

Lourdes in 2023

So what does 2023 hold for us?

What is the situation in Lourdes this year? Not surprisingly, many have asked me about whether it is 'safe' to go back to Lourdes this year and in particular, is it 'safe' to invite our Assisted Pilgrims to join us again this year. And those speaking with me include our own volunteers, our members of the Oblate Lourdes Hospitalité. The Oblate pilgrimage, such as we have known it since Fr Michael Ring OMI first had to courage to arrange and lead the first Oblate pilgrimage in 1883, would not be possible without the effort and commitment of our Hospitalité members. With all the uncertainties of recent years some have wondered if they are still needed, that perhaps now is the time to 'step back,' that maybe they are not needed as they might have been in the past.

All of these questions make a lot of sense. Covid changed so much in our lives and in some ways, it is only now that we are seeing changes that we didn't realise had happened. During Covid, those who are older or vulnerable, because of personal health, were asked to stay at home, not to venture out, not to be with others. That time proved to be very hard on so many people and left its mark. So while thankfully, the Covid situation is now immensely better in these islands (and in Lourdes), it is no surprise that people will remain cautious. So how to answer these questions. Is it safe? Do we still need our volunteers? Should you consider returning with the Oblate pilgrimage this year?

My answer to these questions, is unhesitatingly, yes. I was in Lourdes in June for the first two weeks of that month.

During those two weeks, I met people from many pilgrimages, not just Irish or British, but pilgrimages too from Italy, and France. To my surprise, their pilgrims and their Hospitalité volunteers were asking the same questions!

The consensus of all those who were there was the same; for the pilgrimages and bringing their Assisted Pilgrims, they had made the correct decision; for the Assisted Pilgrims, they felt safe and secure throughout their time. For the volunteers, yes, it was important to come back as their service, that commitment, effort, and giving, was just as much needed as it ever had been.

Lourdes is a very special place, and we all go there for our own personal and unique reasons. Covid interrupted those opportunities to be there, to stand before the Rock of Massabielle, to look at the statue there in niche in the rock, to contemplate what had happened in that place by the River Gave with St Bernadette back in 1858 and then, to bring all of that meaning into our own lives today. The Oblate commitment to making it possible for people to go to Lourdes started just 25 short years after the apparitions to St Bernadette. It continues to this day to be our mission and our commitment. We invite you to join us again this year. Our Lady of Lourdes, pray for us.

- Gerard Bennett
Chief Brancardier,
President of the Oblate Hospitalité



A place of hope...

A place of peace...

A place of encounter...

Lourdes News *Issue 9, July 2023*

In just under two months members of the Oblate Family will travel to Lourdes from England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales and the Island of Jersey. In doing so they will walk the pilgrims path that many have trod since the first Oblate led Pilgrimage in 1883. They will make this journey as pilgrims of hope open to sharing the journey with those they encounter along the way.

In his message last year on the Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes, Pope Francis reminded us of the Christian meaning of encounter, when, he said, "Encounter is always opening oneself to others. The opposite of encounter is closing one's heart."

Turning to Our Lady he said, "Mother, help us not to have closed hearts, because selfishness is a moth that gnaws at the heart from within... Encounter is not a handout, it is putting oneself on the line for an idea, it is walking together, avoiding being alone and isolating oneself in order to be together with others, with friends, with family, with the People of God, all together in prayer before the Virgin."

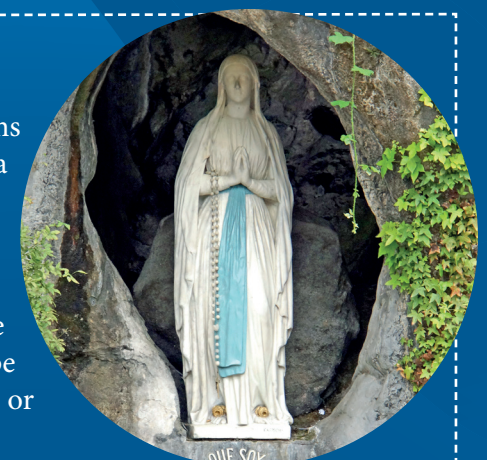
As we prepare to journey to Lourdes in September let us be open to all those we will encounter in the coming months and in Lourdes. May these meetings enable us to open our hearts and to truly travel as Pilgrims of Hope.

- Fr. Lorcán O'Reilly OMI

Petitions

In 1883 the first Oblate pilgrims carried with them the prayers and petitions of many people who were unable to physically make the journey. Writing a prayer petition to Our Lady of Lourdes is a way for all people to share in the gift of Lourdes. Simply write from the heart your request and address it to Our Lady and end it with an affirmation of your faith.

If you would like us to bring your prayer petitions with us in September please send them to us and we will place at the Grotto on your behalf. Petitions can be sent to: Kirk Jacob, Denis Hurley House, 14 Quex Road, Kilburn, MW6 4PL or by email to lourdes@oblates.ie



Follow the pilgrimage online:
www.oblates.ie/Lourdes2023

Learn about the history of the pilgrimage:
www.oblatelourdespilgrimage.com

1883-2023: Follow in the footsteps of past pilgrims... join us in Lourdes!

