

Devotions and Reflections : Stations of the Cross and A Pilgrimage in Spirit to the Grotto of Lourdes

By John JD Schweska, Knight of Malta

STATIONS OF THE CROSS

The traditional Stations encourage a deeper discipleship and union with Jesus Crucified, following Him to the glory of the empty tomb. They particularly apply to our vocation as knights and dames as we are called to walk with the poor and sick and often assist to help them carry and manage their crosses and challenges. Each of us, too, have our own suffering or burdens—sometimes unknown to others—even as we faithfully continue serving others and showing them a healing path. We also need to each refresh ourselves and ask for Jesus’ help in our own lives so we can have the strength and wellbeing to be a channel of the same healing love for others. There will also be cross roads or times in our lives that God may be asking us to lay down our swords of chivalric “helping” and *accept* the help we may be in need of from others—giving them an opportunity to minister to us—a humbling experience perhaps for us, but also a time for spiritual growth and deeper union with Christ and His Passion, and the grace’s which flow from His Cross.

These Stations are simple sharing’s from my heart with my fellow brothers and sisters in the Order. They can be made walking from station to station in a church—perhaps after morning Mass during the weekday, or on a Friday in honor of the Lord’s Passion. They can also be made at an outdoor shrine of stations if one is available in your area. Another option may be to make the stations while at home in a prayerful setting or even in bed if one is not feeling well—uniting your own aches and discomfort with Our Lord’s sufferings. .

I. Sentenced by Pilate

My Lord, Jesus, I want to walk this journey to Calvary with You. Give me strength to follow you in good times and bad, in celebration and sorrow, in times of friendship and betrayal by those I trusted and loved. Give me Your Spirit so that I will know when to speak up and when to be silent, when to advocate in the name of justice and good and when to accept the hurt, disappointment and pain in the spirit of atonement—in union with Your Passion.

+We adore you O Christ and we bless you because by your Holy Cross you have redeemed the world. Mary, Our lady of Sorrows, walk with me—show yourself my Mother.

II. Receives the Cross

Brother and Savior, Jesus, You carry this Cross for me and for all my brothers and sisters throughout the world. Thank you for loving me, for bearing my sins, for washing them in Your Precious Blood. Make me a channel of Your Reconciliation for others. Incite me to know more about the daily crosses of my local and global brothers and sisters who may be crying out for assistance and justice. Help me to be a true Knight (Dame) of Malta in being ready to help and be part of the spiritual efforts and practical solutions to aid my neighbors in your Name.

+We adore you O Christ and we bless you because by your Holy Cross you have redeemed the world. Mary, Our lady of Sorrows, walk with me—show yourself my Mother.

Falling First Time

King and Redeemer, You fall with the heavy burden of the Cross. You encourage me to get up and move on when I fail and falter, to press on when I become discouraged or disappointed. Let no one or anything at all keep me from you and the precious Faith I have received. Give me knightly fortitude to persevere in the Faith passed on to me from the Apostles. Let the Holy Spirit embolden me with fidelity at all costs. With St. Paul, let me press on to win the heavenly crown of your love and everlasting company.

+We adore you O Christ and we bless you because by your Holy Cross you have redeemed the world. Mary, Our lady of Sorrows, walk with me—show yourself my Mother.

Meeting His Mother

Jesus, Son of Mary, how can we possibly imagine the depth of sorrow and union of hearts in this meeting along the way to Calvary? Mary, Your first and most faithful disciple now faces you with tears as she beholds you—her Son and Savior. Jesus, let my knightly life have Mary at my side in everything. I need her maternal presence in my life. Our Lady of Mount Philermos, Queen and Mother, bring healing and love to our beloved malades—past, present and to come—all those entrusted to our care. Give us your maternal heart, Mary! Let us be present to them with your compassion and constancy, your solicitation for their every need, and your steady faith and trust in the Lord.

+We adore you O Christ and we bless you because by your Holy Cross you have redeemed the world. Mary, Our lady of Sorrows, walk with me—show yourself my Mother.

