

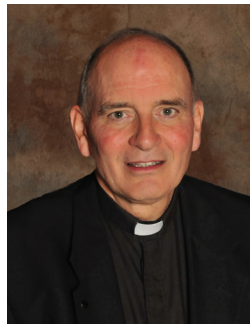
only three months from huge Indiana fieldstone boulders.

The Grotto's principal features, like faith itself, are simple and direct. Placed in an elevated niche is a statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary, as she appeared in Lourdes. Kneeling before her and praying the Rosary, is Bernadette Soubirous, who was canonized a saint in 1933. The land which stretches out from the Grotto itself toward St. Mary's Lake originally sloped from the back of the Basilica of the Sacred Heart down to the water. When the first Main Building was destroyed by fire in 1879, the burnt remains were deposited here. During the construction of the Grotto, that same charred rubbish, spread out and covered by soil, became the welcoming plaza that still invites visitors to stop and pray at the Grotto.

The hundreds of candles within the Grotto are one of its most impressive features. The burning of votive candles is a visible symbol of prayers offered to God, to Mary, or to the saints. The tiny yet persistent flames one sees burning here day or night testify to the faith of countless believers.

In this quiet place of prayer, one may experience healing and strength for oneself or for others, especially through the intercession of Our Lady of Lourdes, the Immaculate Virgin Mary. May she intercede for us all.

A native of Chicago and a graduate of Notre Dame, Fr. Peter Rocca, C.S.C., was ordained in 1974 and was assigned to pastoral duties at St. Ignatius Martyr in Austin Texas. He then attended the Catholic University of America where he received two additional Masters degrees: one, in Liturgical Studies, the other in Liturgical Music. In 1980, he returned to the University of Notre Dame where he has served as Director of Liturgy at Moreau Seminary as well as assists on the formation staff. From 1984-1997, he served as Assistant Vice President for Student Services at Notre Dame. In 1997, he was appointed Rector of the University Church, the Basilica of the Sacred Heart, which position he held for twenty-three years. Currently, in addition to his duties at the seminary, Fr. Rocca also teaches classes in the Masters of Divinity Program and serves as Chaplain for the ROTC students at the University of Notre Dame.



A publication of the Congregation of Holy Cross,
United States Province of Priests and Brothers
Office of Development
P.O. Box 765, Notre Dame, Indiana 46556-0765
www.holycrossusa.org
development@holycrossusa.org

APRIL 2020



MONTHLY REFLECTION SERIES

The Grotto of
Our Lady of Lourdes at
The University of Notre Dame
by Rev. Peter Rocca, C.S.C.

Many visitors to Notre Dame probably think that the football stadium is the most popular site on campus. They are unaware of the fact that the Grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes equals if not surpasses the popularity of the “house that Rockne built.” Countless students, faculty, staff, alumni, and visitors have come to the Grotto to pray, day or night, since it was first built in 1896. It had long been the dream of Father Edward Sorin, C.S.C., the founder of the University of Notre Dame, that a grotto be built on campus which would replicate the grotto-like cave of Massabielle, near Lourdes in France. Here the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared eighteen times, from February 11 to July 16, 1858, to fourteen-year old Bernadette Soubirous, the firstborn daughter of François and Louise Soubirous. Bernadette describes in a letter the first apparition of Our Lady:

I had gone down one day with two other girls to the bank of the River Gave when suddenly I heard a kind of rustling sound. I turned my head toward the field by the side of the river but the trees seemed quite still and the noise was evidently not from them. Then I looked up and caught sight of the cave where I saw a lady wearing a lovely white dress with a bright belt. On top of each of her feet was a pale yellow rose, the same color as her Rosary beads. At this I rubbed my eyes, thinking I was seeing things, and I put my hands into the fold of my dress where my Rosary was. I wanted to make the sign of the cross but for the life of me I couldn't manage it and my hand just fell down. Then the lady made the sign of the cross herself and



at the second attempt I managed to do the same, though my hands were trembling. Then I began to say the Rosary while the lady let her beads slip through her fingers, without moving her lips. When I stopped saying the Hail Mary, she immediately vanished.

In subsequent apparitions, Mary spoke to Bernadette of God's love and the need for personal conversion and prayer. During these visits, Mary asked that a chapel be built near where the appearances occurred. In her final apparition, Mary revealed herself as the Immaculate Conception. The Church declared Bernadette's claims “worthy of belief” and the site became known as the Shrine of Our Lady of Lourdes.

Seventeen years earlier, in 1841, the

“ Hail Mary, Full of Grace, the Lord is with thee ... ”

religious community of the Congregation of Holy Cross, founded by Blessed Basil Moreau, had sent the Rev. Edward Sorin, C.S.C., and six religious Brothers from Le Mans, France, to the mission territory of Indiana. A year later, in 1842, they established the University of Notre Dame.

Father Sorin was very much taken by the extraordinary apparitions at Lourdes and made a point of visiting the French shrine several times. He could not help but be moved by this special place of prayer and healing, which today remains one of the most visited of all Catholic pilgrimage sites in the world.

It was only after the death of Father Sorin in 1893, however, that his dream of building a grotto in honor of Our Lady of Lourdes would be realized. A Holy Cross priest and President Emeritus of the University, the Rev. William Corby, C.S.C., moved by Fr. Sorin's devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, worked to finance and build the Grotto with money donated from a friend and Notre Dame alumnus, the Rev. Thomas Carroll. One-seventh the size of its French prototype, the Grotto at Notre Dame was built in