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Tomorrow Is "Grotto Day"

It was on February 11, 1858, that the Blessed Virgin first appeared to 14-year-old Bernadette Soubirous on a cold, rainy day in Lourdes, at the foot of the Pyrenees. She had gone with her sister and a friend to gather firewood. As she was about to remove her sabots to cross a little canal, she heard a violent wind rising; and looking up she was puzzled to see that the row of poplars along the river bank was unstirred. But glancing toward the rock with its triple grottoes, she noticed that the wild rosebush trailing from the niche of the second grotto was swaying violently.

Then suddenly in the alcove a young girl appeared smiling, and made a sign for Bernadette to come near. The young girl's dress was white, and was bound by a blue sash; a white veil reached to the hem; a golden rose rested on each bare foot, and a large rosary hung from her right arm. She was wrapped in a soft light. To Bernadette she appeared to be about 14 or 15 years of age.

At the sight of the vision Bernadette was startled. "I rubbed my eyes," she later said, "I shut and opened them, but the Lady was still there." Bernadette reached for her rosary, but found she could not lift her hand to her forehead to make the Sign of the Cross. The Lady in the grotto then crossed herself, and now Bernadette found that she could do so, too, as she began her rosary. The Lady listened silently, the beads slipping through her fingers, as the child articulated the Paters and Aves. Only in the Glorias did she join Bernadette's prayer.

Eighteen times Bernadette saw the Lady who identified herself: "I am the Immaculate Conception." They conversed frequently, and Bernadette made a report of the Lady's words, her directives, her revelations, her promises. Today, a statue of Mary stands at the spot where she appeared. The crutches of the cured hang on the grotto walls. During the Occupation days of World War II, German soldiers came here secretly at night to pray.

What Happened To Bernadette?

After the last apparition Bernadette remained some eight years at Lourdes. She lived quietly with the nuns who operated a hospice in the locality. The Lady of the Grotto had promised her: "I will not make you happy in this world, but in the next." She had a desire to join the Carmelites; but the severe rule, and her own frail health, prompted her to join the Sisters of Charity. In 1866 she entered the Motherhouse at Nevers, received the religious habit, and the name Sister Marie-Bernard. She was assigned as an infirmarian, and after 12 years she took her final vows. Her health rapidly became worse. On Easter Wednesday, 1879, she died, saying the words: "Blessed Mary, Mother of God, pray for me ... a poor sinner, a poor sinner."

In 1908 the first steps toward her canonization were taken, and the next year her body was exhumed and found incorrupt, though the rosary in her hands and the crucifix upon her breast had been badly rusted. The Sisters clothed her in a new habit and placed her in a sealed casket. On The Feast of the Immaculate Conception in 1933, Pope Pius XI signed the final decree of canonization, and inscribed her in the roster of the saints.

And that's the background for your own grotto here at Notre Dame -- where we linger many times each day -- saying the same prayers to the same Lady! If you do not as yet have the grotto "habit" then start tomorrow. It's one of the choicest facets in your Notre Dame education!

PRAYERS - Deceased: father of Ed Gilbert of Morrissey; grandfather of Frank Tedare of Zahm; Mrs. John O'Grady. Ill: mother of Luke Brennan of Morrissey.