Simon Helps

Lamb of God, Christ Jesus, Simon was pressed into service for You, but I like to think he willingly did so, instinctively sensing the outstanding and momentous grace awaiting him in helping You bear the weight of Your Cross—and that You looked upon his face with the utmost love, gratitude and the promise of salvation. Let me see you, my Jesus, in every person—even behind the veil of ugliness and sweat, meanness and ingratitude, and in the scars and weight of their own multi-faceted crosses. Give me the grace, through the intercession of all the saintly and blessed members of the Order of Malta who now reign with you in heaven, to aid the weak, the erring and lost, the sorrowful, the poor, and those you may send my way for guidance and solace. I want to willingly help them carry their crosses.

+We adore you O Christ and we bless you because by your Holy Cross you have redeemed the world. Mary, Our Lady of Sorrows, walk with me—show yourself my Mother.

Veronica

My Jesus, Veronica, pressed herself through the mob and the Roman soldiers in order to wipe clean the sweat and blood from Your Face. The imprint of Your Face, in all its broken beauty, was left on the fabric of her veil. Give me her courage to love you even in the most frightening situation, and when I feel pressured by others to choose sin and indifference to Your Gospel. Let me always opt for you. Let me choose you in everything. May I graciously attend to all those who are suffering and disadvantaged, and who have no one to speak for their cause, or on their behalf—for to do this this is to participate in the true charism and identity of the Order of Malta and all its members who love you? Imprint Your Face upon the very fabric of my life and actions as your true son (daughter). Make me a vibrant and authentic Knight (Dame) of Malta.

+We adore you O Christ and we bless you because by your Holy Cross you

have redeemed the world. Mary, Our lady of Sorrows, walk with me—show yourself my Mother.

Second Fall

O Christ, I get so caught up in guilt and shame when I fall behind my goals, and slide back from my ideals. Contrition is healthy when it leads me to your healing mercy and love. Don't let me get caught up in negative guilt that drives me even further backwards, and lacking in belief in Your never failing mercy. Mary, Refuge of sinners, pray for me. It is time to move on with Christ, in peace and forgiveness—and to encourage others who have fallen to do the same—with Christian joy and unflagging confidence.

+We adore you O Christ and we bless you because by your Holy Cross you have redeemed the world. Mary, Our lady of Sorrows, walk with me—show yourself my Mother.

The Women Mourn

Beloved Lord, the women were crying on your behalf and at the site of your dolorous plight. Turn our grief and sorrows into sanctifying work and living prayer on behalf of Your Kingdom—let our challenges, grief and pain bring us deeper into life-giving inroads of healing and growth in Your Name, transforming suffering into grace. Jesus, let us stop to console others on their difficult paths, and to point the way to hope and the transfiguration of both their souls, and negative situations and painful conditions. With You, Lord, all things are possible!

+We beseech you to help us Lord Jesus whom you have redeemed by your Precious Blood. Mary, Our Lady of Mount Philermos, assist me in faithfully living out the Beatitudes of your Son in my life.

IX Third Fall

Sorrowing Jesus, this is the most terrible and blood-soaked fall, the most crushing of all the falls on the Via Dolorosa. You are prostrate in the dust and stones, lying on the very street. Jesus, when I am at my lowest in life—in sorrow, anger, confusion, sickness, failure, depression or lack of trust and true friendship, stay with me—speak to me somehow— With Peter, I cry out: “Save me or I perish, Lord!

Jesus, send Your Holy Spirit to refresh and revive me! Renew my inner soul’s youth like the eagle’s soaring flight. Let me know Your saving Passion at work within me, purifying me, leading me onwards, preparing me for greater moments—whatever it may be and whatever may happen, You are there and part of the pain and challenge—and You are at my side to turn darkness into light.

+We beseech you to help us Lord Jesus whom you have redeemed by your Precious Blood. Mary, Our Lady of Mount Philermos, assist me in faithfully living out the Beatitudes of your Son in my life.

Stripping

Jesus, my King, You own the universe; you are the Eternal Word—yet you are viciously stripped of everything by your own creatures. You are naked, lord—and horrifically injured; you appear as a poor fool for your enemies, and a sight of agony to your followers. Free me from all inordinate desires and needs that keep me from being loyal to you. Give me, O Lord, spiritual detachment and perspective that I may not be disturbed by the changing secularity of the world, its many temptations, and unsettling circumstances—but find peace and centeredness in you. Be the King and center of my heart!

