

## **HOSPITALITÉ NOTRE DAME DE LOURDES**

### **SERVICE SAINTE BERNADETTE**

### **FORMATION**

### **MODULE -2-**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Being a *hospitalier* is a vocation, in other words it's an answer to a call. A call to holiness.

One of the characteristics of holiness is service, and in particular service to the lowliest of our brothers & sisters, to the poor and the sick : "In so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me" (Mt.25,40).

In Lourdes, Mary invited Bernadette "to come here for a fortnight", not to do something but to discover 'another world '. This "other world" is that of Holiness, in the image and likeness of Christ, the one who came 'not to be served but to serve.'" But also in the image and likeness of Mary "the handmaid of the Lord".

In this second formation module, I invite you therefore to enter with your heart and your intelligence into that which is the essence of our Christian life, that is to say our spiritual relationship with God and with our brothers.

When we talk about spiritual relationship, we touch upon the source of our spiritual life - that is the person of the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit which has been given to us to make us sons, loved by the father in the image and likeness of the only son of God: Christ

In the text which follows you will find a brief development of the identity of Christian spirituality, its sources (a subject which will be explored in greater depth in the third module) and the spirituality of the "*hospitalier* spirit".

May these few pages help us in our formation in the school of Mary, mistress of spiritual life.

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## I. WHAT IS SPIRITUALITY ?

To answer this question, I will make use of a testimony and parable which I was told about.

With the simplicity of this parable, a person tried to explain what is spirituality: "Spirituality is like water that keeps the grass wet so it is always green and growing". Moisture in grass cannot be seen but, without it, the grass will dry out. What we see, is the colour of the grass, but for that to be the case, it has to be regularly watered and taken care of.

The grass symbolizes all our doings and actions in our everyday life. It stands for all our projects that give meaning to our life: fighting for justice, improving the lot of those whose situation is precarious, being in the service of others. Art and culture are also part of what gives meaning to our existence. But alongside these great ideals can also be simple everyday things : starting a family, doing well at work, having friends, enjoying leisure activities, etc... All these beautiful hopes, these grand ideals need "water", "humidity", i.e. they need of a 'spirit' who carries them, encourages them and who gives meaning to these guidelines.

**That said, we could define religious spirituality (and this is equally true for all religions) as the set of principles and practices, which are in connection with divinity, which transcend our normal experience. These principles and practices characterise the lives of a group of people in relation to their belief.**

## II. WHAT IS CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY ?

**It is the personal experience lived by a Christian who enters into a relationship with God and his Truth.** The Word of God (the Bible), which is the Revelation of God, plays a fundamental role in this spiritual approach. The word of God is always an invitation to listen and to put into practice this Word. It is also an invitation to contemplation, prayer and action. In this sense we can say that Christian spirituality is both unity and diversity. Unity because it has its foundations in the Word spoken by God and diversity because it can occur in many forms.

Christian spirituality is not the "exclusive preserve" of a group of people of exceptional qualities. It is not, either, an accidental dimension of Christian life. Every Christian, whatever his state of life, is called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of charity. Because Christian life is not restricted to the observation of a few precepts or commandments; It is a call to live the fullness of this life, which finds its source in the Holy Spirit, received on the day of our baptism.

Let us read and meditate on what the Second Vatican Council tells us in Constitution Lumen Gentium n° 40 on the **universal call to holiness** :

*“ The Lord Jesus, the divine Teacher and Model of all perfection, preached holiness of life to each and every one of His disciples of every condition. He Himself stands as the author and*

consummator of this holiness of life: "Be you therefore perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt. 5,48). Indeed He sent the Holy Spirit upon all men that He might move them inwardly to love God with their whole heart and their whole soul, with all their mind and all their strength (Mk. 12,30) and that they might love each other as Christ loves them. (Jn. 13,34)

The followers of Christ are called by God, not because of their works, but according to His own purpose and grace. They are justified in the Lord Jesus, because in the baptism of faith they truly become sons of God and sharers in the divine nature. In this way they are really made holy. Then too, by God's gift, they must hold on to and complete in their lives this holiness they have received. They are warned by the Apostle to live "as becomes saints" (Eph.5,3) and to put on "as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved a heart of mercy, kindness, humility, meekness, patience", (Col.3,12) and to possess the fruit of the Spirit in holiness. (Gal.5,22). Since truly we all offend in many things (James 3,2) we all need God's mercies continually and we all must daily pray: "Forgive us our trespasses"(Mat.6,12).

