

HOSPITALITÉ NOTRE DAME DE LOURDES

SERVICE SAINTE BERNADETTE

FORMATION

MODULE -4-

INTRODUCTION

I have the pleasure and joy of presenting to you the fourth Formation module for *Hospitaliers*. In the second module, we tried to immerse ourselves in the peculiarities of Christian spirituality. In the third module, our thinking focused on the sources of Christian spirituality.

The aim of this fourth module is to help us discover the missionary presence of the Church in the world. However, this is no ordinary presence, for the Church is in the world in order to evangelise.

This means that the Church is sent by the Lord, with the assistance of the Holy Spirit, to proclaim the good news until the Lord comes back at the end of the time.

So, in this context, every baptized person is a missionary, which means “one who is sent” By his actions, his words, his life choices, the Christian gives to the world a 'surplus': the presence of Jesus who said: "I am with you until the end of the world".

In this fourth module, we will first find a presentation of the text from the Gospel of St. Matthew (28, 16-20) in which the disciples are sent on a mission. The Lord asked them to have three attitudes:

- To be convinced and convincing disciples .
- To have a mystical and spiritual dimension to their lives
- To adopter an ethical standard of behaviour.

Secondly, I will try to show how the message of Lourdes, eminently missionary, informs the mission of the *Hospitaliers* of today.

May these few pages help you to live better the grace you have received : the grace of being a *Hospitalier* in the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Lourdes.

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I. SENT ON A MISSION

"Meanwhile the eleven disciples set out for Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had arranged to meet them. When they saw him, they fell down before him, though some hesitated. Jesus came up and spoke to them and said 'All authority in heaven and on Earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, make disciples of all nations : baptise them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you. And Lo, I am with you always, yes to the end of time "(Mt 28: 16-20)

"Go and tell the priests to have a chapel built here and get people to come here in procession" This is how Our Lady spoke in front of Bernadette on March 2nd 1858. Fr. Sempé, first Rector of the sanctuary, and the chaplains obeyed this instruction to the letter and that is how the crypt and the Basilicas of the Immaculate Conception, the Rosary, St. Pius X were born... However, this request contains an apparent contradiction. Indeed, it required the construction of a chapel near the town of Lourdes, when, in reality, one already existed in the town - and there is still one there now - the parish church in Lourdes. So why two chapels?

Apparent contradiction

In the light of the Gospel that we will find an answer to this "apparent contradiction". But above all, I'd like to make it quite clear that Our Lady did not seek to create "two churches" in opposition to each other, the parish and the sanctuary; on the contrary, we are talking about one and the same Church...

We know from the Gospel that Jesus came to proclaim the presence of the Kingdom of God among men, which he did by his words, his gestures of mercy and healing, but especially through the gift of his life on the cross. The announcement of the good news would be made especially in a specific place of Palestine, Galilee, the so called "Galilee of the nations" (Mt.4, 15), probably because its inhabitants made up a cosmopolitan population.

Yes, the Galilee was a "peripheral land"; geographically and culturally, the centre of religious and political power was not close by. It was to this place that risen Jesus called his disciples: **"Go and tell my brothers that they must leave for Galilee, and they will see me there"** (Mt. 28.10). This predilection of the Lord for the Galilee is none other than means nothing else than his choice for the poor and for all men. The Kingdom of God is not only for an elite, but for all, for "all the nations": **Go, therefore, make disciples of all nations...**" (Mt 28,19).

Saint Paul first, then the whole Church seized upon this commandment of the Lord and thus the Gospel ripened in all his missionary dimension. It is here that we find the explanation to this "apparent contradiction" of Mary's request to build a church near the village of Lourdes. It is a very instructive way of reminding us that the Church is not called to occupy the centre of our society, but she is invited to shift continually towards the periphery. The Church! Always missionary, always sent, always a servant, always committed to all men.

"Let us go forth, then, let us go forth and offer to everyone the life of Jesus Christ. Here I repeat for the entire Church what I have often said to the priests and laity of Buenos Aires: I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has

been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security. I do not want a Church concerned with being at the centre and which then ends by being caught up in a web of obsessions and procedures. If something should rightly disturb us and trouble our consciences, it is the fact that so many of our brothers and sisters are living without the strength, light and consolation born of friendship with Jesus Christ” (Pope Francis : « The Joy of the Gospel » n.49)

The Lord does not want the Gospel to be locked within the walls of Jerusalem, it has to be a missionary activity. Our Lady did not meet Bernadette in the parish church, but at Massabielle. So what is this church?