+We beseech you to help us Lord Jesus whom you have redeemed by your Precious Blood. Mary, Our Lady of Mount Philermos, assist me in faithfully living out the Beatitudes of your Son in my life.

XI. Crucifixion

Jesus Crucified! Your sacred hands that skillfully built with stone and wood, hands which healed and blessed, hands once reaching out to save Peter from the perilous sea, are now nailed down to the rough beams of the cross. Your feet that walked miles to proclaim Good News and feet recently anointed in rich perfume by Mary of Bethany and lovingly dried with her hair, are now tortured by hammer and nails. By Your healing Cross and Passion, detach me from all that I am negatively bound to in sinful thinking and behavior, from addictions and obsessions of any kind, from anger and pettiness, from apathy and lack of charity, and above all, from growing jaded and sarcastic: unable to appreciate life's beauty, goodness, and the talents and joy of others. Prevent me from losing my initial chivalric ardor and enthusiasm for the Order Of Malta, my belief in its mission and values, and my commitment to it as a Religious Order of which you call me to in commitment and profound, faithful service—a true vocation! Keep me solidly attached to you and your love, your guiding, freeing principles, your mandate to remain like a child, filled with awe and trust.

+We beseech you to help us Lord Jesus whom you have redeemed by your Precious Blood. Mary, Our Lady of Mount Philermos, assist me in faithfully living out the Beatitudes of your Son in my life.

XII. Death

Oh Jesus, Your sacrifice is consummated on the Cross! "It is "love to the end" (JN 13:1). Your love confers on this sacrifice its "value as redemption and reparation, as atonement and satisfaction." (*Catechism of the Catholic Church, 616*). With St. Paul, I humbly acclaim that Christ "loved me and gave Himself up for me" (Gal 2:20). Your death, Jesus, opens the gates of heaven. Your Precious Blood is indeed, as St. Thomas Aquinas writes, "the key to heaven". With Mary, Our Lady of Sorrows, and the faithful disciple John the Apostle, I stand with you too to the very end, and yes—at every beginning—both in the dying and the risings of everyday life. I stand with you in the poor and sick. I stand with you when the Faith is threatened and thwarted so that I may a true spiritual soldier of the Faith in its defense and

propagation. I am all yours in everything, Jesus! *[Kneel here at this station, if possible, in a moment of silence].*

+We beseech you to help us Lord Jesus whom you have redeemed by your Precious Blood. Mary, Our Lady of Mount Philermos, assist me in faithfully living out the Beatitudes of your Son in my life.

XIII. Taking Jesus' Body down from the Cross

O God-man, Eternal Word, your lifeless Body is taken down from the Cross by the first models of our Knighthood: those faithful women and men who did not abandon You, who witnessed to You even in the midst of peril of their own lives, who tenderly venerated and embraced You. I come to you now with Your Mother, Mary, the youthful beloved disciple, John, Mary Magdalene, Joseph of Arimathea, Nicodemus, and the holy women disciples — all accompanying you to your grave. May their faith, courage, fidelity and friendship with you inspire me to renew my commitment to you and to the Church—and to be willing at all costs to be faithful to those you give to be to care for, faithful to their every need. For some, I must be ready to lovingly be present at their final moments of life and to be an anchoring presence of grief support to their loved ones and a source of encouragement and Christian hope.

+We beseech you to help us Lord Jesus whom you have redeemed by your Precious Blood. Mary, Our Lady of Mount Philermos, assist me in faithfully living out the Beatitudes of your Son in my life.

XIV. Burial

My Jesus, Mercy. Here I am now at the tomb. It is dark now as they place your lifeless body on the shelf of stone, wrapping you in the Shroud, and closing the chamber with the great circular rock. Our Lady of Sorrows is the epitome of all grief. The few who remained with you till this very hour are bereft, shaken, but strangely calm, too. Your force of grace is with them.

Your promises burn in them. Something lingers in their souls with distant, churning anticipation. Lord, remember now all who are in agony and are to die today. Remember them in Your Kingdom. Purify the souls in Purgatory. Lord, embrace all our fellow Knights and Dames who have died, into your everlasting Kingdom.

