

A.M.D.G.

Homily, Our Lady of Lourdes, 2025, Jesuit Tampa

550, 000 – The total number of fans at home Bucs games. 2023-2024

787,772 – Total number of spectators at home Lightning games 2023-2024

4 million – the total number of people who went to Busch Gardens in 2023

5 million – the total number of people who visit the Shrine of Lourdes each year, from 80 different countries. It is one of the most popular pilgrimage sites in the world.

Lourdes is a small French town tucked into the foothills of the Pyrenes with a river running through it. Ever since Mary appeared to a young peasant girl named Bernadette Soubirous on a ledge in a rock next to the bank of the river, while she was gathering fire wood to keep her family warm in the winter, pilgrims have flocked to the place. Lourdes is known especially for healing miracles, often times through bathing in the waters that flow from a spring that burst forth underneath where Our Lady was standing. There have been 70 miracles associated with Lourdes that are officially recognized by the Church, and thousands upon thousands of unofficial healings over the years. There is a room under the main Church that has hundreds and hundreds of crutches and memorial plaques hanging from the walls.

Our Lady of Lourdes reminded the Church that healing is a constitutive part of the ministry of Jesus. Throughout the Gospels we hear stories of Jesus healing the sick and casting out demons, physical manifestations of the coming of the Kingdom of God. Jesus passed on this power to his disciples, who also healed people and exorcised evil. The Church down the centuries has continued this mission of Jesus, and that is why we have accounts of healing miracles throughout the history of the Church. Holy sites like Lourdes concentrate this power of healing in the Church, but one need not go to a holy site to receive the grace of healing.

Now many of you are no doubt skeptical about miraculous healings, and for legitimate reasons. Neither you nor anyone you know has probably ever been healed from any ailment of body, even when perhaps you prayed for it. Moreover, perhaps you have been taken by the argument that miracles were a thing reported in the past because people were superstitious and they did not

have scientific methods to falsify the claims. Now, we with the rigors of science can dispel any claims of healing miracles through disciplined investigation.

Well, every one of the authenticated miracles of Lourdes went through a process of scientific investigation that yielded the result that no natural explanation could be found for the healing. Science has actually helped the Church validate the miracles.

But what about your own experience, where has Jesus been when you needed a miracle in your life? That is a good question. Well, I have a challenge for you then, to test this doubt against experience. I believe, and I have seen the power of Jesus heal people. And I believe that Jesus desires to continue to heal those who come to Him in faith.

But perhaps physical healing is not what you need. French peasants of the nineteenth century suffered primarily from physical illnesses. St. Bernadette herself had tuberculosis, which eventually killed her. So most of the miracles of Lourdes are physical healings. But there is also spiritual wounds that people carry, which need spiritual healing. In our time this is the far more common illness. Thanks to modern medicine and a good diet we are quite healthy physically. Our sicknesses tend to be more interior and spiritual. Christ also came to heal those diseases, if only we would come to Him in faith.

Let me offer you an example. I took a group of students on a pilgrimage to Lourdes several years ago. One of the students in the group was a star soccer player, hoping to play D1 in college. He told me at the end of the pilgrimage that he only went on the trip for the tourist aspect of it. He was not interested in the spiritual part. But something changed his attitude when we arrived in Lourdes. We went as a group to the Grotto. That is the place where Mary appeared to Bernadette and where the spring of water flows out of the rock. Pilgrims walk along the side of the rock, which is a cave shape. We stopped to pray for a few minutes in silence on the benches. After about ten minutes I looked around and the soccer star was weeping very deeply. I was a bit surprised, but just prayed for him and left him to himself. At the end of the pilgrimage he told me that Mary spoke to him about his grandfather, who had died recently, causing him deep inner pain because was like a father to him since his parents were divorced and he had almost no

contact with his father. Mary told him in his heart that his grandfather was still looking out for him in heaven and was at peace. This message brought him deep consolation, and healed a wound in him that had festered in the months following his grandfather's passing, the wound that he was abandoned and alone.

Sometimes the wounds in our hearts cause us more pain than the injuries of our bodies, and they also prove harder to heal. But our hope is in Jesus Christ, who came to heal the brokenhearted, to bind up the wounds of our hearts and shed light on the darkness of our souls. I encourage you to pray for healing if you are suffering from inner wounds. If students want, maybe we can organize a Mass of healing one day, maybe in Lent, and call upon the Lord, and Our Lady's intercession, for the healing of our hearts.