Thus it is evident to everyone, that all the faithful of Christ of whatever rank or status, are called to the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity ; by this holiness as such a more human manner of living is promoted in this earthly society. In order that the faithful may reach this perfection, they must use their strength accordingly as they have received it, as a gift from Christ. They must follow in His footsteps and conform themselves to His image seeking the will of the Father in all things. They must devote themselves with all their being to the glory of God and the service of their neighbor. In this way, the holiness of the People of God will grow into an abundant harvest of good, as is admirably shown by the life of so many saints in Church history."

### III. THE IDENTITY OF CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY

#### A- Spirituality of the Trinity

**Christian spirituality cannot be identified by one single factor or component alone. But there is one that is fundamental: it is a Trinitarian spirituality, it is a personal relationship with God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.**

God is the centre and the absolute point of reference of all Christian experience. A God who loved us first, who by love created us and who for love has redeemed us and freed us from all evil and all forms of slavery. A God who wants to give us his own life so that we might share in his happiness and have within us eternal life.

Any Christian spirituality begins on this basis. But, at the same time, Christian spirituality is our response to this love of God who wants to sanctify and make us human. Our human condition is such that we are powerless to respond with strength alone to the call of God. But God snatches us away from our blindness and our powerlessness by making us a gift of the three theological (= gift from God) virtues (= strength, ability) : Faith, Hope and Charity.

***"The theological virtues ... dispose Christians to live in a relationship with the Holy Trinity. They have the One and Triune God for their origin, motive, and object. They are infused by 'God in the souls of the faithful to enable them to act as his children and to merit eternal life'".***

**Faith** is the theological virtue by which we believe in God and believe all that he has said and revealed to us, and that Holy Church proposes for our belief, because he is truth itself. By faith "man freely commits his entire self to God." For this reason the believer seeks to know and do God's will. "The righteous shall live by faith." Living faith "works through charity." (Ga 5, 6)

The disciple of Christ must not only keep the faith and live on it, but also profess it, confidently bear witness to it, and spread it... : " Faith must be accompanied by good deeds for, "faith is dead if it is separated from good deeds" (James 2,26).

**Hope** is the theological virtue by which we desire the kingdom of heaven and eternal life as our happiness, placing our trust in Christ's promises and relying not on our own strength, but on the help of the grace of the Holy Spirit.

The virtue of hope responds to the aspiration to happiness which God has placed in the heart of every man; it takes up the hopes that inspire men's activities and purifies them so as to order them to the Kingdom of heaven; it keeps man from discouragement; it sustains him during times of abandonment; it opens up his heart in expectation of eternal beatitude. Buoyed up by hope, he is preserved from selfishness and led to the happiness that flows from charity.

**Charity** : Charity is the theological virtue by which we love God above all things for his own sake, and our neighbour as ourselves for the love of God.

Jesus makes charity the new commandment (Jn.13, 34). By loving his own "to the end" (Jn.13,1) he makes manifest the Father's love which he receives. By loving one another, the disciples imitate the love of Jesus which they themselves receive. Whence Jesus says: "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; abide in my love." And again: "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." (Jn.15, 12).

Charity is greater than all the virtues. It is the first of the theological virtues: "the three remain: faith, hope and charity." But the greatest of these is charity (1 Col.13, 13)

Charity ensures and purifies our human power to love. It elevates to the supernatural perfection of divine love. The fruits of charity are joy, peace, and mercy; charity demands beneficence and fraternal correction; it is benevolence; it fosters reciprocity and remains disinterested and generous; it is friendship and communion ». (Catechism of the Catholic Church n° 1812-1829 passim).

## **B – Following Christ.**

God revealed himself in a unique way and in fullness in the person of his son, Jesus Christ (Hb 1, 1-3). In order to know him it is up to us to follow Jesus, since we can only know the Father in as much as we follow and imitate the Son (Jn.14, 5-11)

**Following Christ is the fundamental and the most original dimension that identifies the Christian spirituality.** It lies in the fact that we are following a God who became man, and who assumed all our human condition except sin. That man is Jesus of Nazareth. It is in his person that the fullness of God lives. He is the model of our human and Christian life. It is for this reason that the starting point of healthy Christian spirituality must be an encounter with the person of Jesus.

When we make Jesus Christ, the God made man, our model of life, Christian spirituality preserves us from an idealistic or purely spiritual Christianity. It also protects us from the temptation to want to adapt God to our own images, our ideologies or our own interests. The true God is revealed in the person of Jesus Christ: Almighty and at the same time poor. Absolute and at the same time protagonist of a human story and close to each one of us.

