

*“May you always find in faith, nourished by the Word and by the Sacraments, the strength needed to love God, even in the experience of illness.”*

— Message Of His Holiness Pope Francis For The Twenty-Fifth World Day Of The Sick 2017



*“As we waited on the benches to go in, it became a time of personal, contemplative prayer.” A Caregiver*

## Welcome to the Baths at Lourdes

Soon, we will be traveling together to Lourdes, France, where Our Mother Mary made known to Bernadette the healing waters. You will have the opportunity to bathe in these sacred waters, a profoundly moving experience.

We understand you may not know what to expect. This brochure has been created to prepare you so you may draw the most benefit from your visit to the Baths in the Sanctuary in Lourdes. We hope it will help alleviate any anxiety, answer your questions and address any concerns you may have before we depart on our Pilgrimage.

### History of the Baths

In 1858, Mary appeared to Bernadette Soubirous, an uneducated French peasant girl looking for firewood in the woods. During a series of visits between February and July that year, Our Lady revealed to Bernadette a spring and invited all to prayer and penance and to wash in the waters. Our Lady also imparted to Bernadette a message for priests: “Go, tell the priests to come here in procession and to build a chapel here.”

### Spirituality of the Baths

Many travel to Lourdes to experience a deeper peace not felt before. The Pilgrimage provides an opportunity for those of us making this journey to undergo a grace-filled conversion of heart, bringing us closer to God. While we often are praying for a healing of the body, we also may seek a change, a transformation, a healing of the heart or spirit. Our immersion into the life-giving waters sanctified by Our Mother Mary is a time of renewal and refreshment. What a treasure we all have in the Blessed Mother. Your prayers to her, central to the experience of the Pilgrimage and the Baths, will be a source of comfort, hope and love as you turn to her in faith.

### The Healing Waters

The water at Lourdes has been tested, and there is nothing seemingly unusual about it, other than that it is very pure. As Catholics, we see water, tied to the sacredness of Baptism, as a sign. Combined with faith, water can heal. Many miracles have been attributed to bathing in or drinking the water at Lourdes as well as to participating in the Eucharistic Procession and Adoration. Pilgrims may experience healing in body, mind or spirit and leave with a deeper sense of God’s presence and love in their lives. Suffering is often alleviated at some level, and the experience can be profoundly life changing.

*“I think it is one of those experiences in life that one must go through to realize the magnitude of what has happened.” A Caregiver*

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## Preparing for the Baths

In the next section, **At the Baths**, we will describe what to expect when you enter the Baths. However, often people are so focused on the logistics—changing, stepping into the bath, turning to face the statue of the Blessed Mother—that they rush through or even miss the sacred moments central to the visit. We'd like to help you understand what to expect so that you may be able to set aside those concerns, savor the moment and fully experience the spirituality of the Baths.

- **Beginning at Home:** Before you leave on the Pilgrimage, think about the prayers and petitions you will want to offer while you are in the bath. You are preparing for a moment of being one with the Lord. Your petitions may be for yourself, for someone else or both, but they should be thoughtful and important to you. You don't want to find yourself overwhelmed and as a result end up missing the special moment before you. Try to be contemplative and focused.
- **Arrival at Lourdes:** When you arrive at Lourdes, but before you go to the Baths, you already will have had opportunities for prayer and reflection. On your first afternoon, you will attend the Opening Tri-Association Mass in The Rosary Basilica, concelebrated by priests from the other two associations from the United States that are in Lourdes the same week: the Federal Association and the Western Association.

- **The Morning of Your Visit to the Baths:** The next morning you will go in procession with your fellow pilgrims to St. Bernadette Chapel. Procession is in itself a sacred form of movement tied to Our Lady's message for the priests to process to the waters and build a chapel. You will share in the Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, take part in the Morning of Recollection and pray the Rosary. You will hear inspiring talks by many of the priests traveling with us, and there is the opportunity for Confession. Throughout the Morning of Recollection you will be invited to enter more deeply into the sacredness of Lourdes as you prepare to be immersed into the waters.



*"The most special moment for me. I felt as though it was just my time with the Blessed Mother." A Malade*

## At the Baths

After lunch you will process with your fellow pilgrims from your hotel to the baths. Immersion in the bath is a sacramental experience that intertwines the natural world with the spiritual. God has always touched our human lives through elements of the natural world—for example, the Bread and Wine, Moses and the Red Sea, the Loaves and Fishes and the Wedding Feast at Cana. Through the water at Lourdes, the Blessed Mother connects us to her and to the love of her Son Jesus Christ.

With this in mind, we recommend that, to the extent you can, you focus on the true meaning of what is happening when you go into the bath. It is understandable that you will be a little nervous and distracted by the process. Be aware, but let others deal with the overall logistics. Surrender to what you are about to experience, and try to put the distractions aside as you step into the water.

When our procession arrives at the baths, you will break off into separate areas for men, women and children. Attendants of the same sex, called Hospitallers, will welcome you. Members of our Association will be present in the waiting area to help direct you.



- **The Waiting Area:** Your first stop will be the waiting area. It is outside, covered by an awning. There may be some music or someone praying the rosary. This is a place for silent, peaceful prayer. We recommend you use it to consider the intentions you will want to bring into the bath.

