

OUR LADY OF LOURDES



Catherine Labouré, a nun of the Daughters of Charity of St Vincent de Paul in the Rue du Bac in Paris, testified that on November 27th, 1830 the Blessed Virgin appeared to her during evening meditation to request the casting of an oval medallion to be worn by the faithful. On the front there was to be displayed an image of herself in the form shown with the words *Ô Marie, conçue sans péché, priez pour nous qui avons recours à vous* – ‘O Mary conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee’. On the reverse around the margin there were to be twelve stars, a large letter 'M' surmounted by a cross, an image of the Sacred Heart of Jesus crowned with thorns and of the Immaculate Heart of Mary pierced with a sword. Catherine heard the Blessed Virgin ask her to take these images to her confessor and tell him to have medallions cast featuring them. She said: ‘All who wear this medallion will receive great graces’.

It had always been believed by a majority of the faithful that the Blessed Virgin had been conceived free from Original Sin. This belief was raised to an article of faith by Pope Pius IX when, in the bull *Ineffabilis Deus* on December 8th, 1854, he proclaimed it Catholic doctrine.

The doctrine served to confirm the veracity of the claims by the little French girl, Bernadette Soubirous of a series of private revelations made to her in a grotto adjacent to the Gave de Pau at Lourdes in southern France, between February 11th and July 16th 1858. Bernadette said that *uo petito damizello* (‘a small young lady’) had appeared to her whom she described as wearing a white veil and blue girdle, with a yellow rose on each foot. She spoke to her not in French but in her native *Occitan*, the *lenga d’oc* or *Provençal*, of southern France. The lady asked her to return each day for a fortnight, though external influences intervened to alter the program. On a number of occasions she asked the lady who she was but her answer was only a smile. The seventeenth appearance, on March 25th, lasted more than an hour. Again Bernadette asked her who she was and finally the lady told her *Que soy era immaculada councepciou* - ‘I am the Immaculate Conception’. She told the local bishop that she did not understand what the words meant. But the bishop knew!

Bernadette’s ignorance of the immense theological truth confirmed the truth of her claims.

Michael Baker

February 11th, 2025—*Our Lady of Lourdes*