Diocese of Hallam
Virtual Pilgrimage Blog

Thursday 2nd July 2020

Today we reflect on the theme of Thanksgiving.

When we're in Lourdes, Thursday is the last full day of the pilgrimage. Many of us are very conscious of that fact from Thursday morning. We start to think about the journey home and the arrangements that have to be made.

By Thursday many pilgrims (and Helpers & Youth) are starting to feel tired. We try to have a little bit less in the programme, and it seems to take longer to get from the hotel to Mass in the morning !

Today, we would have had Mass on the Theme. The theme for this year was to be "*I am the Immaculate Conception*" but we haven't followed that in our Virtual Pilgrimage because the Sanctuary have announced that it will be carried over into 2021 so we'll reflect on it next year.

Today, on our Virtual Pilgrimage, Fr. Darren Reid will celebrate Mass at **12.00noon** from **St. Peter-in-Chains, Doncaster on the theme of "Thanksgiving".**

This is a later start than our usual morning Mass. So we can have a leisurely morning. There have been a lot of services this week and some people might be getting a little tired.

If we were in Lourdes, the Group Photos would now be ready - just in time for when we pack our suitcases tonight. Mary Webster would be going from hotel to hotel dropping off all the photos.

This morning we have the big reveal of our Virtual Group Photo. Thank you to Thomas Lowson for having that idea and organising it all. Details of how to order a copy will be available after the pilgrimage.

On Thursday afternoon in Lourdes many of our pilgrims would have joined in praying the Stations of the Cross.

There are two main options. Pilgrims who are using a wheelchair in Lourdes follow the "Low Stations" situated on the Prairie, across from the Grotto. If you have been to Lourdes, you will probably have seen the Low Stations. Rev. Margaret Oldroyd, one of our Anglican Chaplains, has prepared some Stations of the Cross which show the Low Station sculptures by Maria de Faykod. They will be on the website to download this afternoon.

The other Stations of the Cross in Lourdes are the "High Stations". These are made of cast iron and painted gold and were completed in 1912.

When we started to plan this Virtual Pilgrimage, Deacon Peter Hunt pointed out that some pilgrims may never have seen the High Stations because they

cannot be accessed if you use a wheelchair. They are set into the hillside and a set of very steep rocky paths.

At **3.00pm** we will share with you a very powerful “Stations of the Cross in a time of Pandemic” prepared by Deacon Peter using photographs of the High Stations.

Many things have had to be done differently these last few months. The idea of a Virtual Pilgrimage isn’t the first time we’ve had to think “outside the box”. One of the joys of our Pilgrimage is that we are very resourceful at coming up with solutions when the unexpected happens.

One memorable example of this was in 2017 when Hallam Youth were due to pray the High Stations one afternoon, but we got the news at lunchtime that a tree had fallen and the Sanctuary had closed the High Stations for the rest of the day whilst it was removed, because it was a hazard.

Hallam Youth were not to be deterred. At incredibly short notice the Stations of the Cross went ahead on time, but up at the Youth VIllage. Instead of gold life sized statues we had yellow t-shirt life sized people ! The Stations of the Cross were presented by School Staff and Youth Leaders in a series of Tableaus.

Talking of motionless figures, in the picture of the Tableau you can see our Medical Director, Dr. Russell Brynes on the left-hand side in his blue polo shirt.

Dr. Russell is a GP and has been a doctor on the pilgrimage for over 25 years. He provides huge experience and support to the us. So too does Sarah Kent who co-ordinates our dedicated team of nurses. Together, our doctors and nurses provide the essential medical care and support that a diocesan pilgrimage needs to fulfil its mission of bringing people to Lourdes who could not otherwise travel. Thank you to all our doctors and nurses for everything they do.

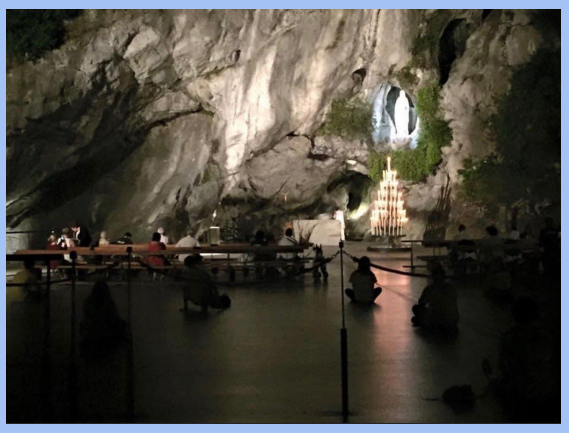
As this is our last full day of the Pilgrimage when we’re in Lourdes, towards the end of the day we would have held our “Thanksgiving Service”. We try to distinguish between a “Thanksgiving Liturgy” - spending time looking back at what we have received - and our “Closing Mass/Liturgy” where we look forward.

At our Thanksgiving Liturgy last year we suffered some technical problems with the projector. There is an irony in that now when you think of the technical problems St. Marie's Cathedral experienced for most of the Opening Mass of this Virtual Pilgrimage. It shows that technology can fail wherever you are.

What was memorable in our Thanksgiving Liturgy last year wasn't the fact that parts had to be omitted because we couldn't use the screen, but what we asked everyone to do. We asked everyone present to find someone in Church who had helped them in some way during the pilgrimage, and pray a short blessing with the words "***May God bless these hands that have reached out in friendship and love".*** This was a very emotional moment, and its strange to recall that now when today we can't reach out and touch the hands of people who have helped us...unless they're in our household or our "bubble".

Our **Thanksgiving liturgy** for our Virtual Pilgrimage will be at **7.00pm** where we reflect on what we are thankful for as our pilgrimage starts to draw to a close.

At the end of our Service on Thursday night in Lourdes last year, Bishop Ralph lit our diocesan candle and it was placed with the other candles, where our pilgrims could see it and say a pray on their way back from the Grotto for the last time later that night/Friday morning. The idea of a diocesan candle is something that was brought back last year, and I think we should continue it as its a lovely symbol of all the prayers and intentions that are made in Lourdes.



As this would be our last night in Lourdes, tonight Hallam Youth would have their last "Night Visit to the Grotto" for a time of private prayer. Many Helpers and some pilgrims would also spend some time praying at the Grotto either before the 11.00pm Mass, or more likely, after - with the steep walk back up "Les Lacets" path.

I've been privileged to witness what happens at a Hallam Youth Night Visit to the Grotto, but due to the nature of it, very few people outside of Hallam Youth have had an insight into this very special time. Tonight, at **10.00pm** Alistair Weir and James Tucker (who co-ordinate Hallam Youth with John Slade) lead us in prayer and a virtual **Night Visit to the Grotto** with a video reflection created by Emma Cooper, who has been the main voice of the Pilgrimage on social media throughout this virtual pilgrimage. Sincere thanks to all of them for everything they do.

Alex Prior
Pilgrimage Director