



The Armor of Faith

Topic Summary: Miracles and Faith

Part VII: Our Lady of Lourdes



Our Lady of Lourdes
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Introduction

[Greeting:] → Welcome to “The Armor of Faith,” a show where we hope to bring our listeners closer to the Word of God and the blessings we receive through living in the fullness of the Catholic faith. My name is Doug and I will be your host as we discuss the blessings of the Church Christ built upon Peter.

I am joined today by some special guests who I will introduce in a moment, but let us open first with a prayer:

Heavenly Father, we lift up our hearts in thanks and praise for this opportunity to open and share your Holy Word this day. We pray that You are with us and all our listeners as we share with one another the blessings of faith. We pray You will grant us wisdom and understanding as we seek to learn Your Holy Truth.

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit we pray.

Discussion:

Today marks the beginning of our second year of broadcasting with our 53rd episode. We would like to thank our listeners, the owner and staff of WCAT Radio, Halo Haven Ministries, and everyone who participates on the Armor of Faith Radio team for the opportunity to share our various discussions concerning the blessings of our faith.

As we began Armor of Faith Radio, we mentioned that if we do not know our faith, we leave ourselves vulnerable to the one who endeavors to take it from us. The discovery of all the

blessings of our faith is a life long journey. We mark our lives with major milestones such as baptism, confirmation, first communion, and marriage through which we take a moment to learn about our faith, but our learning should not stop here. To understand the fullness of faith requires a life long effort of study, prayer, and discernment. While an opportunity for our learning begins with instruction we receive during the course of the Mass, we must also endeavor to augment our learning through such opportunities as bible study, prayer, various forms of religious formation, and participation in ministry.

We would like to thank our listeners for spending time with us, as one of our objectives is to generate discussion through which we all might learn and grow in faith. We hope you enjoyed our last year, and in case you missed an episode or would like to listen again, we would like to remind you that you can access episodes on demand at:

<http://www.wcatradio.com/armoroffaith.html>

Today, Dan and Helen are not with us. They are currently with family as their daughter went through surgery to donate a kidney to a daughter-in-law of the Hawkins. Dan and Helen are helping with the care of their grand children as the two women recover from their respective surgeries. We hope you will join us in keeping the Hawkins family in our prayers during this time of recovery.

As I mentioned, we have some special guests today as we are being visited by our Son and His Family, so we have an opportunity to gain their perspective as we discuss questions concerning miracles and faith.

Last time, we discussed the apparitions of Mary which led to the striking of what we refer to as the Miraculous Medal. I mentioned that as we examine miracles such as the apparition of Our Blessed Mother to Saint Catherine, we have no tangible evidence to examine in the same fashion as the *tilma* of Our Lady of Guadalupe. I also mentioned that even the most faithful of priests much take care in the consideration of reports of visions because of the confusion and damage which a hoax may cause, but that does not mean such miracles do not happen. It means we must take care in our examination, not only from the perspective of validity, but also from the standpoint of what God is communicating to us.

As we experience God, it should not surprise us that we may also experience the supernatural, for God is not of this world, but the Creator of this world. At the same time, we must also consider that miracles are not our cause for faith, but it is our faith which allows us to recognize and accept the miracles of God.

Catholics are criticized as idolaters, and indeed, if we worshiped the Miraculous Medal, we would be. If we understand, however, its purpose to enable us to reflect upon the grace of God, then, we see it is no different than the bronze seraph which Moses placed on the pole at the instruction of God.

As we discussed, some may misunderstand that the Miraculous Medal is something which it is not. It is not a charm to bring us wealth, riches and materiel good fortune. It is a reminder of the graces we receive from God. Grace is truly wealth and riches, but not the wealth and riches of the material world, for the substance of such things shall wither and decay. Grace is the wealth

and riches of our relationship with God. Grace is the gift of God; His favor and His help to respond to His call. It should be no wonder to us, then, that the faithful poor find happiness despite their poverty of the world while happiness eludes those who have all manner of worldly wealth, but who lack a relationship with God.

