

Bernadette and Sister Mildred: Heaven's Connection

February 25th I had another of those “experiences” of which you had already heard, Father, many times. Though I had not at that time been thinking of her, she suddenly appeared at my side. This person was none other than St. Bernadette. She did not come as a Sister, but as the little peasant girl who saw “the Lady.”

I was transported somehow with her to the Lourdes Grotto in France. We stood a short distance away from it looking up into the niche, which was filled with light. In the midst of the brilliant light I saw “the Lady” so beautiful, so glowing as it were, in light that I could scarcely see the outline of her figure. It was brighter than any light I have ever seen. It was a light all heavenly and full of glory. I was transfixed.

Then suddenly the figure of Our Lady seemed to dissolve in the light but the brilliant light itself remained. Then I saw a path; at times it seemed to take the form of steps leading upwards from the niche where “the Lady” had been standing. Ever so often as I gazed at this luminous pathway, I caught a glimpse of angels.

I was anxious to follow the path of light and as I eagerly endeavored to do so, Bernadette held me back. Then I exclaimed, “But I want to go there.” The Saint answered, “No, my sister, it is not yet time for you, but it will be soon.”

(Letter, Sr. Mildred Mary Neuzil to Father Paul Leibold, April 12, 1958)

Our Lady's first appearance to Sister Mildred Neuzil on September 25, 1956 was as Our Lady of Lourdes; that was not by accident but by divine providence. Clearly Our Lady came to America in gratitude for our devotion in taking the Immaculate Conception as our Patroness (1847). This title given to Bernadette Soubirous at Lourdes on March 25, 1858 was a sign of heaven's confirmation of the definition of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception by Pope Pius IX four years earlier on December 8, 1854. Not only did Our Lady favor America under the title of our country but also under the title of her patronage. Often Our Lady asks for a chapel to be built at the site of her apparition, but not so with Our Lady of America. She appeared at numerous locations so no one could claim her exclusively, for she belongs to the nation, and she herself claimed our patronal church, already being built in Washington, D.C. at the time of her appearance, as her own. She wishes to be honored **there** as “**Our Lady of America, the Immaculate Virgin.**” “**This is my shrine, my daughter. I am very pleased with it. Tell my children I thank them. ...make it a place of pilgrimage. It will be a place of wonders.**”

(Sister Mildred Mary Neuzil, The Diary, OUR LADY OF AMERICA©, Lodi, OH, Pg. 14.)

Without minimizing the greatness of the miracles of Fatima and Lourdes, Our Lady of America promised that miracles even greater than those would be granted here in America, the United States in particular, if we would do as she desires. The miracles

she promises us, however, will be miracles of the soul, not of the body. We must beg her for the healing of the soul of America, for many see it as the new Babylon which calls down God's judgment because of so many sins against life and purity and faith.

Bernadette was born January 7, 1844, one of nine children, five of whom died at birth or shortly after. She was born in her father's mill to the sound of the grindstones crushing wheat into flour for bread. What a fitting image for this **victim soul crushed with suffering like the grain and mixed with Him Who is the Bread of Life**. When her family fell upon hard times they moved to a room in a cousin's home called "the dungeon." It had been considered too damp for prisoners and was part of the reason for Bernadette's illnesses and asthma which often kept her from school. As a result, she was in classes with younger children who thought her "stupid" because of her difficulty learning. As with other visionaries, Bernadette was not believed and was called a liar or feeble-minded. She confided to a friend the secret of her resignation, that if you think God permits it, you do not complain. Hers was a voluntary and often difficult obedience. Referred to by some as the most secretive of all the saints because of her few words and great silence, she was, nonetheless, very transparent. Our Lady gave Bernadette three secrets meant only for her and bade her tell no one, not even her confessor nor the Pope. Although harassed by many to reveal them, she obediently told no one.

