

# St. Bernadette's relics to begin first tour to U.S. in Florida in April

MIAMI (CNS) – The relics of St. Bernadette, the Marian visionary of Lourdes, France, will tour the United States for the first time.

The visit will begin in South Florida at Our Lady of Lourdes Church in Miami, with a morning welcome Mass on April 7. The next day the relics will visit St. Bernadette Church in Hollywood, Florida, then return to Our Lady of Lourdes Church.

On April 11, Monday of Holy Week, Archbishop Thomas G. Wenski of Miami will celebrate an evening Mass at the church, which will be followed by a candlelight procession. The relics will stay at Our Lady of Lourdes until April 18, Easter Monday, when a multilingual farewell Mass will be celebrated.

The relics will go to two other Florida dioceses, Palm Beach and St. Petersburg, and then zigzag across the country to 23 other dioceses, visiting 34 churches, cathedrals and shrines. The last stop is St. Bernadette Church in Los Angeles July 31-Aug. 4.

The full schedule of the relics' U.S. tour can be found at [www.stbernadetteusa.org](http://www.stbernadetteusa.org).

"I saw a great opportunity here, particularly with the current state of our world," said Msgr. Kenneth Schwager, pastor of Miami's Our Lady of Lourdes Parish, who was instrumental in making this tour happen. "I started calling parishes across the country with the names of Our Lady of Lourdes and St. Bernadette to make them aware of this grace," he said, and the result is the upcoming tour.

For the relics to visit, he explained, Archbishop Wenski had to make a request to the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Lourdes (Sanctuaire de Notre-Dame de Lourdes) in France, which he did so over three years ago, Msgr. Schwanger told the Florida Catholic, Miami's archdiocesan newspaper. "But with COVID, all requests were delayed."

Around the time Miami's request was granted, the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Lourdes expressed an interest in a national tour.

The Vatican has granted a plenary indulgence for those visiting the relics during the tour. During the Miami stay, Masses will be offered daily at Our Lady of Lourdes along with *le geste de l'eau*, the water of Lourdes.

On Feb. 11, 1858, a "lady in white" began her 18 visits to a poor, uneducated 14-year-old girl, Bernadette Soubirous, in the obscure town of Lourdes in southern France – population 4,100 – at the Grotto of Massabielle. Over the course of six months, asked Bernadette to come and visit her.

"I do not promise you the happiness of this world but of the other," the "lady in white," told Bernadette, who became the messenger to the local community, the priests and the bishop of Tarbes, France. She would appear 18 times to the young girl.

On the 16th apparition, Bernadette asked the "lady" her name, to which she replied: "I am the Immaculate Conception."

Father Dominique Peyramale, the local priest, was immediately convinced that Bernadette was communicating with Mary, for neither Bernadette nor anyone in the local community, could have known that some years earlier, in 1854, this theological doctrine was declared by the Church as dogma stating that Mary, through God's grace, "was conceived free from the stain of original sin through her role as the Mother of God."

The priest brought Mary's message, that a chapel should be

built in that spot, to the bishop of Tarbes, who three years later confirmed the apparition was indeed Mary.

Her instructions become a reality with the building of the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Lourdes, the washing with and drinking of the water of Lourdes, and pilgrims coming to participate in the nightly candlelight processions.

Bernadette left Lourdes to live out her religious vocation within the community of the Sisters of Charity of Nevers in 1866. She saw the chapel completed but never returned to Lourdes. She died in 1879, was proclaimed blessed in 1925 and was canonized in 1933.

Her body, exhumed in April 1925 for her beatification, was found to be uncorrupted. Fragments of the fifth and sixth vertebrae were removed and reserved for veneration by the faithful.

“Our Lady of Lourdes Miami is a reflection of Our Lady of Lourdes France,” said Msgr. Schwanger. “We have our own Hospitalité de Miami, a group within the diocese that is associated with the Hospitalité Notre Dame de Lourdes.”

These two organizations work together to organize two archdiocesan pilgrimages to Lourdes each year, in June and September. “Their service helps to make each pilgrimage a grace-filled encounter with the healing touch of Jesus through the intercession of his mother,” Msgr. Schwanger said.

On the 11th of each month, Our Lady of Lourdes also hosts either a Eucharistic procession and benediction or a Rosary candlelight procession, alternating every other month. In Lourdes, France, these are held daily.

“People who are sick and their caregivers from across the diocese come to Lourdes, Miami, for healing, much in the same way they would go to Lourdes, France. (Because) not all of us are able to travel to Lourdes, France,” Msgr. Schwanger said.

“The Hospitalité de Miami would be happy to share its experience and help other dioceses set up their own organization to make annual pilgrimages.”

Visiting St. Bernadette through her relics while they are in the United States is a rare opportunity.

“St. Bernadette continues to be a vehicle through which Mary points the way to her son, Jesus Christ, through this relics tour,” said Msgr. Schwanger. “It’s an affirmation that the Lord attends to everyone and everyone has an opportunity to be healed and, in turn, to bring healing and peace to the world. And don’t we all need healing in one way or another?”

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