

MOVEMENTS IN OUR HEARTS

STORIES FROM ORDER OF MALTA'S 61ST INTERNATIONAL PILGRIMAGE TO LOURDES – MAY 2019

Led by the Grand Master, Fra' Giacomo Dalla Torre del Tempio di Sanguinetto, 7,400 people, including 1300 Malades from 45 countries congregated at the Marian sanctuary in Lourdes for the most important of the Order's pilgrimages.

Our delegation was made up of 30 pilgrims from Hong Kong, 10 from Korea and 11 from Australia.



We continued our now traditional collaboration with the Irish Association providing volunteers to accompany their Malades. This year there were Irish 45 Malades warded at Saint Claire's in Accueil Notre Dame. 25 lower dependency Malades were accommodated at Hotel Roissy.

We were formed into various teams to take care of transporting Malades to events and outings; ward duties and medical shifts. Hong Kong volunteers also manned the Global Fund for Forgotten People desk. For the first time, we have volunteers assisting at the Baths. They worked in teams in four-hour shifts to assist a constant stream of pilgrims and Malades immerse and pray in waters from the spring that appeared miraculously in 1858. All volunteers reported that they were deeply moved by their experience.





The signature events at the Pilgrimage were the Eucharistic procession with the sick to the Sanctuary, the Pontifical High Mass in the Basilica of St. Pius X celebrated this year by the Archbishop of New York, Timothy Cardinal Dolan, and the candlelight Marian procession.

Each saw several thousand participants in a gentle, harmonious outpouring of faith. Our own Grotto Mass, heard under umbrellas on a wet two-degree morning, was magnificent.

We can only speculate the majestic movements in the hearts of the Magis after their encounter with Jesus, Mary and Joseph one silent night two thousand years ago. And the newness in their lives when they returned home.

Our pilgrims were similarly graced during and after the pilgrimage. It is a joy to share with you their reflections.



Holy Moments at the Baths

Jenny Choy: Serving at the Baths, assisting and accompanying the pilgrims' innermost moments with Holy Mary is a blessing to me. Through what we did with the pilgrims in silence and with a gentle smile at all times, I came to experience the loving heart of Holy Mary and how tender it is of the grace that She is sending to us. I am an unworthy servant; may Holy Mary be my guide so that I will do what is needed when is needed.



Paul Maher: The faith of pilgrims praying intently before plunging in the 12C water and their gratitude to the volunteers. The stretcher-borne American, in pain, uncomplaining, praying for the return of his siblings to the church, enduring the manhandling and plunge, then filled with joy and gratitude – “Thank you so much. You guys do a great job.”

The brain-damaged young Czech man, unable to speak, but clearly aware, and wanting to bathe, who prayed with us, smiled and was clearly joyful after his plunge....and many others who in their suffering strengthened my faith.....I'm yearning for 1 May 2020!

Hyewon Helene Chung: My first pilgrimage with the Order of Malta reminded me of my previous visit to Lourdes 10 years ago with my family. During that visit, I had a few prayers in my mind. God had responded though I have forgotten those prayers until I volunteered for the Baths this year.

I had a spine condition when I was young. During my adolescent years I was dependent on an orthosis attached to my back. Though the orthosis eventually came off, I still was admitted to the hospital annually at least for a month to relieve any excess burden placed on my spine. Giving birth was a great challenge, but the Blessed Mother was kind to hear my prayers and I was blessed with a healthy son. However, I was never free from the fear of pain until 10 years ago.

During my visit to Lourdes 10 years ago, I had the chance to be bathed in the very same premises where I volunteered this year. My prayers back then must have been answered. Since then, I have been healthy and capable to physically live my life not different than any healthy person. Perhaps this lack of difference was why I have not thought of my earnest prayers from back then.

On my second day at the Baths this year in Lourdes, the room where I was volunteering in switched to accepting children. Only when I started greeting the children to the room did I realise what the change meant: I was to assist children who were dependent on devices not different from my own orthosis.

Assisting the children undo and redo their orthoses reminded me of the cold feeling coming from the devices - memories which I had buried deep inside myself. It all came back to me so quickly - how cold the orthosis was and how hurt I was from the strange and cold stares.

I was shaken by the sensation of sympathy for the children's inconveniences and their mothers' sorrow. Had I assisted only adults; I would not have had the same experience. That moment, I realised God had guided me back here as a volunteer so I could be an evidence of His miracle. I also realised the meaning of being relieved of physical pain is to do God's work better.

