

Diocese of Hallam Virtual Pilgrimage Blog

Sunday 28th June 2020

Welcome to everyone joining us on our Virtual Diocesan Pilgrimage to Lourdes.

Over the last 30+ years I've been to Lourdes in a wide variety of different ways - but this is definitely a first !

Each day, I'm hoping to reflect on what we had planned to do in Lourdes, and also explain a little about what we're doing instead on our Virtual Pilgrimage.

Yesterday, Hallam Youth would have arrived in Lourdes, and a small group of pilgrims and Helpers who often travel out early via Stansted would have been in Lourdes since Friday afternoon. This morning the Advance Party would have made sure all the medical equipment we need is collected from the store, checked, and distributed.



There is a huge amount of work that goes on behind the scenes before pilgrims arrive in Lourdes, including the sought after job of assembling toilet seat raisers!



On Sunday morning, most pilgrims would have had an early start - getting up very early in the morning and starting to arrive at Doncaster Sheffield Airport from 5.30am. The staff at Doncaster airport are very accommodating and try to make the journey as easy as possible but the airport doesn't yet have any airbridges, so pilgrims who can't walk up the aircraft steps have to board via an Ambulift which is quite a slow process. The volunteers from the Friends of Doncaster Sheffield Airport (FODSA) look forward to our charter flights every year and give us a lot of help.



Our flight would normally be scheduled to depart between 8.30am and 9.30am but boarding 189 people can take a long time. Everyone is very patient - the journey is part of the pilgrimage and it gives a chance to get to know other pilgrims. We might not always leave on time, but we often make up some of that time as the flight itself is less than 2 hours.

On arrival at Lourdes airport, there would have been a team of Hallam Youth to greet pilgrims and they would take everyone's luggage and put it on the coach for their hotel.



The rest of Hallam Youth would have spent the morning collecting the wheelchairs, and helping the Advance Party label and distribute them to each hotel. They would then help greet pilgrims as they arrived at their hotel from the airport and assist them with their luggage.

The pilgrims would have their lunch on arrival and then had a short opportunity to freshen up and rest in their rooms.

Normally we would have our Opening Mass late afternoon and before that would be a key moment in the pilgrimage and the forming of bonds between Youth Helpers and Assisted Pilgrims as they meet each other for the first time.

During our Opening Mass we would have the very moving "*Blessing of Helpers*" where all those who have volunteered on the pilgrimage - Helpers, Doctors, Nurses, Youth, Youth Leaders, School Staff, Musicians, etc - come forward and receive a blessing at the start of the pilgrimage.



We will be broadcasting our own Virtual "*Blessing of Helpers Service*" at 3.00pm led by Fr. Bernard O'Brien and Fr. Evangelist Ohaejesi from St Paul's, Cantley, Doncaster, and we are all invited to reflect on "Service".

Often there is an image in our minds of "Helpers" and "Sick" in Lourdes. The reality is that on pilgrimage we really do serve one another.

I would encourage you to remember that when you watch our Blessing of Helpers liturgy - the blessing that is offered applies to **all** of us, particularly at this time.

Two years ago we illustrated this during one of our Masses in Lourdes. Bishop Ralph washed the feet of representatives of all different aspects of the pilgrimage - not only Youth, Youth Leader, Nurse, Doctor, Helper, etc but , Assisted Pilgrim, Clergy, Musician, Pilgrim, etc. too.



The other broadcast of our Virtual Pilgrimage today is "*Tolan's Tours*". This will now be uploaded at the changed time of **7.00pm** in order to give time for both services to be easily accessed on the homepage of our website www.hallam-lourdes.com. All the videos, however, will be available to watch after they've been broadcast.

During our time in Lourdes we spend a lot of time in the Domain, but sometimes don't get to see the history of Lourdes. *Tolan's Tours* is a walking tour that Fr. Terry Tolan ran for many years, up into the town and visiting places associated with St. Bernadette. Fr. Terry was Assistant Pilgrimage Director and truly loved Lourdes. He was made an Honorary Chaplain of the Shrine in recognition of his contribution.

Deacon Peter Hunt kindly took over Tolan's Tours after Fr. Terry died, and has prepared a virtual Tolan's Tours for us to enjoy today.



After the evening meal at 7pm most pilgrims are ready for an early night as they've been up since the early hours.

In light of this, in recent years we have held Night Prayer in St Joseph's Chapel at 9.30pm for Hallam Youth with Bishop Ralph.



Finally, please do share details of the Virtual Pilgrimage with anyone who you feel might be interested. It is open to everyone across the Diocese, regardless of whether or not they were planning to travel to Lourdes, or have been before.

Please help promote the website address www.hallam-lourdes.com in your parish or share this blog with them.

There is also a Facebook Group set up to share memories and photographs of the pilgrimage. That has already helped a lot of people reconnect and renew friendships, or share their own experiences. That Group is very popular and I would encourage you to join it if you can, but you don't have to be on Facebook to take part in the Virtual Pilgrimage since everything is broadcast on the website.

Thank you again for taking part in our Virtual Pilgrimage this year.

Alex Prior
Pilgrimage Director