

2nd Sunday of Lent, 2008
(Jubilee of the Apparition of Our Lady of Lourdes)

*“The Temple of God was opened in Heaven;
and the ark of His Testament was seen in His Temple”*
(Apocalypse 11: 19)

Those words of the prophetic Revelation granted to St John are the opening words of the Epistle for the Mass commemorating the eighteen apparitions of the Blessed Virgin, Mary Immaculate, at the little village of Lourdes. Between February 11th and July 16th, the Blessed Virgin showed herself to a fourteen-year-old shepherdess, a child born in poverty and living in poverty, as she was gathering sticks for the fire. On March 25th, the “beautiful lady” told her, “I am the Immaculate Conception” — thus confirming the Dogma pronounced by the Pope a few years before.

God chooses His instruments carefully, especially in a country that (at the time) was so opposed to God, to Christ and all that Christ revealed. And this message was to be for the whole world. So often during the history of salvation God says to us: “My thoughts are not your thoughts; nor are My ways your ways.” Fr John Corapti was telling us about his meeting with Mother Theresa: it was 90 days before she died; and there she was, her worn-out body in a wheel chair – needing to be helped in everything – she was being spoon-fed every 15 minutes to prevent fluid forming in the lungs. She spoke to him about her works: the great number of houses of her Sisters of Charity that had been founded in every part of the world; there were 5,000 Sisters in her Congregation of Charity; during fifty years in Calcutta alone, she had rescued 60,000 destitutes abandoned in the gutter, to be cared for in an atmosphere of prayer and Godliness; then she gazed at him and said: “You see what Jesus can do with nothing.”

Let us remember those words; especially when we are tempted to say our ways are better than His. It is interesting to know of Bernadette's humility: when she was asked by the priest, “Do you expect me to believe that you saw the Blessed Virgin?” she replied: “No! I saw a beautiful lady who said ‘I am the Immaculate Conception.’”



The child didn't even know what the words meant. However, the words of the Apocalypse in today's Epistle continue: "And there were lightnings and voices, and an earthquake and great hail." And they go on to describe "the ark of His Testament" with the beginning of Chapter 12:

And a great sign appeared in heaven: A woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars.

The Church does not apply the words taken from the "living word of God" to great events without good reason, and the Epistle concludes: "Now is come salvation and strength and the kingdom of our God and the power of His Christ."

When we dwell upon those words, we see why on the 150th anniversary of this heavenly visitation the Pope proclaimed a Jubilee Year with great privileges and indulgences that can be obtained by the faithful; especially the grace of true repentance with a more complete conversion to God and heavenly things. What a joy it was to have a Catholic Television channel that could bring these celebrations to the whole world; and indeed they were wonderful celebrations — upwards of 35,000 faithful souls proclaiming the glory bestowed by God upon that humble virgin of Nazareth. There was a large contingent of pilgrims from Ireland, led by the Bishop of Limerick; and there was a sizeable representation of faithful attached to the traditional Latin Liturgy. In Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, the Bishop unveiled and blessed a beautiful statue of the Immaculate Conception, a replica of the Statue the Pope visits in Rome on December 8th every year. The celebrations of the anniversary were truly world-wide. Sadly there were those places where the Jubilee, as all Jubilees of the past, was ignored; even those groups of people (Catholics) who showed no interest whatsoever.

But Mary's Immaculate Heart will triumph. The first recorded cure approved as a miracle happened in 1858. From the picture it appeared as the grandmother of a baby a few weeks old; the details were on record; quite a group of women cried out, "You will kill him!" as she knelt and plunged the tiny body into the spring (then just a round pool). But the child lived to enjoy robust health, completed his military service, went to Rome for the canonisation of St Bernadette — and died when he was eighty. Quite a number of men and women who had been miraculously cured were interviewed on world wide television. St Bernadette was never cured of her ailments but received great spiritual graces. She suffered, her body wracked with pain, and then there was the petty persecution from some of the community — not least the superioress who considered her to be mad — but she lived the brief message of the Immaculate Virgin: "Penance, Penance, Pray for sinners."

The message was repeated at Fatima: "Offer prayers and sacrifices for the Church, for the Pope, for the conversion of sinners. That is the message of this Jubilee year for each one of us; we can do it if we are one with the Church in this year of great rejoicing with our prayers, penances; and loving thanksgiving to God.

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