Jesus not only teaches us to live as Christians and in communion with God our Father. He also teaches us to live as human beings. *“The truth is that only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light. For Adam, the first man, was a figure of Him Who was to come, namely Christ the Lord. Christ, the final Adam, by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and His love, fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear.”* Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes* n° 22).

Indeed, we meet in Jesus Christ, the perfect man, the Image of the invisible God (Col 1,15). In Him we find the deeper meaning of our being, through him we better understand God’s plan for mankind.

**So, knowing, contemplating (internalising) and following Jesus is the great task of Christian life. In this sense, knowing the Gospel, contemplating the Word and the gestures of Jesus, and putting them into practice is the essential attitude of the disciple of Jesus. In the Gospels we find everything that touched the hearts of the apostles and the disciples and which has been put into writing for our Christian faith. "Something which has existed since the beginning, that we have heard, that we have seen with our own eyes, that we have watched and touched with our hands: the Word this is what we proclaim". (1Jn 1, 1).**

*“The man who wishes to understand himself thoroughly-and not just in accordance with immediate, partial, often superficial, and even illusory standards and measures of his being - he must with his unrest, uncertainty and even his weakness and sinfulness, with his life and death, draw near to Christ. He must, so to speak, enter into him with all his own self, he must "appropriate" and assimilate the whole of the reality of the Incarnation and Redemption in order to find himself. If this profound process takes place within him, he then bears fruit not only of adoration of God but also of deep wonder at himself.”* (John Paul II, « Redemptor Hominis » n° 10).

## **C – Life according to the Spirit.**

**Christian spirituality is Trinitarian, it consists of following Christ, God made man, who leads us to the father. But at the same time, it is also means living according to the Holy Spirit. This is also essential to Christian identity.** Christ sent by the Father acts today, after his Resurrection, through his Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the spirit of Christ who invites us to follow him. In other words, Christian life means following Jesus (Christ the way or path) and at the same time, living according to his spirit. Through the Holy Spirit not only do we imitate Christ, but we become transformed in Him and we become like him, the Son of God. This is what is called 'the life of Grace. It means being "born again" as Jesus said to Nicodemus (Jn.3, 1-15). This new birth taking place in the heart of the believer is the work of the Holy Spirit.

The gift of the Holy Spirit is also one to be shared as a community. On the day of Pentecost, it was given to the Apostles and to those who were listening to them. This gift is for the whole Church, which today by his missionary action gives it to all peoples.

**When we talk about 'spiritual life', we are not referring to a life that is guided by the higher human faculties, but a life that is oriented and nourished by the Holy Spirit, who transforms us into new creatures (Rm.8, 11)**

Jesus is also the model of all spiritual life. Indeed, his entire life and all his actions were guided and nourished by the Holy Spirit. The will of Jesus, in perfect harmony with the will of his Father, and the action of the Holy Spirit are one and the same thing because of the faithfulness of Jesus of Nazareth to the Holy Spirit.

“Those who live by the flesh can never be pleasing to God. You, however, live not by the flesh but by the Spirit, since the [Spirit](#) of [God](#) has made a home in you. Indeed, anyone who does not have the [Spirit](#) of [Christ](#) does not belong to him. But when [Christ](#) is in you, the body is dead because of [sin](#) but the [spirit](#) is alive because you have been justified; and if the [Spirit](#) of him who raised [Jesus](#) from the dead has made his home in you, then he who raised [Christ Jesus](#) from the dead [will](#) give [life](#) to your own mortal bodies through his [Spirit](#) living in you”. (Rm 8,9-11).

**Living “by the flesh” or by our natural inclinations, is to live only taking into account the criteria of this world. Living “by the Spirit” is to live taking into account the plan of God embodied in the life and teachings of Jesus.**

The gifts of the Holy Spirit are given to us so that we may have within us the capacity to discern and act according to the teachings of Jesus and the Church. What are these gifts?