“When they saw him, they fell down before him, though some hesitated” (Mat. 28,17).

The Gospel tells us: "they fell down before him... they hesitated" and it is no different today. The good news, the message of the Resurrection is fascinating and at the same time doubt creeps into our minds. Yes, we are ready to bow down and worship the Lord and yet, at the same time, to doubt his presence. Oh how many times this has happened, grace and Sin, the divine and the human; and our life fluctuates, I would say, between faith and doubt.

Faith which needs doubt and doubt that needs faith, simply for fear of ‘monopolising’ Christ. And that is at the heart of this great spiritual battle, a sign of good spiritual health, which goes on in the life of every Christian. It is in the midst of shadows and light that we move forward. But the Lord tells us **"I am with you always, yes to the end of time". (Mat. 28,20).**

The Bible is a permanent illustration of how, when God created the world with his word, he expressed his satisfaction saying that it was 'good' (Gn.1, 21), and when he created the human being with the breath of his mouth, man and woman, he said that "it was very good" (Gn.1, 21). It's a beautiful world created by God. We proceed in a divine plan of wisdom and love. But, through sin, this original beauty has been tarnished and this beauty has been injured.

God, through our Lord Jesus Christ in his Paschal mystery, has made man a new creation, by making him a son and he has given him the guarantee of a new heaven and a new Earth (Ap.21, 1). We carry within us the image of the first Adam, but we are called also, since the beginning, to make the image of Christ, the new Adam (1 Cor. 15.45). Creation bears the mark of the creator and wants to be released, and "participate in the glorious liberty of the sons of God" (Rm.8, 21).

II A MISSIONARY CHURCH

So what is this church which has been sent to announce the good news? It is a human and divine Church. Rich in the love and the mercy of God. Composed of men who are saints because by the grace of baptism they belong to Christ, and at the same time these men are sinners.

“Go, therefore, make disciples of all nations : baptise them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you”

The Lord is sending us out on a mission and expecting us to do three things :-

A) First he tells us to **"make disciples."** It is we who must make disciples, not him. He told us this. Even if the mission does not belong to us, it has been entrusted to us as a gift and a grace.

It is a joy to have met the Lord and have been sent by him to be a bearer of the treasure which is Gospel. Being a Christian is not a burden, if not a gift: God the father has blessed us in Christ his son, Saviour of the world.

It is a grace to have met the Lord and to be his disciples-missionaries. The joy of the disciple is an antidote in the face of a world that is afraid of the future and which is exhausted by violence and hatred. The joy of the disciple is not a selfish feeling of well-being but a certainty that comes from faith, which soothes the heart and making it capable of announcing the good news of the love of God. Knowing Jesus is the best gift that anyone can receive. Meeting him and helping others to get to know him, by our words and our lifestyle, should be the best things to have happened in our lives

Why am I a Christian? First of all because someone testified about the presence of the Lord in his or her life and that testimony touched me. This 'someone' takes back me to the people around me, my father, my mother, a friend, a priest, a teacher or catechist. The fruitfulness of our life is not only a biological consideration, it also has a spiritual significance. "Make disciples" is a call to fertility, an invitation to bear fruit. Bernadette has "made" many disciples. Where are they? They are us - pilgrims of Lourdes! This sanctuary exists through the will of our Lady and through the testimony of Bernadette

What did Mary, the mother of God, transmit to Bernadette here at Lourdes? She transmitted, through her words and his actions, her own experience of being a disciple of her son, Christ. She transmitted her of Christian life. What does Bernadette transmit to us? What does she witness to? Bernadette transmits and reflects her personal encounter with the mother of God. But the purpose of that encounter is to lead her into another meeting, with Christ.

In conclusion, the meeting between Mary and Bernadette enables us to discover the person of Christ. The various meetings at the heart of a pilgrimage which are infused with the word of God, prayer and charity make us discover the presence of Christ among us. Thus we become disciples with each other: **"when two or three are gathered in my name, I am there, among them"** (Mt. 18.20).

This first missionary and community dimension to the pilgrimage is very important. This means that the shared testimony, the encounters between pilgrims, the prayer, the proclamation of the word, the celebration of the sacraments and the concrete gestures of charity that we experience on pilgrimage are high spots of evangelisation and transmission of the faith.

