



St. Bernadette of Lourdes

Feast Day: April 16 or February 18

Original name **Marie-Bernarde Soubirous**, also called **Saint Bernadette Soubirous**, (born January 7, 1844, Lourdes, France—died April 16, 1879, Nevers; canonized December 8, 1933; feast day April 16, but sometimes February 18 in France), miller's daughter whose visions led to the founding of the shrine of Lourdes.

Frail in health, Bernadette was the eldest of nine children from a poverty-stricken family. She contracted cholera in the epidemic of 1854 and suffered from asthma and other ailments throughout her life. Between February 11 and July 16, 1858, at the age of 14, she had a series of visions of the Virgin Mary in the nearby Massabielle grotto. Mary revealed her identity with the words “I am the Immaculate Conception” and, among other messages and affirmations, told Bernadette that a chapel should be built there. Bernadette steadfastly defended the genuineness of these visions despite strong opposition from her parents, the local clergy, and civil authorities, and she faithfully transmitted Mary's messages.

To escape public attention, she became a boarder in the local school run by the Sisters of Charity of Nevers. In 1866 she was granted admission into the novitiate in the motherhouse at Nevers. There she completed her religious instruction and passed her remaining years in prayer and seclusion, happy and loved for her kindliness, holiness, and wit, despite almost constant sickness and pain. She died in agony, willingly accepting her great sufferings in faithful fulfillment of her “Lady's” request for penance.

She was canonized by Pope Pius XI, who authenticated her visions and the veneration of Mary as Our Lady of Lourdes.

Celebration of her feast is optional in the Roman calendar, though Lourdes is a major pilgrimage centre for those seeking healing. The chapel of the St. Gildard convent, Nevers, contains her body, which is said to be incorrupt.