+We beseech you to help us Lord Jesus whom you have redeemed by your Precious Blood. Mary, Our Lady of Mount Philermos, assist me in faithfully living out the Beatitudes of your Son in my life.

IV. Empty Tomb

The tomb is empty! Easter dawns! The angels tell us not to be afraid. The Crucified One Whom we are seeking is truly risen, as He said! Lord, as Your Dame, (Knight), let me proclaim this truth in word and deed, in charity and hope. Renew my life and purpose, Lord. Open the doors of opportunity and grace so that I may express all my gifts and talents for your glory. Roll back the stone that blocks my life from the fullness of life you bring to us. Open my heart to you more than ever before. Make me a channel of your everlasting love!

+Crucified and Risen Lord—Your Wounds are my merit: “Vulnera Tua-Merita Mea!” I proclaim your most holy death and profess your Resurrection! With St. Thomas, I cry out in faith: “My Lord and my God!”

Finish the Stations with a few moments of adoration and thanksgiving:

(If in a church, we can now kneel, or sit before, the tabernacle in adoration and thanksgiving united to the Crucified Lord's risen Presence in the Blessed Sacrament. We remember the Church and all its needs, the Order of Malta throughout the world, and the intentions of the Holy Father. [Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory Be]).

A PILGRIMAGE IN SPIRIT TO LOURDES

These reflections are a brief journey in spirit made in my own heart and mind—and now sharing them with you, my fellow pilgrims in the Order—a pilgrimage in spirit to Lourdes by reflecting on some of the key images and symbols found at the Sanctuary. Lourdes is Gospel territory! We see Jesus and His message alive in the Sacraments being celebrated, the unity of so many people seeking spiritual wholeness and the tender and practical care from persons of all ages caring for the sick and disabled. We encounter Jesus alive and at work in Lourdes. Mary leads us to him, Source of life and healing. It is most likely that when we are in Lourdes, we find in a special and emphatic way the very heart and meaning of the Order of Malta. We gather together as one ancient Order of members from all over the world. We have the opportunity to deeply pray while we also serve in practical, caring and loving ways for those most in need of seeing Jesus and Mary in our faces and hands. At the same time, we honor the sick—our “beloved malades,” as we so often say, as our very “Lords”. We are their servants—their personal knights, dames and squires in the modern world, showing them exquisite hospitality and reverence—respect and the joy we have in caring for them. We experience our call to love them and see the face of Jesus in each one of them. We touch the Gospel with every visit to Lourdes. We can go to Lourdes often in spirit. Be there. Close your eyes for a moment. Refresh yourself as if you were at the Grotto. Hear the waters of the Gave River. Relax. Pray the rosary. These following meditations may be of aid to recall some of the prominent Gospel images of Lourdes—leading us deeper into us deeper into the call of Mary to prayer, penance for sinners (including ourselves!), service, and a Eucharistic life of love.

THE ENCOUNTER

Lourdes is about an encounter with the holy, of heaven encountering us in our everyday lives here on earth—God expressing His love for us through the visit of His special envoy, the Blessed Virgin Mary —and it is also Mary

herself expressing her own motherly solicitation for each one of us. There is an encounter in the grotto, first and very importantly by and with St. Bernadette, through the apparitions—and ever after, with each of us who either physically go there, and with all of us who desire to be present with Mary and her children at the grotto and through the waters that flow from it. Encountering Mary in friendship and filial love leads us further into a real relationship with Jesus. It is then—when we know Jesus in friendship—and as a viable member of his Gospel family—that our faith and our commitment to the Order of Malta as a genuine vocation takes on extraordinary significance. We are willing and happy knights and dames, auxiliaries and volunteers because we love and are loved and are in a marvelous, incomparable relationship with the Lord and His Mother. They show us daily that this relationship embraces all God's people. We are not alone—ever. Jesus and Mary share with us their family of love—the saints, the angels—and above all, we are daily led to a closer life of union with the Most Blessed Trinity! The divine encounter for us, of course, emphatically began for us in the waters of Baptism. Lourdes and its ever-flowing spring reconnects our memories and brings us back in a beautiful way to that baptismal font of life, the very start of our infant journey in the Gospel—to the re-commitment to it—the re-vivification of Baptismal life today, now—truly lived out practically and fully! The ancient ritual of the investiture ceremony of knighthood was filled with Baptismal symbols, including a ritual bathing before the actual dubbing—a viable sign pointing, as Lourdes does, to getting back to the encounter with God in our Lives beginning with our baptismal consecration—immersing us in the death and Resurrection of Jesus, the rising and dying in and with Him daily, anointed by the energy and love of the Holy Spirit, and as adopted sons and daughters of the Father.