B) The second element **baptism: "baptise them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."** Anyone who belongs to Christ is involved, through baptism, in the life of the triune God. They no longer belong to men, but to God alone, who welcomes

them into the community of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. It is in God that humans will experience their true dignity as sons and daughters of God: "The truth is that only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light." (Second Vatican Council. *Gaudium et Spes*. 22).

One might define this second aspect of the mission as **the mystical or spiritual aspect of our lives**. Not because we are going to have apparitions or extraordinary contemplation. But quite simply because we have something extra to contribute to our society, **our Christian spirituality**.

“Whenever we say that something is “spirited”, it usually refers to some interior impulse which encourages, motivates, nourishes and gives meaning to our individual and communal activity. Spirit-filled evangelization is not the same as a set of tasks dutifully carried out despite one’s own personal inclinations and wishes.

How I long to find the right words to stir up enthusiasm for a new chapter of evangelization full of fervour, joy, generosity, courage, boundless love and attraction! Yet I realize that no words of encouragement will be enough unless the fire of the Holy Spirit burns in our hearts. A spirit-filled evangelization is one guided by the Holy Spirit, for he is the soul of the Church called to proclaim the Gospel. Before offering some spiritual motivations and suggestions, I once more invoke the Holy Spirit. I implore him to come and renew the Church, to stir and impel her to go forth boldly to evangelize all peoples.” (Pope Francis, « *The Joy of the Gospel* » no. 261).

“Spirit-filled evangelizers are evangelizers who pray and work. Mystical notions without a solid social and missionary outreach are of no help to evangelization, nor are dissertations or social or pastoral practices which lack a spirituality which can change hearts. These unilateral and incomplete proposals only reach a few groups and prove incapable of radiating beyond them because they curtail the Gospel. What is needed is the ability to cultivate an interior space which can give a Christian meaning to commitment and activity.

Without prolonged moments of adoration, of prayerful encounter with the word, of sincere conversation with the Lord, our work easily becomes meaningless; we lose energy as a result of weariness and difficulties, and our fervour dies out. The Church urgently needs the deep breath of prayer, and to my great joy groups devoted to prayer and intercession, the prayerful reading of God’s word and the perpetual adoration of the Eucharist are growing at every level of ecclesial life. Even so, “we must reject the temptation to offer a privatized and individualistic spirituality which ill accords with the demands of charity, to say nothing of the implications of the incarnation”. There is always the risk that some moments of prayer can become an excuse for not offering one’s life in mission; a privatized lifestyle can lead Christians to take refuge in some false forms of spirituality.” (Pope Francis, « *The Joy of the Gospel* » no. 262).

C) The third course of action that the Lord expects of the disciple is to observe the commandments: **"teach them to observe all that I commanded you."** It is the **ethical dimension of our life**, in the choices we make, in the way in which we position ourselves in our society with regard to peace, justice, brotherhood, to the conception of life, to charity. Our

ethical choices that find their sources in the Gospel are already a missionary activity which our world needs.

"Evangelization would not be complete if it did not take account of the unceasing interplay of the Gospel and of man's concrete life, both personal and social" (Pope Paul VI « Announcing the Gospel » no.29)

It is not sufficient to experience God, to feel close to him, to feel his saving presence and be in him. Faith requires that we follow all the commandments that Jesus has given us, and that we pass on our faith to others. The Lord not only taught us the merciful God to whom we pray with confidence and with whom we feel safe. He formed us into a Church, and he gave his Church the assistance of the Holy Spirit. And it is through and in the teachings of the Church that the Lord, today, invites us to make our life according to the Word of Jesus, and thus testify to his message, which opens up new possibilities to mankind.

Pope Francis invites us to bring the good news to the 'peripheries of existence' and the first 'periphery' lies in our own lives. There are still areas of our personal thoughts, our emotions, our actions, our spirit, our will that have not been illuminated by the light of the Gospel. There are areas of our motherhood, fatherhood, of our ministry as priest, of our consecrated life, of our student life, our professional commitment, our commitment as *hospitaliers* l... that have not been touched by the grace of the Good News. May each of us be the first missionary of his own life!

"Pray God for the conversion of sinners." Bernadette takes on this invitation of the Lady and treats it as a mission, perhaps as *the mission par excellence* of her entire life : "Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for me, a poor sinner!" She prays for herself, she prays for others...