During our discussion concerning miracles and faith, we noted the trials and challenges of those who experience, witness, or receive third hand accounts of a miracle. As we began to examine Marian Apparitions of post biblical times, we note the response of those who believe and the skeptical. This is perhaps a common theme we might expect as the result of any miracle, but perhaps we give too much attention to the event rather than asking the question, what is God communicating through a given miracle?

By this time, we may also note a theme where the lives of those who experience a miracle are forever changed. With this change comes blessings as well as challenges. The first hurdle they face is what to tell others. Who would not be excited by a vision of our Blessed Mother? Still, in our society, to speak of such things risks far more negative attention than positive.

Today, we will discuss the miracle, or I should say miracles, associated with Our Lady of Lourdes. The story begins on 11 February 1858, as Bernadette, the daughter of Francois and Louise Soubirous, along with her sister and a friend, were in search of firewood. The girls approached a grotto area. Bernadette hung behind as her sister and friend took off their shoes to wade across the a stream. As Bernadette began to remove her own shoes, so she might follow, she heard a noise, like a rushing wind, from the vicinity of the grotto.

As Bernadette looked up, she saw “a Lady dressed in white, wearing a white dress, a blue girdle and a yellow rose on each foot, the same color as the chain of her Rosary: the beads of her Rosary were white.” As the woman began to pray the Rosary, Bernadette took out her own beads and prayed with her. After completing the prayers, the woman beckoned Bernadette to approach, but when Bernadette hung back, the woman disappeared. (*Our Lady of Lourdes and St. Bernadette*, pg1)

(Question 1: So, lets put ourselves in the shoes of this 14 year old girl. What might our thoughts be in such a moment, especially after praying with someone who disappeared as suddenly as she appeared?)

At first, Bernadette said nothing of what she saw, but after some questioning by her sister and friend, Bernadette revealed her experience who then told Bernadette's parents.

(Question 2: So, now, we are in the shoes of the parents of a 14 year old girl who relates the experience of her vision. What, as parents, might we think of the report of our child?)

During the course of the visions, Bernadette was told to tell the priests that a chapel should be built on the grounds of the grotto.

(Question 3: So, now we are the priest who, through the accounts of a 14 year old girl, receives the request, through a vision, that a chapel should be built. I should point out, that at this time,

Bernadette did not know the woman she saw in her visions was our Blessed Mother. **How might we, in the position of a priest, react to such a conversation?)**

Local authorities received word of Bernadette's reports. They detained, interrogated, and harassed her, attempting to trip her up in regards to her story. She withstood all questioning and was consistent in her accounts.

(Question 4: So, now we are officials in authority. We hear of the stir being caused by the reports of this 14 year old girl. **How, as government authorities, might we react to such a situation?)**

Of course, there was much discussion by the towns people. As they heard that Bernadette was being detained by the authorities, they reacted as well.

(Question 5: Now, we are in the shoes of members of the community. **When we hear the accounts over several days, then, hear that Bernadette has been harshly detained, what might our reaction be?)**

After several visits, on 25 March, the Feast of the Annunciation of the Virgin Mary, Bernadette went once more to the grotto and inquired of the Lady as to her identity. Our Blessed Mother responded, "I am the Immaculate Conception." These were the last words reportedly spoken by our Lady to Bernadette.

To understand the importance of this statement, we must understand a relationship of time. It was only four years earlier that Pope Pius the IX proclaimed the infallible dogma of the Immaculate Conception, which means Mary was conceived without original sin so she may be unblemished as the woman who became the Mother of the only begotten Son of God. It is possible that Bernadette had heard news of this proclamation, but it is also reported that this was already a common belief of Catholics at the time.