Our Lady of Lourdes, Mother of Conversions and Health of the sick, pray for us—may we be signs of God's loving availability to an ever present encounter with us—open to receive us into friendship and family. Make us veritable bridges to unite people and make them more aware of being brothers and sisters. May our lives reflect light and happiness, and so attract others to friendship with you and the Redeemer—the Lord Jesus.

ROCK, EARTH and WATER

One thing that stands out at the grotto is the sheer image of gray rock—massive outcrop of stone, a natural mountain cave, and in some areas of the rock’s surface—a gentle seepage of water from its tiny fissures, a trickling from its pores and fissures. The rock is holy—we sense it. It seems to be breathing memories of all the hands that have touched and smoothed its surface to a very smooth exterior with a luminescent glaze. Its rocky moistness is like the sweat of the sick or the tears of the broken hearted and suffering who have prayed under its shade. Within the grotto’s enclosure to the left, at the base of an enclave, bubbles forth from the earth the source of the actual famous Lourdes water—the spring discovered by the hands of St. Bernadette at the very instructions of Our Lady to drink and bathe. We can see as we look down at the source of the spring where Bernadette scratched the surface of the earth in search of it, that the water is coming from the subterranean rock of the cave itself—working its way through its underground fissures to the top. The water gushes forth and is redirected by channels to the faucets and baths outside the grotto for our own spiritual and physical needs. It is impossible really to separate the images of rock, earth and water at Lourdes. Mary also asked Bernadette to kiss the earth in penance for sinners. In atonement and humility at “ground level”, we come before the rock that gushes forth the water of life for us—Jesus! St Paul calls Christ the rock from which waters of life spring forth for our refreshment and life. (1 COR 10:4). Christ tells us that for us who believe in Him living waters will spring up within us as well! (JN 7:38). The grotto is a sign of Christ and the life that comes forth from His pierced Heart on Mount Calvary. Mary calls out to us in the recesses of the rock to go into the depths of the cave—to find Jesus. She calls from the niche within the cave—appropriately so as she lives in and for Christ. She continues her work of calling us to conversion and wholeness. As members of the Order of Malta, we share in Mary’s work. We touch Jesus in the rock under the gaze and in the presence of Mary—and find strength and joy in her Him to do His work of love for others. Mary reminds us how Jesus is the Rock of our salvation. (PS 18:2) With Jesus and Mary, we become in a sheltering rock and spring for those we serve—a sure sign of Christ’s love to and for our malades. We come significantly, like Mary herself, to bring others there under our loving

protection and care to help them find solace and healing. And we too drink deeply from the spring of the rock for our own needs, for our own strength and perseverance in our mission and vocation as knights and dames, for the grace to be love and to love as Christ taught us.

Oh Mary, Our Lady of Lourdes, I find joy in the grotto you chose to appear in eighteen times to St. Bernadette and which you made into a sanctuary of prayer. We see your Son in the rock—He who is our strength and salvation—and we feel your maternal gaze upon us in the niche of your visitation. Make us daily instruments of the Lord—living channels of the life giving waters of the Gospels—shown especially by the sacred Beatitudes we are called to live as members of the Order of Malta. When others see my life, let them see the sturdiness of the biblical rock, a rock that is also spiritually pierced, flowing with the self-sacrifice of my life for God and His Church—and all those whom I am called to serve in Jesus’ Name, and in your company, O Mary.

