

Bernadette Soubirous

Saint Name: St. Marie-Bernarde or St. Bernadette Soubirous

Dates: January 7, 1844 – April 16, 1879

Location: France

Feast Day: February 18

Marie Bernadette Soubirous was born at Lourdes, France on January 7, 1844, the oldest of 9 children. As a toddler, Bernadette contracted cholera and suffered extreme asthma for the rest of her life. At fourteen while with her younger sister and friend, Bernadette witnessed an apparition of Our Blessed Lady above a rose bush in a grotto called Massabielle (Tuta de Massaveilha). A few days later, Bernadette said “the vision” asked her to return to the grotto each day for two weeks. With each visit, she saw the Blessed Virgin Mary; on one of the visits, the vision had told her to make known the miraculous healing powers which the Blessed Virgin would give to the waters of Lourdes. The muddy waters became clean and fresh water flowed through the grotto. After the thirteenth apparition Bernadette told her family that the lady said, “a chapel should be built, and a procession formed.” During the sixteenth vision, Bernadette claimed she asked the vision her name but the woman only answered by saying “I am the Immaculate Conception.” Bernadette witnessed eighteen apparitions during those two weeks. Bernadette’s visions were met with mixed feelings from the townspeople; however, after rigorous interviews from the Church and the French government, by 1862 it was confirmed that Bernadette had spoken the truth. On July 29, 1866, Bernadette joined the sisters of Charity at Nevers, taking her vows in 1878. Her Mistress of Novices was Sister Marie Therese Vazou who renamed Bernadette to Marie-Bernarde in honor of her grandmother. Marie-Bernarde spent the rest of her life working there as an infirmary assistant and later a sacristan. She endured many severe trials and patience in sickness during her religious life. When asked if she experienced any self-righteous pride in being favored by the Blessed Mother, she would respond by saying “The Blessed Virgin chose me only because I was the most ignorant.” Marie-Bernarde was diagnosed with tuberculosis of the bone in her right knee and died in the Sainte Croix (Holy Cross) Infirmary of the Convent of Saint-Gildard at the age of 35 on April 16, 1879. Marie-Bernarde’s last words were “Blessed Mary, Mother of God, pray for me. A poor sinner a poor sinner.” Thirty years after her burial, two doctors and a sister exhumed Marie-Bernarde’s body. They claimed the crucifix and rosary had been oxidized but her body remained incorrupt. The incorruption was cited as one of the miracles supporting her canonization. Her body was exhumed two more times finding it still incorrupt.



Saint Bernadette is often depicted in prayer with a rosary or appealing to the Holy Virgin. She was beautified in 1925 and canonized by Pope Pius XI in December 1933 in which the Pope declared St. Bernadette’s feast day would be observed February 18 - not on the date of her death April 16. She is the patroness of illness, people ridiculed for their piety, poverty, and shepherds/shepherdesses.