*The moral life of Christians is sustained by the gifts of the Holy Spirit. These are permanent dispositions which make man docile in following the promptings of the Holy Spirit.*

*The seven gifts of the Holy Spirit are wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord. They belong in their fullness to Christ, Son of David. They complete and perfect the virtues of those who receive them. They make the faithful docile in readily obeying divine inspirations.*

*The fruits of the Spirit are perfections that the Holy Spirit forms in us as the first fruits of eternal glory. The tradition of the Church lists twelve of them: "charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control, chastity." (Gal 5:22-23) (Catechism of the Catholic Church N° 1830-1832)*

## **D – Life in the Church**

**Life in the Church is also an essential component of Christian spirituality. The Church is the privileged place where the Holy Spirit is at work. The Church is assisted by the Holy Spirit. It is not an arbitrary mediation that positions itself between life according to the Spirit and ourselves. On the contrary, it is the guarantee of this presence of the Holy Spirit and the fact that we can follow it without fear of being mistaken. It is not the Holy Spirit but it is assisted by the spirit. It embodies it and discerns it. It is not Jesus Christ, but by its word and his teaching, by the sacraments and pastoral service, it leads us to the source of life : Christ.**

Christian spirituality is not an ideology or a simple ethical attitude that can feed on any source. Christian faith and spirituality are nourished from that source which is the Church. It reassures us so that our spiritual life is not something subjective, but it is consistent with the Gospel by its Magisterium (teaching). It invites us and helps us objectively to walk the paths of the Gospel today.

The Christian community (parishes, movements, associations, fraternities, hospitalities, etc...) is the concrete way by which the church stands as mother and guide of our spiritual life. Christian spirituality is one of community because it helps us to discern the requirements of the Holy Spirit in our daily lives. It helps us and gives us the opportunity to pray, to participate in the sacraments of Christ, to share the word of God, to live in fellowship, to put ourselves in the service of the poor, the sick or any other of our fellow men affected by the realities of life.

*“The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts. For theirs is a community composed of men. United in Christ, they are led by the Holy Spirit in their journey to the Kingdom of their Father and they have welcomed the news of salvation which is meant for every man. That is why this community realizes that it is truly linked with mankind and its history by the deepest of bonds (Second Vatican Council. Gaudium et spes. N° 1)*

*“The People of God believes that it is led by the Lord's Spirit, Who fills the earth. Motivated by this faith, it labours to decipher authentic signs of God's presence and purpose in the happenings, needs and desires in which this People has a part along with other men of our age. For faith throws a new light on everything, manifests God's design for man's total vocation, and thus directs the mind to solutions which are fully human" (Second Vatican Council. Gaudium et spes. N° 11).*

## **IV. THE SOURCES OF SPIRITUALITY**

After identifying the basic components of Christian spirituality, we are now going to set about discovering their source. This aspect will be discussed in more detail in a later module. **However, allow me here to just outline the essential sources of Christian spirituality: the word of God, the sacraments, prayer, devotion and life with the Virgin Mary, the witness of the Saints and service of our brothers and sisters.**

## **V. THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE HOSPITALIER SPIRIT**

The New Testament makes frequent mention of both suffering due to illness or disability, the quest for healing and the place occupied by those who in one way or another, take care of those who are in need. These relationships, against a background of pain, develop and harmonize around the person of Jesus, who is there by the side of those who come in large numbers seeking healing, deliverance, miracle.

In turn, these healings and miracles are the sign that the Messianic age has occurred. So when John the Baptiste sends his disciples to ask him if he is the Messiah, Jesus replies to them : "Go back and tell John will report to John what you hear and see: the blind see again, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised to life and the Good News is proclaimed to the poor" (Mt.11, 4-5).

Hiding behind that list are the actions of Jesus and the many relationships that unfold around him. "They brought to him all who were sick, and those who were possessed by devils. The whole town came crowding round the door and he cured many who were suffering from diseases of one kind or another ; he also cast out many devils "(Mk 1: 32-34). Among these healings, that of the paralysed man explicitly refers to several people without whom it would not have been possible. Jesus was at that time in a house and "some men appeared carrying on a stretcher, a paralysed man whom they were trying to bring in and lay down in front of him. But, as the crowd made it impossible to find a way of getting him in, they went up on to the roof and lowered him and his stretcher down through the tiles into the middle of the gathering, in front of Jesus" (Lk.5,18-19).

But taking care of those who are suffering is not limited to transporting them to Jesus. Indeed, it is a whole action of intercession that unfolds, in connection with the presence of Jesus. When Peter's mother-in-law was sick, "they told him about her straightaway" (Mk 1.30).

