

Even if you are not making
the Novena, offer Mass...

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...and Communion tomorrow
for your father.

Lourdes and Carlsbad.
By Arnold Lunn.

Question XXIX. Isn't it rather an awkward fact for you Catholics that a party of Lourdes pilgrims contracted an infectious disease on the return journey and fell ill?

Answer. It would be an awkward fact if Lourdes were the spiritual equivalent of Carlsbad, and if pilgrims were encouraged to visit Lourdes on the assumption that they had a right to their money back if no cure were forthcoming.

But thousands of pilgrims in perfect health visit Lourdes as an act of devotion. Thousands of sick people visit Lourdes primarily in search of spiritual health. Pilgrims are not encouraged to believe that pain is necessarily all evil or that our main concern in this life is the avoidance of illness and suffering. "The good news of Christianity," as Dr. Inge has finely said, "is that suffering is itself divine. 'In all their afflictions He was afflicted.' 'Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows...' It is the blasphemy of 'Christian Science' and kindred movements to deny the Cross. And in our soft, self-indulgent age it is, shamefully, felt to be a greater difficulty in the way of belief in God that men should suffer than that men should sin. This timid, pain-dreading temper is thoroughly unchristian."

Pilgrims to Lourdes ask the intercession of Our Lady not only for deliverance from the ills of the body but also for deliverance from that pain-dreading temper which Dr. Inge condemns as unchristian.

Even a mild epidemic among returning pilgrims is a valuable reminder of the difference between Lourdes and Carlsbad. Carlsbad, in theory at least, has some beneficial effect upon almost all who take the waters, but the waters of the Lourdes grotto have no inherent therapeutic value either for the restoration of lost health or for the inoculation against future disease.

Miracles at Lourdes do not only benefit those who are cured but proclaim to a world which is losing its faith that God's arm is not shortened. Moreover, it is not only those who are cured at Lourdes who have cause for gratitude. Even a skeptic who traveled back with a train load of pilgrims who had not been cured would find it difficult to deny some causal connection between the radiant happiness on the faces of those who learned at Lourdes that sickness and suffering are not necessarily evil, and the prayers which they had offered to Our Lady.

Question XXX. Do you claim that there are no miracles outside the Catholic Church?
Answer. I make no such claim. I agree with Father Ronald Knox that a miracle might be done "to attest the message of some Salvation Army missionary to China while he was preaching all the faith he knew to people who had no chance of hearing about the faith from Catholic teachers." Moreover, I believe some miracles are the work of evil spirits.

