

Diocese of Hallam Virtual Pilgrimage Blog

Friday 3rd July 2020

Today we reflect on the theme “Looking Forward” and we celebrate the Feast of St. Thomas.

This would be our last day in Lourdes. It can be a little hectic for the Helpers and Hallam Youth, although hopefully pilgrims don't feel too much of a change of pace.

Friday morning we would either have Mass or a Closing Liturgy. There's a balance to the timing of this - not too early because pilgrims have to get out of their rooms and there is luggage to be moved. But also not too late, because we have to get to the airport for our flights after lunch and Hallam Youth need to set off early afternoon for the coach journey back.

Today we're taking advantage of the fact that we we don't have a long journey home. We're back already! So, we're having Mass and a Closing Liturgy.

This morning at **10.00am** Fr. Martin Trask will celebrate **Mass for the Feast of St. Thomas** from Wath, and we reflect on today's theme of “Looking Forward”



Fr. Martin Trask with our Diocesan Banner

Fr. Martin has travelled with Hallam Youth since 2013 and we're very lucky to have him involved with our pilgrimage. He has years of experience of Lourdes, having travelled for a number of years with HCPT Group 101 (Doncaster) - as the late Fr. Terry Tolan did many years ago.

As a pilgrimage we benefit greatly from HCPT 101. You will have heard the voice of Phil Hall during each of our Services. Phil is the Group Leader of HCPT 101 and a very talented singer and musician. Over the last few weeks, Phil recorded the hymns and songs that we've used in our Virtual Pilgrimage using an 8 track recording device to get the harmonies and different instruments that we've heard. Thank you Phil for the many hours that took, and for everything you do for Lourdes. Thank you, also, to Anne Prior who you will have heard sing during our Virtual Pilgrimage (not as high tech as Phil as it was recorded with an iPhone), and who many of you will have heard lead the music in Lourdes over the last 30 years.

The Feast of St. Thomas is also the anniversary of our Bishop Emeritus, Bishop John Rawsthorne's installation as the second Bishop of Hallam, on the 3rd July 1997. Congratulations Bishop John, and thank you for contributing to our services this week, from Widnes.



Thank you, also, to all priests and deacons who support the pilgrimage and those who have contributed this week.

We are extremely fortunate as a Diocese, that all three of our Bishops since the formation of the Diocese have been incredibly supportive of the Pilgrimage, and have loved Lourdes. I feel very old (having just turned 50 perhaps that's inevitable) when I reflect that I have helped organise pilgrimages with all three of them.

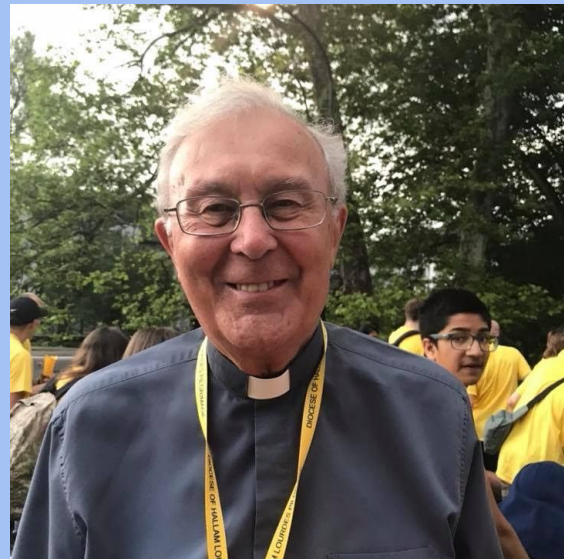
Bishop Gerald Moverley treasured the pilgrimage and helped build it up from the very beginning. After a joint pilgrimage with the Diocese of Leeds in May 1981 he asked Fr. Harney to organise our own, so our first pilgrimage took place in May 1982. Bishop Moverley used to ring me and ask "How is my pilgrimage?" He was very proud that the smallest diocese in England had a substantial pilgrimage, and the biggest banner.



Bishop Gerald Moverley in Lourdes 1993

Bishop John was a great supporter of the pilgrimage, and indeed of Lourdes, throughout his 17 years in Hallam. He helped the Hallam Youth section of the pilgrimage develop and grow to the numbers we have today. It was during Bishop John's first pilgrimage that our tradition of the Bishop having a meal in each hotel during the week started. It was a way of him getting to know pilgrims from around the diocese, and Bishop Ralph continues that to this day.

This would have been the third consecutive year that Bishop John came back with our Diocesan Pilgrimage since he became Bishop Emeritus and moved to Widnes. We hope he will join us in 2021.



That brings me to Bishop Ralph. What can I say?! Thank you Bishop Ralph for everything you bring to our pilgrimage and for leading us each year. Bishop Ralph usually has a heavy programme in Lourdes as he takes part in the main programme and everything Hallam Youth do - their night prayer, Night Grotto Visits, etc. This week might have been a little lighter, but a lot happens behind the scenes, especially on a virtual pilgrimage!



