

**MEMORIAL OF SAINT IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH,
BISHOP AND MARTYR
SHRINE OF OUR LADY OF LOURDES
LOURDES, FRANCE
OCTOBER 17, 2006**

Praised be Jesus Christ, now and forever. Amen.

1. To go on pilgrimage is to step outside of our everyday life, in order to see and understand its deep and lasting meaning. It is to experience the truth that our everyday life is, in fact, an extraordinary journey home to God our Father. The holy places to which we go on pilgrimage help us to focus on our final destiny, to be purified of all that leads us to stray from the way of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to be strengthened in the virtues which keep us on the way of the Cross with our Lord Jesus. The time of pilgrimage is strong in the gifts of God's grace. Above all, our Lord directs us to a deeper knowledge and love of Him, really present in the Holy Eucharist, the essential and incomparable food of our earthly pilgrimage, which is His Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity. He also invites us to a deeper love of Him in the Sacrament of Penance, through which He, using the ears and voice of the priest, receives the confession of our sins and absolves us of them. Pilgrimage teaches us to center our lives on the living encounter of Christ in the Sacraments of the Holy Eucharist and Penance.

2. We have come to a place made holy by the eighteen apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary from Thursday, February 11th, to Friday, July 16th, in the year 1858, to an uneducated and exceedingly poor peasant girl, Bernadette Soubirous. As she always does, the Virgin Mary appeared to a faithful messenger who would assist her, the Mother of God, in bringing her children to her Divine Son, our Lord Jesus, their only salvation. Here, our Blessed Mother asked Bernadette to be her messenger of prayer and penance, centered upon the Real Presence of Our Lord Jesus Christ in the Most Blessed Sacrament. The healing for which the Shrine of Our Lady of Lourdes is so well known has its source in our Lord Jesus Christ. At the heart of the apparitions of Our Blessed Mother here is the request of processions with the Most Blessed Sacrament during which

the faithful are blessed by our Lord Himself and receive a deeply interior healing of soul and, if it is God's will, a physical healing

3. The physical cures worked here by Our Lord through the intercession of His Immaculate Mother, are most noteworthy. They are extraordinary signs of God's love and mercy, and the cause of hope for all who come on pilgrimage to meet Our Lord here through the intercession of His Mother. What is equally noteworthy and a cause of secure hope is the spiritual healing received by all who come here, with humility and trust, to meet our Lord through the help of Mary Immaculate, His Mother, to whom He has given us as her dear children.

4. Permit me to recount for you my own witness to the grace of spiritual healing at work in this holy place. I first visited here in August of 1972. Having completed my first year of theological studies before ordination to the priesthood, I came here on pilgrimage with a classmate and good friend from the Archdiocese of Milwaukee. We spent our first day participating in Holy Mass, going to Confession and praying at the Grotto and in the three basilicas. Throughout the day, I sensed ever more the holiness of the Shrine, the strong grace of our Lord Jesus Christ at work, drawing souls to Himself through His Mother Mary. In the evening, we were privileged to participate in the procession with the Most Blessed Sacrament. Something simple, but unforgettable, happened, which has remained in my memory as a symbol of the great gift of pilgrimage to the Shrine of Our Lady of Lourdes. There was a throng of participants. When the priest was approaching the place where my friend and I were standing, someone behind me kept pushing against me. I confess that I was becoming annoyed. Finally, after the priest blessed us with the Blessed Sacrament, I turned to see who was pushing me. There was a young mother holding up her little son with Down's syndrome to be blessed by Our Lord. Her face was radiant with joy and peace. At that moment, I saw in a powerful way, God's grace of healing and hope at work here.

5. Pilgrimage to the Shrine of Our Lady of Lourdes opens our eyes anew to see the source of healing and hope for our lives in the Holy Eucharist, in our participation in the

Eucharistic Sacrifice, above all, and in our adoration of the Most Blessed Sacrament and our reception of the Benediction of the Most Blessed Sacrament. Regarding the Shrine here, Pope Saint Pius X, the great saint of the Most Blessed Sacrament, declared:

The unique glory of the Shrine of Lourdes resides in the fact that Mary attracts to it people from everywhere for the adoration of Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament, so that this sanctuary, which is at the same time the center of Marian devotion and the throne of the Eucharistic Mystery, seems to surpass in glory all others in the Catholic Church. (quoted in “The Two Things Go Together,” *“You Will Make This Known,”* New Bedford, MA: Franciscan Friars of the Immaculate. 1998, p. 161).

6. When Bernadette received her First Holy Communion on June 3, 1858, between the 17th and last apparitions of our Blessed Mother, she was asked what brought her greater joy, receiving our Lord in Holy Communion or seeing Our Blessed Mother. She replied: “I do not know; the two things go together and cannot be compared. All I know is that I was intensely happy at both times,” (*Ibid*, p. 159). Love of the Blessed Mother and love of our Eucharistic Lord, her Divine Son, go inseparably together. The more we draw near to our Blessed Mother, the more she leads us to her Son in the Holy Eucharist, her Son Who alone is our life and salvation. Saint Paul strongly reminds the early Christians at Galatia, who were adding to the Catholic faith elements of their own, without respect for Christ’s desire that all come to Him and be saved: “For in Christ Jesus, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love,” (Reading I). Here, in this holy place, there is the grace of pilgrimage, the grace to center our lives anew in Christ, on our Catholic faith, on living our faith in Christ-like love, on practicing that purity, that cleanness of heart, which Our Lord teaches us in the Gospel and which is selfless and generous love of our neighbor, especially our neighbor who is in most need.

7. Saint Ignatius of Antioch whose memory we celebrate today is a sterling example of faith in Christ, which expresses itself in love, faith in Christ to which our Blessed Mother leads us. A convert of Saint John the Evangelist, he became heroic in his faith, hope and love. He desired one only thing, in his words, “that I may not only be called but be found a Christian” (*Butler’s Lives of the Saints*, 1956 edition, New York: P.J. Kenedy, 1956, Vol. 1, p. 221). He gave himself totally to Christ. He did not fear death, but his possible betrayal of Christ in order to avoid death. God granted him his desire to become “the pure bread of Christ” by offering his life totally as an oblation of faithful love.

8. Christ now unites us to Himself in His Eucharistic Sacrifice. Making our hearts one with our Blessed Mother’s Immaculate Heart, we lift them up to the Lord for His glorious pierced Heart, opened for us in the Eucharistic Sacrifice, our hearts are purified by Christ by pure love and inflamed with His all-generous love. Through the communion of our hearts with His Most Sacred Heart, may we, like Saint Ignatius of Antioch, become the pure bread of Christ for our brothers and sisters.

Heart of Jesus, formed by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary, have mercy on us.

Our Lady of Lourdes, pray for us.

Saint Ignatius of Antioch, pray for us.

Saint Bernadette Soubirous, pray for us.