- **The Changing Room:** When it is your turn, you will be directed to enter the building where the baths are. You will see a number of stalls with curtains. After entering one of the stalls, you will undress. Note: You and your caregiver may ask to go together into the same changing room, or to go into the private bath area to pray together.

**Women:** Please be assured that every provision is in place to protect your privacy and modesty. The attendants are skilled at covering you during the steps that follow. You will be asked to take off all your clothes, including undergarments. Once undressed, you will be wrapped in a blue cloth to ensure your complete privacy. You may hang your clothes on the hook above your assigned chair and place your shoes under the chair. Then you will sit, waiting to enter the bath. You may want to arrange for safekeeping of valuables at the hotel or with a companion. Also, as the attendants will insist that you put back on everything you wear in, you may want to leave items like stockings back in the hotel.

**Men:** You will undress to your underpants, hanging your clothes on the back of your chair and putting your shoes under your seat. Then you will sit on a bench waiting to enter the bath. You may want to arrange for safekeeping of valuables at the hotel or with a companion.

- **Stepping Into the Bath:** The entrance to the bath is covered with a white curtain. The curtain will be opened, and you will be brought individually into the bath area itself. The curtain will then be closed behind you. You will see a stone tub, slightly bigger than a standard bathtub, with fresh, circulating water. Here, there will be an attendant who speaks English, and the attendants tend to be warm and kind. You will be wrapped in a thin cloth that has been dipped in the bath water. Be prepared; it is cold.

You will be led to the top of the steps that go down into the water. There will be an attendant on either side of you guiding you. This is where you may want to pause, surrender and place yourself in God's presence as you prepare for a powerful experience to be renewed in the spirit of God's love and mercy that comes from the healing waters.

*"Spiritual beyond description. I had a few reasonable requests of our Blessed Mother and was pleased that She interceded on my behalf." A Malade*

- **At Prayer:** At the steps leading into the water, you will be joined by the attendants for a moment of prayer. You will also have a moment to lift up the prayer intentions you have brought with you and place them into the loving arms of the Blessed Mother. You may offer your intentions either silently or in a quiet voice to yourself. This is a profoundly powerful moment. Take the time to prepare for the sacredness of the Lourdes waters. When you are finished, make the sign of the cross, which will tell the attendants you are ready.
- **Immersion:** When you have completed your initial intentions and prayers, you will step down until you are knee deep in the water. Your attendants will gently guide and immerse you into the water up to your neck. The dip will only take a moment. Yes, the water is cold, and you literally have placed yourself into the hands of others, but try to focus on the water as a grace-filled connection between you and Our Lady of Lourdes. Not everyone chooses to be immersed. Whether for medical or other reasons, you may simply want to have the water poured on your hands or feet. This is your decision. There is no need to feel guilty about not being immersed. Be sure to communicate your preference to the English-speaking attendants.
- **Drinking From the Pitcher:** When you are once again upright, you will have an opportunity to drink from a pitcher of the healing waters. This water is not drawn from the baths but from the drinking faucets, which have the spring as their source. You will also have another opportunity, as you face the statue of Mary, to spend a few added moments in prayer.
- **Leaving the Bath:** Your attendants will help you out of the bath. Most people find that they dry off immediately.

The speed with which you dry off is a beautiful part of the sacred mystery, of the joy and peace so many experience at the baths. You will return to the changing room to dress. The attendants will insist you put back on everything you have brought.

**Women:** You will once again be shielded by the blue cape, insuring your full privacy.

**Men:** In the corner, with a blue cape to shield, the white cloth will be removed, and you will put on your underwear.

You will return to the changing room to dress. The attendants will insist you put back on everything you have brought. Once dressed, you will exit the building and rejoin the members of the Order who brought you to the Baths. They will be watching for you.

- **Caring for Children:** Within the men's and women's baths, there are separate areas for children, where the child is accompanied by a parent or other guardian. If you are a parent accompanying a young child, you also will be undressing as described above. Young children will be given a bowl of water and instructed to wash their hands and face. They will also be provided a cup filled with water from the spring to drink. Older children and teenagers may choose to be immersed in the baths if they wish, going through a similar process as described for the women and men above. The bath attendants are trained to assist children throughout the bathing process, and we suggest you rely heavily on them to guide your child through the bath. If you have questions about the bath for your child, please speak to one of your Team Captains and ask to be put in touch with the Bath Coordinators, who can guide you through the process of bringing a child to the Baths.

### Some Practical Information

- You do not have to bring a bathing suit or towel. Everything you need will be provided at the Baths.
- We make reservations for our Malades and Caregivers in advance. You may bring with you your Caregiver or a Knight or Dame. (However, you may bring only one.) This individual will accompany you to the Baths but will enter the bath separately from you.
- The water is constantly circulated and tested.

### Care and Comfort

We enter the baths in a vulnerable state, much as a child enters the world. However, we are not alone. May you find comfort in knowing that the Holy Spirit and the Blessed Mother are watching over you and filling you with grace each step of the way. We hope this brochure has shown you that caring attendants will be by your side during your visit to the baths. We also hope you now will be better prepared spiritually so that you may fully appreciate the profound nature of this sacred experience.

