatory. They used it for defining various parameters of the earth's orbit. Similar arrangements have been made, for the sake of convenience, in other large churches like the Bologna cathedral, where Pope Gregory XIII had preparatory studies made for the enactment of the present, "Gregorian" calendar.*

Known as the "Cathedral of the Rive Gauche," Saint-Sulpice is one of the largest churches in Paris. Here our day begins with a celebration of Mass before we travel to the suburbs of Paris to see Versailles, famous not only for its magnificent gardens and edifices, but as a symbol of the absolute monarchy of the *Ancien Régime*. We'll be treated to a tour of the Royal Palace and Gardens, where in addition to seeing the meticulous manicured lawns, flowers, and sculptures, we'll behold spectacular fountains, located throughout the garden and dating from the time of Louis XIV. The fountains contribute to making the gardens of Versailles unforgettably unique, and on weekends from late spring to early autumn, the administration of the museum sponsors the *Grandes Eaux* – spectacles during which all the fountains in the gardens are in full play. This afternoon, we'll have free time to see more of the world's most beautiful city.



We may want to stroll through lovely gardens, like the Tuileries Garden or Luxembourg Garden where are located two Statues of Liberty, a larger version of which was sent as a gift from France to America in 1886. Or perhaps we'll spend our time being enchanted by shops, cafés, museums, or the spiritual richness of countless historic churches, chapels, and dwellings. We begin our last night in Paris by gathering for a memorable dinner to commemorate our pilgrimage.

### **Day 10: Return to the USA**

*We will let the power of the holy shrines and priceless relics settle over us, then like other pilgrims of other times, go back to our lives with renewed faith and readiness.*

This morning we leave our hotel for our return flight to the USA



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