Thank you Bishop Ralph, for your leadership of our Diocese and for accompanying us on pilgrimage. When the idea of this Virtual Pilgrimage was first put to him, Bishop Ralph immediately said "Let's try it". Thank you for your unfailing support and advice.

On this our final day, Bishop Ralph will lead our **Closing Liturgy at 3.00pm**.

Many of you will not know that there is a meeting between the Sanctuary and the different pilgrimages every lunchtime when we're in Lourdes (except Sunday). I attend some of those, but Deacon Peter Hunt, our Assistant Pilgrimage Director attends more and ably represents us. Amongst many other things he also produces the Pilgrimage Prayer Book each year which is a mammoth undertaking. Thank you Peter, and Sarah, for all your support and for everything you do for the Pilgrimage, and for your contributions to this Virtual Pilgrimage.

Special thanks to the other members of our Steering Group too. I have mentioned some of them in previous Blogs, but haven't yet included Dr. John Cornell and Rose Shay, our Safeguarding Representatives. Thank you both. Rose also takes the enquiries for the pilgrimage and deals with the Booking Forms that come in. Thank you Rose for all the time you put in for our 2020 Bookings - the work isn't wasted as all the information carries over to 2021.

Speaking of Booking Forms brings me to a topic I have deliberately kept out of the pilgrimage all week.... Finance. There is absolutely no charge for participation in this Virtual Pilgrimage. And there is no expectation of a donation - we know that many people are experiencing very difficult financial circumstances at the moment.



Each year, the pilgrimage fare is costed to include the levy that our pilgrimage is asked to pay to the Sanctuary in order to contribute towards the operation of the Shrine. We do that both through the main pilgrimage fare and the Youth fare. Since the pilgrimage isn't taking place the Sanctuary would not ordinarily receive the estimated €5,000 that our pilgrimage would have given (just over £10 per person) because we don't have any income from fares this year.

The Sanctuary is facing a significant financial deficit as a result of the pandemic - around €8m. We are going to send a donation to the Sanctuary this Summer. For this reason any funds raised for the Lourdes Fund this year will go towards financing a donation to the Sanctuary of as close to €5,000 as we can.

IF you do want to make a contribution to the Hallam Lourdes Fund towards that, and your financial circumstances permit, you can do so through the bank details on our website. Click [Here](#) to go to that page but I would emphasise there is no expectation whatsoever.

The Virtual Pilgrimage itself has cost very little - we have worked on a budget of under £500 which includes the cost of the website design software and hosting, and the very large candle burning in Lourdes ! So we don't need any donations towards the Virtual Pilgrimage. Everything has been done by volunteers

Thanks to everyone who made videos. If I have missed anyone, my apologies. To conclude, I have to sign off this series of two blogs with three final "thank you's".

Firstly, my sincere thanks to everyone who has participated in our Virtual Pilgrimage. The idea came about after a chance conversation with two other Pilgrimage Directors. They mentioned that they had done quite a bit of work for their Virtual Pilgrimages at the end of July. I'd not even thought of it. But I immediately knew we could do something really good. That was 6 weeks ago, so we didn't have much time. All we had was a vision, some good ideas, and a very talented and committed group of volunteers. Thank you for taking part and for joining us in prayer this week. The Rector of the Shrine, when asked what the mission of Lourdes is, simply replies "To help people form a deeper personal relationship with Jesus". Our aim this week was the same. It has been a privilege to create this unique opportunity.



Emma Cooper (Coops)

Secondly, huge thanks to Emma Cooper, (or "Coops"). Emma is one of our brilliant Youth Leaders and has been outstanding. Everything to do with our Facebook Group all week has been managed by Emma. Great posts, reflections, and comments and phenomenally quick answers to

queries or problems. It must have been a full time job! The Group has grown from nothing to over 530 members and exceeded our wildest expectations. It really has been a humbling experience to read some of the memories and testimonies on the Group. The success of that initiative is entirely down to Emma.



Beth Prior in the Torchlight Procession in 1999

And my final word of thanks has to be to my daughter, Beth Prior. I cannot tell you how proud Anne and I are of her. I knew Beth could edit but I genuinely did not appreciate the quality and standard that she operates at.

Looking back, I don't actually remember asking Beth if she would run the technical side of this Virtual Pilgrimage ! She built the website in just over a week (her first one), and then has spent literally hundreds of hours over the last few weeks editing videos that people have recorded, and producing the outstanding services that we've all experienced.

The creativity and the quality of the broadcasts has made this such a wonderful experience for all of us. Beth has the same obsessive attention to detail that I'm afflicted with. I know its been a very intense and pressured few weeks, and I've not made it easy. Thank you Beth - this literally would not have happened without you.

Alex Prior
Pilgrimage Director