“Consequently, no one can demand that religion should be relegated to the inner sanctum of personal life, without influence on societal and national life, without concern for the soundness of civil institutions, without a right to offer an opinion on events affecting society. Who would claim to lock up in a church and silence the message of Saint Francis of Assisi or Blessed Teresa of Calcutta? They themselves would have found this unacceptable. An authentic faith – which is never comfortable or completely personal – always involves a deep desire to change the world, to transmit values, to leave this earth somehow better than we found it. (Pope François, « The Joy of the Gospel » no. 183)

THE MESSAGE OF LOURDES AND MISSION TODAY

THE STORY

During the first seven apparitions Bernadette was happy. But then, during the next four apparitions, from the eighth to the eleventh, Bernadette began to experience suffering and, at that time, would discover the spring.

On Tuesday, March 2nd 1858, the day of the 13th apparition, Bernadette came to the Grotto, as she had got into the habit of doing, around 5:30 in the morning. Immediately she knelt down, slowly traced on herself a large sign of the cross, and began to meditate the Rosary.

Shortly afterwards her face lit up, and although it remained motionless, everyone watching understood that the Lady was there. However Bernadette continued in prayer. Then later, putting her rosary back into her pocket, Bernadette went inside the Grotto and right up to the rock face on the right. The Lady gave her a sign to come even closer and, as she had now got into the habit of doing, as the first to arrive in the cavity, Marie welcomed Bernadette. Like a mother and her daughter, they lived for a moment in a heart-to-heart.

Then, intimacy having made the encounter possible, they finally came to the moment of catechesis, education and even mission.

Thus, on that day the Lady entrusted Bernadette with the mission: **"go and tell the priests to have a chapel built here and get people to come in procession."** After the apparition, Bernadette followed the same route back but did not go straight to the *cachot* to find her parents. In fact, accompanied by two of her aunts, Bernadette went to the Lourdes presbytery, the home of the parish priest.

It was a difficult moment for her. Firstly, because this was the first time that she had met this man of impressive stature. But also because the welcome afforded to aunt Bernarde, aunt Basile, and Bernadette by the priest was hardly warm. Bernadette was affected by this to the extent that she lost some of her composure and, on leaving Fr Peyramale, she realised that she had forgotten to mention some of the lady's request. demand. To get back to the priest's house Bernadette did not ask her aunts to accompany her but she went instead to the sacristan of the parish, Dominiquette Cazenave, so she could arrange another interview with the priest.

In the afternoon, Bernadette met Father Peyramale for the second time and passed on all the requests that the Lady had asked her to make. Coming out of the presbytery, radiant, Bernadette could say to Dominiquette: "I'm happy, I have done my errand."

A MARIAN STYLE

"There is a Marian "style" to the Church's work of evangelization. Whenever we look to Mary, we come to believe once again in the revolutionary nature of love and tenderness" (Pope Francis. « The Joy of the Gospel » no. 288)

"Go and find my brothers and tell them" (Jn 20,17), those are the first words of the Risen Jesus to a woman, Mary Magdalene.

"Go and tell", those are the words of Mary, the mother of Jesus, to a woman, Bernadette Soubirous.

"My task is to tell you, not to make you believe", these are the words of Bernadette, who expressed the same attitude every time she passed on what she had received.

Women have always had a predominant role in the transmission of the good news. Mary's request: "Go and tell the priests to have a chapel built here and get people to come here in procession", seems quite trivial when you hear it from the Lourdes of today. But if we go back into the context of 1858, what now seems so normal had to go through many difficulties to be able to be accomplished.

To start with, a few specific words to be addressed to the priests. There was in Lourdes the figure of a priest who, for Bernadette, represented the authority of God on Earth, the parish priest of Lourdes, Father Dominique Peyramale. So even getting to see this priest, the *curé*, whom she had never met and who had only recently heard of her because of the events at the Grotto, presented a serious challenge. Bernadette was illiterate, ignorant of religion, she had not yet made her communion, and here she was with a message that would be very difficult to implement. Build a chapel, when there was already a church, the parish church of Lourdes, and go in procession to a cave – and one which lay well outside the town - it was all meaningless! It would all have been more than enough to discourage the poor girl responsible for transmitting the message.

But let us not forget the adventure of one of the prophets of God, Jeremiah, who exclaimed : "Look, I do not know how to speak because I am a child". But the Lord answered him saying : "Where I will send you, never fear because wherever you go, I will go" and "There, I am putting my words in your mouth" (Jer. 1: 6-9).