PROCESSIONS, LIGHT AND PRAYER

Lourdes answers the call of Our Lady to make procession. A procession is a significant symbol of pilgrimage—we are on the way to heaven,—a pilgrim Church, “sojourners,” as St Peter reminds us, (1PT 2:11) on the road to the everlasting city of the New Jerusalem—heaven. St Catherine of Siena beautifully wrote that because Christ is with us on our path to heaven, then in some meaningful way, all the way to heaven is a type and preview of heaven itself. Procession affords us a unique opportunity to be together, to express solidarity in our faith as pilgrims, and to experience a religious unity, prayer and joyfulness irradiated with hope—a tremendous understanding of oneness with others. No place in the world gathers so many nationalities and cultures, languages and even varied faiths that come together in almost perfect unity in procession as Lourdes does—as evidenced in the startling candlelight rosary procession at night. We are reminded of our journey together to and with a God of unity and concord—a God of light and justice. Prayer naturally flows from this Greta crowd that walks as one, candles aglow. Each pilgrim has his or her own individual call

and purpose but is also bolstered and supported by the whole family of Christ so wonderfully represented by both the procession and individual candles that as we walk together make one luminous unified prayer. Ever since St. Bernadette brought a lone candle to the grotto in 1858 on behalf of her aunt's petition, and the local crowds followed her in a makeshift procession to gather in prayer—so that light of prayers and longings have not stopped being passed down to us through the decades and into these modern times of the 21st century—the holy Gospel ever relevant, the call to renewal and conversion still significant—meaningful—even urgent, especially in today's secular world. Procession, light, prayer—we live these as we come together as a religious and chivalric Order for a valuable time not only of amazing international unity, but for a very real Marian and Olympic-type week of good will and charity. We go home with a sense of the pilgrim journey we are on wherever we are and to whomever we are called to serve, both locally and globally. We carry the light of prayer and hope. We are invigorated at Lourdes to be a light for others in their darkness, and to share the light of our faith and charity at all times.

Our lady of Lourdes, Mother of all pilgrims, Virgin of Light and prayer—make us channels of the radiance of Jesus Christ; help us to be ever flowing prayer and adoration, and the epitome of hospitality and charity to and for all on the pilgrimage of life. Mary, Our Lady of the Way, guide along the Gospel path—which is your Son Himself—who is “the Way.”

THE EUCHARIST

The Virgin Mary requested of St. Bernadette the building of a chapel at the Grotto. The chapel would mark the site of the apparitions as a place of prayer and worship. Mary was preparing at her place of visitation an Altar of sacrifice for her Son in the Holy Mass, the re-presentation of His Sacrifice on Calvary—and a banquet table for the Risen Lord's Supper—and our communion with Him—the Bread of life, the Chalice of salvation. Our lady carefully was preparing a sacred house to proclaim the Gospel, absorb the Word in Holy Scripture and hear the homilies and instructions of the chaplains and priests—and the administration of the Sacrament of

Reconciliation—so integral to the message of penances and prayer for sinners uttered by Our Lady at the Grotto. The building of the chapel would usher forth the endless stream of priestly witnesses who would come to Lourdes to minister to the faithful. Mary was also preparing a sacred house to place the tabernacle for the Most Blessed Sacrament—Jesus present to and for us—in all our needs and for moments of contemplation, basking in His divine and brotherly Presence. The first chapel moderate in size and simple in architecture, (the one actually seen by St. Bernadette), is the crypt chapel located directly above the Grotto and built into the mountain itself, and eventually to be nestled between the great structures of the upper and lower basilicas. One chapel was not enough to meet the growing number of pilgrims—and a larger than “chapel” sized buildings were needed. The sanctuary abounds in “chapels”! The grotto itself with its stone Altar for Massa is probably one of the most tranquil and beautiful places of Eucharistic celebration, particularly at the 11 PM Mass—an intimate time with the Lord as we gather at night under the stars, and near Our Lady’s felt presence in the niche above. Marian shrines are only as authentic and beneficial, it is widely said in the Church, in terms of how Eucharistic they truly are, because Mary is Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament. She wants us to be Eucharistic—united to the gift of her Son’s Body and Blood, attuned to Him, habituated to be in His company, and importantly, receiving Him as the Divine Physician of our souls and bodies. From the Altar of Sacrifice and Banquet comes forth the living Lord in the procession of the Blessed Sacrament where Jesus, as in the times of the Gospels, walked among the masses crying out for Him to heal them of their many infirmities! Many of the miraculous healings are reported to take place before the Presence of the Lord in the monstrance. Lourdes reminds us too to be Eucharistic persons like Jesus—and especially because we are His Knights and Dames of Malta—to break open our very lives and talents like the Bread of the Eucharist, to share with others—and to pour ourselves out in sacrifice and joyful surrender, like living chalices, to all we are called to be and serve for Jesus’ kingdom.

