Homily for Our Lady of Lourdes – Year C

Ever since I watched the movie “Song of Bernadette” many years ago I just “fell in love” with St. Bernadette and the Marian apparitions at Lourdes. Several years ago, I was very fortunate to lead a 2-week pilgrimage to Portugal, Spain and France, which included stopping for a few days in Lourdes. I hope to return within a few years, but if I never do, I have enough memories for a lifetime. My experience of Lourdes, while busy and somewhat crowded, was still profound. What struck me the most was the presence of the beautiful sick and disabled people there in faith and hope and the volunteers helping them get around the large “sanctuary” area surrounding the apparition site. There must have been hundreds and hundreds of sick and disabled people being helped around on crutches, wheelchairs and hospital beds even during the nightly rosary procession, which alone is worth the trip. Seeing all the consecrated sisters helping the sick and the, volunteers, from all over the world, freely giving themselves with unconditional love to these sick people without expecting a reward is truly what St. John Paul II meant that through a sincere gift of self, we truly find ourselves. You certainly experience the dignity of the human person and the dignity of our bodies, even sick and disabled bodies, at Lourdes.

While the town of Lourdes is very busy and commercial, it still houses the old prison where St. Bernadette and her family lived, as well as the mill, where her father worked for a time. These places and others are certainly accessible and worth experiencing by guided or self-guided tours. However, to truly experience Lourdes, Mary and St. Bernadette one should spend most of their time in the sanctuary observing how God, through His sacraments and through us people, brings hope to the hopeless in their suffering. As we know the Evil One will attack people when they are weak, suffering, ill, etc. with discouragement, dismay, depression and even despair. The presence of God in us can be uplifting and even healing for people interiorly when they realize how much love, compassion, tenderness and mercy God truly has for them. This is one reason Lourdes can be so powerful and experience because God is so present there, not only in the Blessed Sacrament, Holy Mass, and Anointing of the Sick, but also in our care, concern and mercy for them. The nightly Rosary processions are a microcosm of endurance and perseverance of people in faith and hope as they are wheeled around the sanctuary at Lourdes. It is also very uplifting and healing for those not diagnosed with a physical disability or sickness. By witnessing the faith and true goodness among human persons amidst the suffering, this is true Theology of the Body, even the suffering body. No small wonder that St. John Paul II, as pope, named February 11, the Memorial of Our Lady of Lourdes - the World day of the Sick. We must NEVER forget the dignity of the sick and suffering body - children of the Crucified Christ.

All of this has been the work of the Almighty and good God through the intercession of our Mother Mary - Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception and the simple faith of a local peasant girl named Bernadette.

Father Tom DeSimone was ordained a priest on May 13, 2006, the Feast day of Our Lady of Fatima. He most recently served as Parochial Vicar of Our Lady of Sorrows Parish in White Plains, NY. He joins the staff of the Theology of the Body Institute on a three year leave from the Archdiocese of New York, to become the Institute's first full time spiritual advisor and Director of Clergy Development.