While helping the children warm up from the cold water and orthoses, I prayed to the Blessed Mother. I will always remain thankful that I can be of assistance.

Sung-kyoon Francisco Lim: The pilgrimage in Lourdes was especially touching for its beauty under the Pyrenees. The Eucharistic Procession, Grotto Mass, Basilica Mass, and Candlelight Procession were all holy and majestic. I felt our Blessed Mother's presence in Lourdes with her warm and kind smile whenever we assisted the Malades. The Pilgrimage helped me realise that God is within the sick and aged Malades, and that one day, we could be in the same shoes. It was an honorable experience joining the Bath team to assist the Malades seek to heal their body and mind and feel our Blessed Mother's blessing upon them.

Hearts Are Touched

Jenny Yu: Praise to the Lord – Praise to Our Lady of Lourdes. Lourdes is a place deep in my heart; it is a place filled with faith and love. I am truly grateful I joined Order of Malta Hong Kong this year and be able act as a little servant.

Compared with the first two solo pilgrimage back in 2016 and 2018, the exceptional experience this round is unforgettable. Not only the comprehensive program that makes a huge difference, the team spirit offering the little helping hands together is unique; though physically exhausted, it is spiritually rewarded.

The pilgrimage provides spiritual healing. Through tears in touching moments, walking in faith with Malades, praying wholeheartedly day and night to Jesus and Mother Mary.

The sick is not always on the wheelchair. The one standing next to you might be seriously ill. Let's continue to pray for one another, for the sick and those next to you even though you might not know their names.

David Blackwell: This was my second pilgrimage to Lourdes and I again was privileged to have a unique opportunity to fully experience the charism of our Order, service to the sick and the poor, while joining together with members of the Order from across the globe in an international community of service and faith.

I learned firsthand what belonging to the Order of Malta really means – devotion, service, and fellowship. Linked as it is with hands-on service, the pilgrimage offers a unique spiritual experience where we come into close contact with Our Lady. Personally, I felt very close to my late wife Terry, especially at the Grotto, the Crypt and in the Basilica of the Immaculate Conception.

Pilgrims, together with Malades, experience interior miracles—people who are ill, even dying, are able to leave Lourdes with an inner peace they did not before experience: “Anyone who drinks the water that I shall give will never thirst again: the water that I shall give will turn into a spring within them, welling up to eternal life.”- John 4:14



Jiwon Bernard Kim: As a first-time participant to the Order of Malta's Lourdes Pilgrimage, I felt both excited and anxious before arriving Lourdes. After arrival, my mind became peaceful and cleansed. The atmosphere coming from a sacred place definitely is a factor, though I believe it mostly also came from a well-organised program and friendly faces of the members of the Order of Malta who come from all over the world.

It was an amazing experience communing with the Malades and I was deeply touched by all the warmth we shared. The atmosphere and environment were perfect for praying and volunteering. All these elements helped me in achieving a spiritual growth. I am looking forward to participating in the Order of Malta's Lourdes Pilgrimage again. I would definitely like to participate every year as far as my conditions allow.

Yoosun Theresa Chung: My first Pilgrimage to Lourdes with the Order of Malta can be summarised in three words: concern, gratitude, and joy.

Before leaving for the Pilgrimage I was honestly concerned for being part of something I have never done before and anxious that I may not be able to assist the Malades properly. But after the Pilgrimage started, I was constantly feeling grateful that I could take part in this wonderful program that has been going on for 61 years.

Each Mass and religious ceremony was absolutely meaningful and beautiful. Additionally, I was so touched by every Malade I assisted or talked with. Though I participated in the Pilgrimage to assist, I feel like I was the one on the receiving end. The Malades filled me with so much joy and shared their wisdom in life. I look forward to becoming a regular participant of the Pilgrimage every year.

Benjamin Lee: Lourdes was life changing and I vow to dedicate the remainder of my days to the Order of Malta in the service of humanity!

Front Line Encounters

Yongmaan Silvano Park: It was during the short waiting period for the Malades to return from the Baths. Numerous volunteers and Malades were passing by. My eyes randomly landed on one of the exits and I saw Douglas. I assisted Douglas last year in Lourdes. I was extremely surprised to meet him again this year, as it was my understanding Lourdes is known as the final place to visit, where many seek the last miracle.