Our Lady of Lourdes, we thank you for bringing us so intimately home to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. We want to be like Him—Eucharistic—giving of ourselves totally and being present to others with our own bodies

—and all that we are and have. Let our lives be songs of daily praise, witness, and charity. *Make us healing extensions of the Eucharistic Lord*—living Beatitudes, and avenues of grace, strength, hope and *true availability and presence for those most in need*—even as our Lord is for us, as He promised—“even till the end of times!” Amen.

THE ROSARY

The rosary was always in Our Lady’s hands during the apparitions. Bernadette prayed the rosary in Our lady’s presence, with Mary joining her in the *Our Father* and the *Gloria*. Our Lady would always begin the rosary with Bernadette—teaching her how to make the great and reverent Sign of the Cross, slowly and with intensity of purpose. The rosary meditations and prayers are biblically centered—as we know and experience it in our praying. It is a devotion that facilitates union and daily familiarity with key Gospel scenes and mysteries. As we repeat the Names of Jesus and Mary within the “Hail Mary”—the “Ave,” a Christian mantra, we are stilled and focused in the lord. The rosary is a common instrument of prayer seen throughout Lourdes, as we and other pilgrims comfortably carry our beads as easily and unabashedly as part of who we are in Mary’s town. The links in the beads have been described as spiritual apron strings connecting us to Our Mother Mary—she who is our tutor in the path of Christian discipleship and chivalric commitment in the Church and in the religious Order we belong to. After holy Mass, the rosary is the amazing unifying prayer that joins all of us—helpers and malades, priest and laity, youth and elderly—and even said at times by non-Catholics during their visit to Lourdes and in the nightly candlelight procession in various international languages. Even the nearby river rushing through the town and past the Grotto is named the “Gave”—containing providentially the beautiful “Ave” within its very name, the “Hail” to Our Lady uttered by the Angel Gabriel in the Annunciation. Like the river, we carry the “Ave” in our heart and in our actions of charity and services of relief and comfort. *We, like a living rosary of joy, sorrow, light, and glory, really do unfold the Gospel mysteries and message of hope* as we image and live the Gospel for others, not only in our beautiful pilgrimage to Lourdes, —but in the everyday lives at home and in our diocese—and for our local Association—each of us a living “Ave” for Mary and her Son’s

Church.

Our Lady of the Grotto and the miraculous spring, teach us to be knights and dames of the Rosary—persons of union with you in prayer and reflection on the Gospel and its mandates, channels of the Gospel and its mysteries--missionaries on its behalf, and in all the seasons of our lives—faithful to the end. We need your company and presence to us to teach us how to make the passion and victory of the Cross a part of our lives. We need you to accompany us in our call to be instruments of Christ’s joy, glory and light for the sick and poor, as well as courageous defenders of the ancient Faith of the Apostles. Our Lady of Lourdes, Queen of the Most Holy Rosary, pray for us—may the rosary be for us a Gospel prayer, a prayer in life and in our last moments—leading us to the vision of you in heaven—and the crown of everlasting union with the “fruit of your womb, Jesus.” Amen

CHARITY IN ACTION

One of the most striking images of Lourdes is the steady flow and great numbers of malades—the sick and disabled on canes or in wheelchairs, in voiteurs, and some on wheel-bound stretchers. They come in faith and hope for God’s loving touch through Mary. There are also the not so evident, and unseen malades who carry their illnesses without external signs—those patients in different stages of diagnoses, and the very hidden malade: the lonely and broken hearted, the emotionally hurting, the varied dark nights of the soul or private crosses being carried by individuals. Marvelously, the sight of aides and helpers, nurses and doctors, youth and elderly as sitting the sick sands out prevalently to the visitor or pilgrim—even to eth veteran knight or dame of Malta—it always inspires us, moves u to hope in humanity’s goodness and potential for greatness—and in a special way speaks of the kingdom of God and of the Gospel establishing itself in our midst. There is a sterling beauty in watching the genuineness of those men and women, teenagers and children helping others in their infirmities. We are spiritually moved as we observe the kindness and tenderness, with requisite respect, of the aides caring for the malades at the baths—in a way, almost “anointing” team with their touch and warmth of ministry. Watching youth find joy, too, in the service of the less fortunate and the needy is a sure proof

