



**St. Bernadette Soubirous**

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1844–1879 • France

Bernadette Soubirous was born in France, the eldest of nine children. Ever since she was little, Bernadette suffered from bad health. Because she often had to stay home sick, she could barely read and write.

When she was fourteen, Bernadette was gathering wood on the bank of a river near a natural grotto, or cave. As she took off her shoes to cross a stream, she heard a rustling like the wind. But the trees and the river were completely still. Only the bushes near the grotto were moving. There she saw a beautiful lady all dressed in white with a blue girdle about her waist and a long rosary hanging over her arm. She gestured for Bernadette to pray, and together they said the Rosary.

Bernadette continued to visit the grotto, and large crowds of people followed, even though they could not see the lady. During one of her visits, the lady instructed Bernadette to drink from a spring near the grotto. Bernadette could find nothing but muddy water and had to scratch at the dirt in order to drink. The crowds laughed at Bernadette's muddy face, but they were amazed to find that later in the day the water had turned into a clear spring. A man who had been blind for twenty years washed his eyes with the water and was healed! A woman brought her sick son to the spring, and he also was healed. Many, many miracles happened at the spring.

When Bernadette asked the lady who she was, she responded, "I am the Immaculate Conception," revealing that she was the Blessed Virgin Mary. After the apparitions, people flocked to Bernadette because she had seen Our Lady. Bernadette did not like all of the attention, and, to avoid it, she went to live at a school run by the Sisters of Charity of Nevers and was granted permission to join the sisters.

At the convent, Bernadette cared for the sick in the infirmary. Her ill health returned, and she suffered terribly but never went to the spring for healing. Bernadette saw her suffering as something she could offer up to God. She said before her death, "To obey is to love! To suffer in silence for Christ is joy! To love sincerely is to give everything, even grief." Bernadette died a holy death at thirty-five years of age. St. Bernadette, help me to be patient when I am sick!