Oblate Lourdes Pilgrimage, Mission Office, House of Retreat, Tyrconnell Road, Inchicore, Dublin 8

Tel: (+353) 1 454 2888 **Email:** lourdes@oblates.ie

Web: www.oblatelourdespilgrimage.com | www.oblates.co.ie/lourdes2023

Social Media: [f @theoblates](https://www.facebook.com/theoblates) [@theoblates](https://www.instagram.com/theoblates) [y youtube.com/theoblates](https://www.youtube.com/theoblates)



...140 Years and Counting!

“Pilgrims of Hope”

Theme of the
Year 2023

To hope means to recognise the boundless grace of God as the reality that surrounds and supports us. It reminds us that God’s love for us remains constant despite our own inconstancy. The author Charles Péguy who died at the Battle of the Marne in 1914 wrote “The Portal of Hope” which has been described as one of the greatest religious poems of the twentieth century. The poem uses the image of the “little girl Hope” to convey the value of Hope which Péguy himself came to understand through suffering. It also highlights the central place Hope has in the Christian life.

In the following lines from the poem Péguy conveys something of the surprising nature of hope and how it can surprise even God:

*But hope, says God, that is something
that surprises me.*

Even me.

That is surprising.

*That these poor children see how things
are going and believe that*

tomorrow things will go better.

*That they see how things are going today
and believe that they will go*

better tomorrow morning.

*That is surprising and it’s by far the
greatest marvel of our grace.*

And I’m surprised by it myself.

And my grace must indeed be an incredible force.

And must flow freely and like an inexhaustible river.

....

*What must my grace, and the strength of my
grace, be so that this little hope, vacillating*

*at the breath of sin, trembling with every
wind, anxious at the slightest breath,
be as constant, remain as faithful, as righteous,
as pure; and invincible,
and immortal, and impossible to extinguish;
as that little flame in the sanctuary.*

*Since my grace has been flowing forever
for the preservation of the world.*

*Since the time that the blood of my son
flowed for the salvation of the world.*

*A flame impossible to reach, impossible to
extinguish with the breath of death.*

What surprises me, says God, is hope.

And I can’t get over it.

This little hope who seems like nothing at all.

This little girl hope.

Immortal.

For believers, there is no fleeing from the world, as cynical as it may sometimes seem and no matter how many difficulties we might get into. It is not only our world; it is, first of all, God’s world. God placed us in this world and called us into it. God gives beyond all measure and against all time’s hopelessness and sorrow. God is a God of life and a God of Hope.

The Emmaus story reminds us that we need to be open to hear those we meet. God is already present and acting in the lives of the persons we meet, no matter how far they may think they are from God. From this encounter and sharing, our own human and spiritual life may well be enriched.

Last year on the Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes Pope Francis wrote the following on the theme of our call to be Pilgrims of Hope: “We must fan the flame of hope that has been given us, and help everyone to gain new strength and certainty by looking to the future with an open spirit, a trusting heart and far-sighted vision. In the realisation that all of us are pilgrims on this earth, which the Lord has charged us to till and keep (cf. Gen

2:15), may we never fail, in the course of our sojourn, to contemplate the beauty of creation and care for our common home.”

For many Lourdes continues to be an important faith symbol of comfort and care, and a byword for healing and hope. Through the presence of so many of the sick and those who minister to them, through the diversity of languages and peoples Lourdes stands as a beacon and symbol of hope.

We have come to Lourdes not on our own but together with others as pilgrims of hope. Therefore, maybe during your time here it would be good to avail of opportunities that may arise for us to share the stories of our own personal journeys of hope that have brought us to this sacred place for we can be Good News to one another.

Finally, the Grotto of the apparitions is at the heart of the sanctuary and is a place of prayer, hope, peace, respect, unity and silence. When passing through the Grotto or standing in front of it, let us take time to ponder the place of hope in our lives.

Introducing the Water Gesture

(Geste de l’Eau)

Until the Covid pandemic, pilgrims who went to the baths were immersed in the water from the spring. With the onset of the pandemic, the action of total immersion was set aside. Instead, pilgrims are now invited to come to the baths to take part in what is called ‘The Water Gesture’. This gesture respects the instruction of Our Lady to St Bernadette to “go and drink at the spring and wash yourself in it”. During the gesture, which takes place in the individual baths cubicles, pilgrims have the opportunity to wash their hands and face with the spring water, and to drink it. A positive change to the traditional practice is that pilgrims can attend the baths either on their own, or with family or friends in mixed gender groups. Most pilgrims comment that the gesture is now welcoming, inclusive, gentle and moving.

On arrival pilgrims wait on the covered benches outside the baths. This waiting time offers an opportunity to reflect and focus, and to consider prayer intentions. Once inside the cubicle hospitalité members will explain the gesture and guide pilgrims through the process: water will be poured over cupped hands three times: first to wash the pilgrims’ hands, then to wash their face and the third time pilgrims will be invited to drink the water. The gesture finishes with a short prayer.



Pilgrim with us!

Oblate Lourdes Pilgrimage 17-22 September

London

5 nights in Lourdes

£695 pps

- Return flights from London Heathrow to Toulouse
- Transfer on arrival to hotels in Lourdes
- 5 nights hotel accommodation
- Breakfast, lunch & dinner each day
- Transfer from hotels to Airport
- Full pilgrimage programme
- Travel insurance (including covid cover)

**Book now: Call Juliet / Fr Terry on 020 7624 1701 or email lourdes@oblates.ie
Already booked? Why not refer a friend - we still have some places available.**