

150 Years of Lourdes Secondary School Classroom Exercise

Official Websites:

www.lourdes2008.com (note English version at top right hand)
www.lourdes-france.org (note English version at top right hand)

Introduction

2008 marks the 150th anniversary of the apparitions at Lourdes, which is an important destination for Catholic pilgrims. This exercise which has three parts can be used over two lessons. Part One looks at Saint Bernadette and her life vocation. Part Two looks at 'service'. Optional Part Three (follow-on lesson) uses either a DVD or testimonies to bring the Lourdes story alive.

You will need:

- Internet access
- DVD of 'Song of Bernadette' or maybe sixth formers who have been to Lourdes (optional)

Part One Bernadette Soubirous

Either show a short clip from the film 'The Song of Bernadette' or see what students know about Lourdes. If the school sends pupils to Lourdes, maybe borrow some group photos to illustrate the school's connection with that place.

St. Bernadette experienced the apparitions in Lourdes 150 years ago. To celebrate the 150th Jubilee there will be a special focus this year on Lourdes as a place of pilgrimage and prayer.

Class exercise (can be done in groups) – When Catholics are confirmed they choose to take a saint's name as their confirmation name. This is a very personal decision and often it will a saint who is greatly admired, is inspirational or whose vocation has some relevance to the person being confirmed. See if any girls have chosen Bernadette, and why they did so.

The task of the class (or groups) is to imagine that they or a friend are being confirmed and have chosen the name 'Bernadette'. They have to prepare a few short paragraphs explaining their choice. They could consider what we can learn from Bernadette's difficult family circumstances, the legacy of Lourdes as a place of pilgrimage, the example of Saint Bernadette's later life, her vocation to religious life or her illness and death. Information can be found on either the Lourdes website or the Lourdes 2008 website.

Part Two Called to Service

Lourdes is a place of pilgrimage and prayer but also a place of service. Every year many hundreds of young people from across England and Wales travel to help the sick, disabled and disadvantaged.

Our individual vocations are not a one off decision, often these evolve through life. For example, one can be married, a parent and a carer all at the same time. Our vocation is more like a journey of becoming the people God wants us to be. Mother Teresa summed up her life and work by saying that her vocation was to love. For thousands of young people who have been to Lourdes as pilgrims and helpers, the trip has been an important stepping stone in their faith story and vocational journey.

See www.youtube.com "Lourdes a place of Pilgrimage" for a seven minute video of the Archdiocese of Westminster's pilgrimage with footage of young people helping and speaking. Other video clips are also available there.

- Ask the students why they think Lourdes pilgrimages are so popular with their peers, and would it be something that they might be willing to do?
- Broaden the conversation out by asking about volunteering and helping nearer to home. Maybe draw on examples of work experience or any charitable work the school does.
- We often give money to help others, but what about giving our time and using our gifts (time, talents and treasure).

Part Three

Follow-on lesson

If you have a Sixth Form who take students to Lourdes as helpers you can invite some of them to come and share their experiences of being a helper and the effect it had on their lives and those of the pilgrims they accompanied. The H.C.P.T. also has volunteers who are willing to come into schools and talk about their work with disabled and disadvantaged children. Likewise a diocesan youth officer or pilgrimage organizer might be willing to talk about opportunities for pilgrimage and service. Alternatively you can show the class part or all of the film 'A Song of Bernadette'.

Prayer

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of The Holy Spirit. Amen.

A Reading from the Gospel of John (2: 1-11)

On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee. The mother of Jesus was there, and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited. And they ran out of wine, since the wine provided for the feast had all been used, and the mother of Jesus said to him, 'They have no wine.' Jesus said, 'Woman, what do you want from me? My hour has not come yet.' His mother said to the servants, 'Do whatever he tells you'. There were six stone water jars standing there, meant for the ablutions that are customary among the Jews: each could hold twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to the servants 'Fill the jars with water,' and they filled them to the brim. Then he said to them, 'Draw some out now and take it to the steward of the feast.' They did this; the steward tasted the water, and it had turned into wine. Having no idea where it came from - though the servants who had drawn the water knew - the steward called the bridegroom and said, 'Everyone serves good wine first and the worse wine when the guests have had plenty to drink; but you have kept the best wine till now.' This was the first of Jesus' signs: it was at Cana in Galilee. He revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in him.

Mary sees the shame of this family lacking in foresight. They do not have enough wine for their party. In Lourdes Mary sees the expectations of pilgrims, and the pilgrims have confidence in her love. Mary does not perform miracles; it is her Son who does. Mary, however, plays a decisive role in the Gospel story saying to the servants: 'Do whatever He tells you'. She is well placed to give this order, she who said to the angel 'Let it be done to me as you have said.'

Lord, you prepared Mary to be the Mother of your Son. She had the strength to say 'yes' in faith from the Annunciation to the Cross. What you did through Mary, Lord, is a sign of your love for us. We give you thanks.

In Lourdes, Lord, you prepared Bernadette to be a witness to the Virgin Mary. In the transparency of her heart, in her humility and courage, she was faithful to her call. What you did through Bernadette, Lord, is a sign of your love for us. We give you thanks.

Help us to know your will and dreams for us, Lord. May we have the courage and faith to say 'yes' as Mary and Bernadette did. Help us to be good people, reflecting your love to the world. What you do through us Lord is a sign of your love for us. We give you thanks.

Amen.