We also have perhaps had to say difficult words, in connection with the testimony of faith. But also others approached us, witnessing to the faith of the Church, while it was perhaps difficult for them too. Also think about the Virgin Mary, welcoming the mission delivered by the Angel Gabriel in words which were difficult to understand. Then the Angel reassured her saying : "Nothing is impossible with God" (Lk 1,37).

Today everything that happens in Lourdes, not only in material terms, but also in the order of grace, is based on the testimony of a young girl, Bernadette Soubirous. Just as before, having invested the Prophet Jeremiah with a difficult mission, the Lord had said to him: "Today I have set you over nations to build and to plant" (Jer.1: 10).

Bernadette takes her place therefore in a long line of "spokespersons of God", such as the prophets, the apostles, saints and missionaries. We too, in every day of our life, we have certainly shared the Gospel, by our actions, by our words, by the testimony of our life, to our children, our loved ones, to those around us.

THE CHAPEL

What is involved in building a chapel? The first question we might ask is this: Why build a chapel out of town while Lourdes already had its own church? The chapel it is not just a building, but the Church itself that is the people of God, the body of Christ, Temple of the spirit. "You too ... may be living stones, making a spiritual house" (1 P. 2: 5).

Every baptised person is called to build with his brothers a community based on the living presence of Christ, through his Spirit, where the link is that of charity. Think of our parishes, our *hospitalités*, our Christian communities, our family units.

So why this church outside the town? It is also the practical implementation of the Gospel. Jesus tells us that the Church is always called on to meet men where they are, to be sent out into the world and proclaim the Gospel with the world. This is the purpose and essence of our mission.

PROCESSIONS

The second part of Mary's request to Bernadette concerns the processions. If you are in Lourdes, you see large processions - and even participate in them - twice a day : the Eucharistic Procession and the Torchlight Procession. Perhaps where you live there are also sometimes processions. These processions have a purpose. They remind us that we are a people set in motion by the Gospel in the search of an encounter with God.

These processions are ultimately only a pale image of the great procession of each of our lives. We do processions every day. First these processions remind us that our encounters with God take place through encounters with other and in concrete gestures of charity. "The man who does not love his brother that he can see cannot love God whom he has never seen" (1 Jn. 4: 20). "In so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me" (Mat. 25: 40). From which we can understand that Mary's insistence on the procession was to gather us together through links of charity and get us walking together.

A MESSAGE TRANSMITTED BY TWO LAY PEOPLE : MARY & BERNADETTE.

The message of Lourdes had reached us through lay people: Mary, the mother of the Saviour, who communicated with another lay person : Bernadette. And, in turn, Bernadette passed on the message in the first place, to lay people, of whom the majority were women. So, in other words, this testimony which is a treasure to which we are heirs, reaches us through lay people. One has to recall this beautiful text of the second Vatican Council :-

" ... the laity, by their very vocation, seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God. They live in the world, that is, in each and in all of the secular professions and occupations. They live in the ordinary circumstances of family and social life, from which the very web of their existence is woven. They are called there by God that by exercising their proper function and led by the spirit of the Gospel they may work for the sanctification of the world from within as a leaven. In this

way they may make Christ known to others, especially by the testimony of a life resplendent in faith, hope and charity.” (Lumen Gentium n° 31).

By means of a wonderful catechesis, Mary would lead Bernadette towards the maturing of her secular vocation. It is in this way that, within a religion made of rituals and rules, the girl succeeded in meeting a person. And that is what Mary is: a lay woman, but one who does not focus Bernadette’s attention on herself since, by continually inviting her into the interior of the Grotto, she directs it toward the source, i.e. Christ. From there, she asks her "tell the priests to have a chapel built”. Pope Paul VI said: "we are all invited to plant the Church." The message of Lourdes, eminently Christological, reaches us thanks to lay people.

And we, who often practice an eminently rational faith, we must understand that Bernadette, a lay person facing God and the world, as well as many other lay people who live the message of Lourdes, are summoning us and challenging us. They call out to us, not with grand theological speeches, but quite simply because they attract us and draw us towards them. "The Church is growing, not by proselytizing but by "seduction", as Christ "draws" all to him by force of love" (Pope Benedict XVI)

The Church "attracts" when it lives in communion with God and with the realities of this world, because the followers of Jesus will be recognized if they love each other as he loved them.

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