That is also what the Roman army centurion did when he sent several delegations to intercede on behalf of his sick servant (Lk. 7,2-10). (Father R.M. de la Teyssonnière, "The Grotto of Lourdes, a Gospel road" pp.223-224)



## **The experience of Bernadette.**

Bernadette Soubirous was not only the first Pilgrim to Lourdes but, at the very same time, the first sick Pilgrim ever to come to the Grotto. Furthermore she was always accompanied on her way to the Grotto before being welcomed there on her arrival. The contacts that she thus benefitted from remain an exemplary reminder to the pilgrims of today. However, to place ourselves in the perspective of the relationship that is forged between the sick and those who serve them, we must first know the attitude of Bernadette to others.

By nature as by education, Bernadette was always eager to help. Whether within her own family or within the families where she was placed, from an early age she was ready to serve others. And that she did, wholeheartedly and joyfully : she was also unanimously loved. Her younger brothers, whom she looked after, preferred her to their sister Toinette. Marie Laguës, with whom she had a volatile relationship, was nevertheless not without affection for her.

But her first encounter with the Lady at the Grotto of Massabielle marked the beginning of a profound change for the young girl. That day, on the way back, she helped her sister to carry her bundle, not out of generosity alone, but because she had just received grace. The acts of charity she did then longer rested on her alone. Like St. Paul, at that moment, she might say: "I live but it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal.2, 20).

The relationship that Bernadette weaved with Toinette was an extension of the one that Mary had just shared with her. In their meeting, the Holy Virgin, the servant of the Lord (Lk 1,38), his humble servant (Lk 1,48), was entirely given to Bernadette. Meeting after meeting, Bernadette would be increasingly given to Mary, in the same attitude of service.

With Toinette, Bernadette was therefore able to act not for herself but for the other person she was serving. It cost her time, energy, fatigue, going several times up and down the slope that connected the grotto to the Baous road. Yet, it was not in those terms that she conceived her actions, as much as the fact that she loved others more than herself and expressed that fact through the gift of herself. Not long afterwards, when on one occasion Toinette took a branch from the bundle she was carrying and went to hit her sister with it, Bernadette's attitude would not change in her regard.

In the Grotto, if Jesus Christ was at the heart of the relationship of Mary and Bernadette, this relationship was lived in the Holy Spirit. For Bernadette, her relationship with Mary was an outpouring of the Holy Spirit, as once it had been for Elizabeth welcoming her cousin. It was "the love of God that has been poured into her heart by the Holy Spirit who has been given to her" (Rm.5, 5) which enables Bernadette to act in this way" (Fr R.M. de la Teysonniere, *idem* pp.225 - 226).

## **Lourdes today**

At the Grotto, the presence of sick or disabled people and those who serve them cannot go unnoticed. The former are sitting in their wheelchairs or carriages, some even lying on a stretcher. The latter wearing their special uniform, which may vary from one hospitality to another but always makes them perfectly identifiable.

Of course, this is only the visible part of an enormous iceberg. Indeed, today, the majority of the sick or disabled pilgrims coming to the Grotto are not easily identified as such. Similarly, the men and women enrolled as *hospitaliers* don't have a monopoly on service to their sick and disabled brothers and sisters sick, since this service is an essential constituent of the grace of Lourdes: at the Grotto we all become servants.

However the *hospitaliers* just as much as the sick or disabled people, are a sign of the love of God manifested in the cross of Jesus Christ. And this sign is in their mutual relationship.

Often, it takes time to take on board such an approach. Indeed, such is the fame of Lourdes that each visitor tends first of all to be struck by some particular aspect or other before reaching a global vision. Some will essentially associate Lourdes with the sick, others with the *hospitaliers*. Others will be concerned not so much with either of those but will come purely and simply in search of miracles.

It takes time to see the relationship between a sick person and the person serving them. "In Lourdes, what eyes of flesh see, the eyes of the heart must also see : because only the heart is able to understand." (Fr R.M. de la Teyssonnière. *idem* pp. 229)

### **A natural relationship.**

The actions and gestures which we perform in Lourdes for sick and disabled people are of great banality. They are part of everyday life : pushing a wheelchair, a helping hand to touch the rock, picking up something they have dropped, straightening a blanket : nothing complicated. Yet, these actions are important because often those for whom they are accomplished could not carry them out themselves.

That is why Jesus identifies himself with the sick, the afflicted, with anyone who is being put to the test, going as far as to say "insofar as you do this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me" (Mt.25, 40). Indeed, "I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to see me ". (Mt. 25,35-36).

But in the Gospel, by giving his life on the cross, Jesus identifies himself with the *hospitaliers* and their neighbours who live the commandment of love: "you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbour as yourself" (Lk 10,27).

