



## **A Sharing of Experience from the Montfortian Pilgrimage to Lourdes**

**LOURDES, France** – The Montfortian Province of France has a tradition of organizing pilgrimage to Lourdes every year in honor of Our Lady. This year was the 73<sup>rd</sup> Montfortian pilgrimage that took place from 18<sup>th</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup> April 2022. The first of which took place on 25<sup>th</sup> April 1949. Fr. Francis MUHANJI, SMM and Fr. Jailos Augustine MPINA, SMM participated in the pilgrimage for the first time. There were over two thousand Montfortian pilgrims. Among them were the superiors/members of the different communities of the Montfortian family (SMM, DW, and FSG), Montfortian lay associates, the sick, the aged, people with disabilities, lay volunteers and the youth.

It was our first and amazing experience of religious wonder and awesomeness of God through the apparition at Lourdes, when Mother Mary encountered St. Bernadette. The name of Mary as the Immaculate Conception was revealed to Bernadette in the cave where she used to encounter Mary, and this was in answer to the excuse of the Parish Priest who had given a deaf ear to Bernadette's message but later supported her.

The symbol of water (fountain of water) as discovered by St. Bernadette is no doubt related to Mother Mary's message to her. 'Repent, repent'. Pray for the forgiveness of sins. Traditionally, water is a great symbol in our Baptism as the first stage in our Christian initiation as it washes away our original sin. Water in the cave has been a powerful tool in healing of many sick people with related challenges of psychological, physical, mental and spiritual illnesses. We were drinking this water every day and we collected liters of this water for the people who asked us back home.

On an important note, it is very amazing to see very large numbers of people especially the youth meeting at Lourdes to witness the love of God through Mary to St. Bernadette. This was very touching. You rarely see these youth on Sunday Masses but at Lourdes, one will be

surprised with the great multitude of youth involved in liturgical services and accompanying the sick and the aged.

The candlelight procession at 9:00 PM, the procession with the Eucharist and the Masses for the sick are beyond telling. French language did not deter us from experiencing the love of God. It was also amazing to watch the live play entitled *Bernadette de Lourdes le Spectacle Musical*. All in all, what takes place in Lourdes, is a manifestation of the love of God to humanity. The question is how we live the love of God in our lives and how responsive are we to the same love of God.

We are grateful to the Superior General and the Generalate community in Rome for allowing us to participate in the Montfortian pilgrimage and visiting our confreres in France. We also extend our gratitude to Fr. Marco PASINATO, SMM who coordinated with the Montfortian pilgrimage organizers. Appreciation goes to Fr. Paulin RAMANANDRAIBE, SMM, the Provincial Superior of France and community members of Wisdom house Saint Laurent Sur Sevre and Pontchâteau. The hospitality, care and love from Montfortian Lay associates deserve a worthy mention.

We have an important task to witness to the life of God to all humanity. To invite all people to love Mary our mother and to devote our lives to her as Montfortians. We too, have a message from God to tell the whole World. To pray for sinners, the sick, the suffering, those tormented by war and conflict and those that have not been baptized and to all who have not experienced the love of God in their lives.

St. Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort, pray for us. Blessed Marie-Louise de Jesus, pray for us.

*Fr. Francis MUHANJI, SMM*