

NU-BEL-901
2022-09-26



Pilgrimage to Lourdes

LOURDES - Pilgrimage to Lourdes in July: A personal and community experience encounter with God and with others in the footsteps of Saint Bernadette.

From the Latin *peregrinus*, pilgrimage means "to go far". The pilgrim is the one who travels far, who goes to a foreign country and stays there. Then, gradually, the word will become "pilgrimage" as travel to holy places for religious purposes.

During this pilgrimage time, we discover three experiences that follow each other: first, the victory over space, since the pilgrim must break the pattern of his habitual life and go elsewhere changing inwardly; then, the contact with the sacred place which is a sanctuary and finally, the encounter with God and others. The pilgrimage for a Christian can be a path to get out of his daily life, from what holds him back to put himself on the path to Christ. "I am the path," says Jesus in the Gospel according to Saint John 14:6. The path symbolizes the road to follow.

Going on a pilgrimage to a holy place is an act of spontaneous and private devotion. The Christian sets out for a sanctuary to ask for and obtain various graces. The pilgrim may have an intention during his pilgrimage to obtain healing, for example healing of the body through a miracle and the hope of finding the salvation of his soul.

Saint Louis-Marie de Montfort is rightly considered a great pilgrim. He would have traveled about 25,000 km on foot. Why did he make so many pilgrimages? It's through his writings that we can

find some motivations that accompanied him during his many trips: Montfort wanted to touch hearts (*"I took a wandering mood /To save my neighbor, Song 91, 2)*). A second motivation was the search for God. The pilgrimage is still for Montfort a search for God in Jesus Christ that he wants to express with all his being. The pilgrimage expresses his walk towards Christ. A third motivation is deep communion with Mary. The pilgrimage is for Montfort a beautiful opportunity to live a deep union with Mary. His friend, Jean-Baptiste Blain, had already noted this on his departure for Paris at the Pont de Cesson near Rennes: *"The eyes often towards heaven, the heart to Saint-Sulpice, the continual invocation of Mary in the mouth, that is how he left Rennes"* (Pilgrimage, in the Dictionary of Montfortian Spirituality).

Following Father de Monfort's pilgrim mission, our pilgrimage to Lourdes last July was marked by strong moments. We had the opportunity to celebrate different sacraments, namely the Eucharist and reconciliation; also, the discovery of the sanctuary and traces of the life of Saint Bernadette; the teachings of the church with a purely Montfortian accent and mutual help.

As one of the guides in the group, we tried to help each of the pilgrims to set out with an intense desire for God, to walk with prayer in the mouth and in the heart, to give a friendly and fraternal atmosphere. Always leaving a special place in our hearts to the Virgin Mary and like Montfort, we were all invited to look at and imitate the Virgin Mary especially in her pilgrimage of faith. Also, Montfort invites us to be pilgrims through our whole life to fix our gaze on Jesus - Christ: *"It's our model for living, / Let's take his same feelings, / Let's try, hearts to hearts, to follow him / In his steps and movements"* (C 144).

Fr. Aimé KAMANDA, SMM