So Jesus is that Samaritan who comes across a man who was lying half dead, after having

been stripped and beaten. On seeing him he was moved with compassion. He went up to him, bandaged his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them ; then he lifted him onto his own mount, took him to an inn and took care of him. The next day, he took out two pieces of silver and gave them to the innkeeper, telling him: "Look after him and on my way back I will make good any xtra expense you have" (Lk. 10,30.33-35).

To personally live this relationship in Lourdes, one must oneself be either sick or a *hospitalier*. But, for all that, Jesus opens up a way for us when he announces: "I came not to be served, but to serve, i.e. to give my life for the multitude" (Mt 20,28). This means that the sick person too can give service since he can also give his life. He does it differently from the *hospitalier* but, like him, he gives his life. What the *hospitalier* gives, the sick person receives and welcomes. But one must be able to give in order to receive, for welcoming means giving of oneself such as one is. Similarly and conversely, one must be able to welcome in order to give, for giving of oneself means accepting and welcoming others as they are. (Fr R.M. de la Teyssonniere, *idem* pp.230 - 231).

### **A spiritual relationship**

In this relationship, Jesus identifies not only with the sick but also with those who serve them. Because he himself, he assures us, is at the very the heart of that relationship between the two. se two beings: "When two or three are gathered together in my name, I am there among them" (Mt.18, 20).

The *hospitalier* carries out the gestures of Christ, good Samaritan, giving his life for the person he serves. The sick person, in communion with the sufferings of Christ on the cross, entrusts his life to the *hospitalier* who serves him. Thus, at the very at the very heart of their relationship, Jesus enables each one to pass from their own reality to his own : from their reality of suffering and limits, but also expectations and hopes, to the reality of Christ, "the Kingdom of God in our midst" (Lk 17,21), where we taste "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, benevolence" (Ga.5,22).

In such a relationship, this passage is not reserved for just one of the participants, but offered to both, since it is given by each one to the other, and vice versa. Furthermore the sick and those who serve them are not the only ones to benefit from this Passover : because the Paschal mystery, which is accomplished in and through their relationship makes visible the love of God manifested in the cross of Christ.

In Lourdes, where all our senses are called upon, sight has undoubtedly a special place. And, through gestures associated at the most practical level with wounded humanity, the power of the love of God becomes visible and is seen at work. The love of God which is none other than God himself: "God is love" (1Jn 4, 16). So God is active in the everyday life of the sanctuary of Lourdes and touches the hearts of those "who have eyes to see" (Ez. 12, 2)

How many pilgrims of Lourdes are seized, overwhelmed and dissolve in tears by the sight of the mystery of the cross made manifest in front of them? Thus, throughout the sanctuary, the word of Jesus is fulfilled to his disciples: "blessed are the eyes that see what you see! Because, I say to

you: many prophets and kings wanted to see what you see, and never saw it" (Lk 10: 23-24). Fr R.M. de la Teyssonniere, *idem* pp. 232-233)

## **Food for the road**

In Lourdes, those who experience these gestures, those who perform them, benefit from them or witness them, taste the presence of the Kingdom of God, and their hearts are filled with peace and joy. It's an experience that is not limited to this place alone and to that single moment. Indeed, everything that is of the order of love is eternal life. So what we receive in Lourdes through the relationship of the sick and those who serve them, remains with us eternally.

There are those whose lives are marked by the pain of illness, disability or some other cause, and who come to Lourdes regularly to receive the ability to continue living. Among the men and women who come in service every year to Lourdes as *hospitaliers*, many come for the same reason. Here, both receive the love which sustains them along the way.

The Gospel says that Mary "treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart" and , again, stored up in her heart all the words of his son Jesus and everything he did (Lk 2: 19 and 51). Meditating thus, Mary let herself be nourished by words and events of His life.

After a pilgrimage to Lourdes, many pilgrims do the same. In remembering all that, in one way or another, they have benefited from, and meditating on what they have witnessed, what they have seen, they are fed by the love of God as manifested by Christ on the cross.

This memory and this meditation can remain as intense for years afterwards and cause the same emotion, reducing to tears those who return to the source they have received from their brothers and sisters.

This experience also opens up to the mystery of the Communion of Saints, since it creates spiritual links between people who may not have even exchanged a single word. Links for eternal life. (Fr R.M. de la Teyssonniere, *idem*, pp.233 - 234)

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