of the greatness and depth of spirituality and faith a young person can have, especially when adults take time to sincerely mentor and guide, and encourage in matters of the Faith and Christian charity. The display of love in action as seen in Lourdes is spiritual medicine for all of us who share in the experience. It emboldens us to be more alive and passionate about loving and caring—giving of ourselves unselfishly. Herein we find Jesus in a most emphatic and realistic way. Service and ministry with a pure heart and genuine humility both attract others to the Catholic-Christian Faith and it heals those who receive it. In Lourdes, like Tertullian of the 3rd century, we can actually repeat with conviction about Christian action: “See how they love one another”!

Our Lady of Lourdes who oversees your children in the healing work of charity, Mother of all hearts, true Queen of love, teach us love—daily love, healing love, humble love with purity of heart. Give us a determined love that is chivalrous in hospitality, respect and attention to every need of the sick and poor. Open our eyes and hearts to the lonely or forgotten, with a love that touches even the hidden sorrows of others and encourages them forward in hope. Mary, Our Lady of Mount Calvary, show us how to live Gospel love that reflects the sacrifice of Jesus’ Cross and Precious Blood, and the power of His Resurrection that flows unreservedly from His sacred Wounds. Amen.

Prayer

To Our Lady of Lourdes, Mary Immaculate

O Mary, you did vouchsafe to appear eighteen times all resplendent with light, maternal sweetness and beauty in the grotto of Lourdes to the pure youth St. Bernadette, and did announce and ratify that you were the Immaculate Conception. We praise you for your great privilege of being conceived without sin, and for having called us anew to your Son’s Gospel penance and conversion of life. Help us to convert daily to the virtues of the holy Gospel and

to pray for sinners. Draw us to the living waters of your Son and His Eucharistic, and healing love. Heal us of our infirmities of mind, body and soul. Keep us strong under the standard of the Cross! Rescue us from every danger. Look with maternal care upon all our needs today, both temporal and spiritual. Allow us to experience at least one ray of your burning Immaculate, maternal Heart—all aflame with love for the Holy Trinity, for Jesus Crucified and Risen, and for your divine Spouse, the Holy Spirit. Show yourself our Mother! O Mary conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to You. St Bernadette, pray for us! (*Adapted by Author, from Stedman, Ed., JMJ Novena Manual, Confraternity of the Precious Blood*).

A Prayer to Our Lady of Mount Philermos

Most beautiful Mother, mystical and radiant,
Our Lady of Philermos!

Long have you been the image and inspiration of the Order of Malta
extending back through the centuries to your shrine in Rhodes,
and now enshrined in our hearts as we serve the sick and poor,
and as we proclaim the Faith of the holy Apostles!

I kneel before you.

Your eyes compassionately gaze upon the suffering and marginalized,
the ill in mind and body, and also the spiritually impoverished—who have fallen away
from their faith or

who may be lost in adverse and dark places.

You maternally look upon those searching for truth and peace, and the victims of violence
and persecution.

Your loving eyes fall upon us, your knights and dames, and those who work at our side,
to be living extensions of your Son, the Redeemer—

To heal and soothe those in need, to caress their wounds and bind them,

to be bridges of reconciliation and unity—

and to proclaim the holy Gospel with courage and joy.

Mary, our Queen, and Mother, may our hearts be united to you

as we lift high the Cross of Jesus for the world to see and receive His love!

You mantle us in your maternal protection and guidance.

We each consecrate ourselves to your service.

Keep us faithful to the end in works of mercy and charity, always living the Beatitudes,
constant in prayer and a Eucharistic life of adoration, total self-giving and praise.
Give us closer union and friendship with Jesus everyday
and let us share Him with the world.
Guide on the way, His Way.
Our Lady of Philermos, pray for us! Amen.
(John J.D. Schweska, KM)