I was even more surprised to see Douglas appearing so much healthier than last year. My joy was returned by Douglas' wide smile recognizing me. I was thankful to meet Douglas again and to see him in better health.

After returning to Korea, a friend of mine living in Germany texted and told me that she was in a minor car crash not long ago and was having difficulty in recovering. She went on and told me that I was in her dream and somehow, I knew her physical pain and consulted her about the painful spot. She explained how she woke up and recalled the dream and thought to herself maybe her pain would actually go away.

To me, this story comes as a small miracle. It is amazing how it was I who was in her dream and how specifically the dream was about healing physical pain while I was in Lourdes, the sacred place known for the miracles of healing. Now, I pray that she will tell me one day her pain is completely gone.

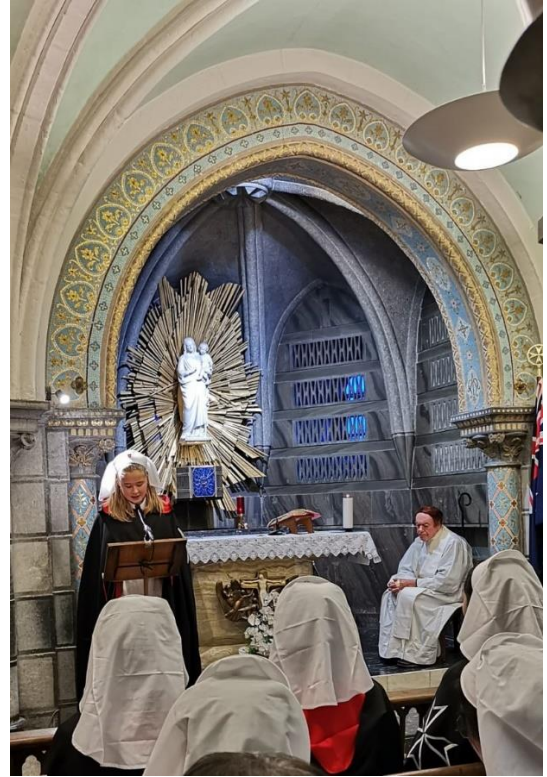
Christopher Schaffer: What an amazing experience again. Making wonderful new friends and meeting wonderful old friends. This year, although the schedule was much the same, seemed busier and more full on.

One particularly memorable moment for me was after a long day. My Malade wanted to go back to her hotel even though the event wasn't over. Not a problem, I can help there. We got back and I said goodbye, but she refused to let me go until we had a cuppa at the hotel's café. We just had a lovely quiet chat. It was a good reminder that sometimes we all need downtime and perhaps every now and then we should get away from the hustle and bustle for some peace and quiet (even when on a pilgrimage!).



A Word from our Chaplain

Fr Malcolm Fyfe: I found this year's pilgrimage far more meaningful and engaging for a number of reasons. I was able to interact at a more personal level with all members of the Australian group. We seemed to grow more bonded together this year and thereby able to share more deeply with each other. Clearly, we were all committed to deepening our relationship with the Lord while honouring his Mother Mary and doing this in conformity with the charism and objectives of the Order of Malta. Let me add that it was a privilege to be able to play some small part as Chaplain. I want to thank all those who made this possible.



To conclude, here is an excerpt from a letter from Rev. Fr Guy Tardivy, O.P., Conventual Chaplain Grand Cross “ad honorem”, General Spiritual Director of the International Pilgrimage of the Sovereign Order of Malta to Lourdes:

In this year, 2019, we celebrate the Holy Year of Bernadette. 175 years ago, Saint Bernadette was born and was baptized. This April 16th is the 140th anniversary of her death.

The pastoral theme of Lourdes for this year calls us to follow the path of Bernadette to discover true Life and true Happiness, as the Virgin suggested to Bernadette at the Grotto of Massabielle.

Bernadette found her happiness in the service of the poorest, entering the Congregation of the Sisters of Charity in Nevers. Through the special attention that the Virgin gave her, Bernadette learned that the Lord is revealed in the poor. To care for the poor – to meet them, to help them and, especially, to love them – opens the eyes and the heart to something other than appearances. This is the happiness of the other world, of the World to Come, and it is capable of transforming ugliness with a kiss of love.

Let's prepare now for the 62nd Order of Malta's Pilgrimage to Lourdes in 2020!

Daniel Kwok, 24 May 2019