(Question 6: Let's place ourselves in the shoes of any of the faithful of the time. **If we had only recently (in historical terms, not Internet time) received news of the infallible teaching of the Pope and also heard of this statement attributed to Our Lady, what might we think?)**

Of course, we do not have time to go into all the details of the story, but as we move forward, we know that Lourdes has become a place of pilgrimage with many reports of miraculous cures. The most recent instance was the healing of a French nun who had suffered from an acute sciatic nerve condition which made it difficult for her to walk. At the age of 78, she made a trip to Lourdes. She did not ask for any type of healing, but after returning from the pilgrimage, she reported a voice told her to remove the braces she wore. Suddenly, she found her foot was able to straighten out and she was able to walk without the assistance of a walker. The next day, she was able to walk 5 kilometers in the forest with her sister-in-law. (Paone)

(Question 7: Let us place ourselves in the position of Sister Bernadette Moriau. **How might we react to receiving a miraculous healing?)**

Over the years, there have been millions who have made a pilgrimage to Lourdes with over 7,000 reported cures. Only 70 of these cases are approved by the Catholic Church as recognized miraculous cures.

(Question 8: The Church has a very strict process for the investigation of what is attributed to the miraculous. What do we think some of the criteria might be before the Church approves the report of a cure as miraculous?)

(spontaneous, instantaneous, complete healing from a documented medical condition, doctors report there is no scientific explanation for the recovery)

Traditionally, there are four gifts attributed to Lourdes: the gift of miraculous water, the gift of healing, the gift of reconciliation, the gift of strength and friendship.

(Question 9: Let us place ourselves in the position of a pilgrim to Lourdes. Many who make the pilgrimage are not physically ill, but either accompany someone who is or are seeking to grow in faith as a result of their visit to a holy place. In the prayers associated with our pilgrimage, for which should we pray for the most?)

Quotes:

I am the Immaculate Conception.

– *Our Lady of Lourdes, March 25, 1858*

I do not promise you happiness in this world but in the next”

– *Our Lady of Lourdes to St. Bernadette*

Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for me, a poor sinner.

– *Last words of Saint Bernadette Soubirous*

I have been told to tell you about it. I have not been told to make you believe it.

– *Saint Bernadette Soubirous' response to skeptics*

Final Thoughts:

As I read the accounts concerning the story of Lourdes and the experiences of Saint Bernadette, I recognized a similarity to our discussion of the man born blind. If you remember, we discussed the response of the person who experienced the miracle, the response of the disciples, the response of the family, the response of the community, and the response of those in authority. Perhaps the most common thread of such an event is the examination of “what just happened,” or for those who did not witness, “what should I believe?”

As we reflect upon these accounts we might be tempted to judge the skeptics, but we must also remember that scripture tells us to “test the spirits.” As we are told in 1 John 4:1-3:

(1 John 4:1-3)

I Beloved, do not trust every spirit but test the spirits to see whether they belong to God,

because many false prophets have gone out into the world. 2 This is how you can know the Spirit of God: every spirit that acknowledges Jesus Christ come in the flesh belongs to God, 3 and every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus does not belong to God. This is the spirit of the antichrist that, as you heard, is to come, but in fact is already in the world.

It is the responsibility, then, for both the Church and the faithful to assess and evaluate reported events which are interpreted as miracles. We should also remember that there is a difference between questioning and obstinance. In the former case, we need to discern as we seek answers, but in the latter, there is no discernment; the conclusion is determined regardless of what we learn.

While there is significant discussion and examination as to whether a given event was truly a miracle of God, we must remember our work is not finished with the determination. If we believe the event was truly an intervention by God, we must also remember to ask the question, what is God seeking to communicate to us?

Wrap Up: Well, our time has once more come to an end. We hope you will be able to join us next week as we pick up our discussion with the events of Fatima.

Let us conclude with a prayer: Heavenly Father, we thank you for this opportunity to open and discuss Your Holy Word. We pray that as we go our separate ways, You will continue to walk with us and help us to see how we may put on the armor of **truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation**, and the **Word** of the gospel not only for the benefit of our lives, but also the lives of all who cross our path. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, we pray. Amen.

Thank you all and God bless.

Next Session: Miracles and Faith – Part VIII: Our Lady of Fatima

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Note: The Catholic Church reports that Pope Pius IX's 1854 proclamation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of Mary and Pope Pius XII's 1950 proclamation of the dogma of the Assumption of Mary are instances of infallible papal teaching, however, there is disagreement as to whether other statements of popes are considered to be examples of infallible teachings.