Indeed, the first striking aspect in the life of Bernadette and in the facts of Lourdes is the extreme poverty into which the unfortunate family gradually sank. A poverty of the destitute which recalls that of Bethlehem. A poverty we find painful to observe so horrible does it appear to us: Bernadette seemed to breathe the Gospel in this poverty. Money was what horrified her, the touch of it burned her like a red hot iron! Everything was poor in and around her: her family, her health, her knowledge, her means ...everything was transparent, everything was inhabited by the Spirit of God.

In Lourdes, Mary makes Bernadette enter into the particularly special atmosphere of the Holy Family which is one of poverty, silence, humble labor; but, at the same time, it is one of peace, of joy, of an astonishing fecundity, the atmosphere in which Jesus was guided and educated for a long time in Mary's company. ...Mary's words were brief and few: Bernadette perceived them not through her ears but in her heart. (Andrew Doze, SAINT JOSEPH--SHADOW OF THE FATHER, Alba House, NY, Pg. 61, 63.)

It was this peasant girl whom Sr. Mildred met and recognized as a kindred soul. Sister Mildred's parents had come to New York from Austria to find a better life. Like Bernadette, she was an amiable, docile soul drawn to silence and contemplation. Though like any other sister on the outside, her interior life was an extraordinary communion with Jesus, Mary, Joseph and the angels. Imitating the simple virtues of the Holy Family became part of her mission for the renewal of the family. While Bernadette died at the young age of 35, Sr. Mildred lived to be 83. Both women were very humble souls. Our Lady smiled at Sister Mildred's humility

when she said, **“My Son is in love with your lowliness.”** As for Bernadette, she saw herself as a broom put back behind the door when its work was done. Sister wrote in a letter, **“Dear Lord, just push me in the corner. Just so you come forth and make yourself known and loved.”** Both women were invited by Christ to share in His Passion in unique ways and suffered immensely. Bernadette suffered in silence from cancer of the bone on her right knee. Sister Mildred suffered interiorly from the cross and the crown of thorns Jesus asked her to bear for the salvation of souls, a suffering known only to her and her confessor. Our Lord told Sister Mildred, **“I am placing you on the altar of sacrifice.”** Our Lady told Bernadette **“I cannot promise you happiness in this life, but only in the next.”** Both endured much jealousy and spiritual animosity from their own sisters. Our Lady said to Sister Mildred: **“Beloved daughter, you are not being accepted because you are a small one. In the end all will come as I desire.”** While Our Lady of Lourdes gave visible signs of healing from the spring water to encourage belief, Our Lady of America asks us to rely on faith that the miracles she promises, miracles not of the body but of the soul, would be the invisible workings of grace. Surely these two women were “victim souls” for God’s greater purpose and holy Will.

Both women brought a message to the Church for the world, a call for prayer and penance for the conversion of sinners and the salvation of souls and for peace in the world. The recitation of the rosary is vital to both messages. While Bernadette’s life neared the close of the 19th century (1879), Sr. Mildred’s closed the 20th; she died in the year 2000. The need for spiritual renewal and the sanctification of the family and of souls through union with the Indwelling Presence of the Holy Trinity will last until the end of time. Their missions must now be ours.

The Lady Sr. Mildred saw at Lourdes, like Our Lady of America, was bathed in the **light and glory of God Who dwells within.** The pathway marked with angels Sister Mildred saw at Lourdes is mindful of the host of angels that hovered over her to protect her from the evil one. Bernadette’s body was exhumed in 1909, in 1919 and again in 1925, and was found to be incorruptible. It was then placed in the convent where she had died. Pope Pius XI canonized her on December 8, 1933, feast of the Immaculate Conception. When asked if she would be canonized one day, Sister Mildred humbly replied, **“Yes, but not because of me but because of the importance of this message.”** We expect that Sister’s body, like Bernadette’s, will be found incorruptible one day as well.

(Notes on Bernadette, Bernadette Speaks, Fr. Rene Laurentin, Daughters of St. Paul, 2000)

May we all be brooms in the hands of Our Lady to sweep the dirt of sin away.

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