

Our Jubilee Pilgrimage

Since last meeting, I had the great joy and blessing of taking part in the Legion's Jubilee Pilgrimage – one of our group of seven pilgrims. We are all grateful for the support of your prayers, and in our turn we prayed for all of you at the many shrines we visited in France and Ireland (and for the other pilgrims, in Italy – though I myself was unable to go there this time). Many more legionaries, I know, would have liked to have joined us, but were with us in spirit and prayer, and we can be confident that through the generosity of your prayers, you would have received a generous share in the pilgrimage graces. We are all very grateful to Sr Caroline Fernandez for planning, guiding and animating our journey with such love and care. With the help of prayer, each day we were led safely and happily on our way. As with life itself, we occasionally had our momentary setbacks, but Our Lady always led us through in the end.

We were first in Lourdes, reliving the appearances of Our Lady to St Bernadette in 1858. Here we joined with huge crowds of pilgrims in the weekly International Mass in the underground Basilica of St Pius X; in the Eucharistic Procession with the sick; and the evening torchlight Rosary Procession. We visited a number of sites connected with St Bernadette and her family. Some of our pilgrims bathed in the healing waters, and had the privilege of leading the Rosary at the Grotto.

From Lourdes we travelled to Lyon. This attractive city had its own pilgrimage destinations of the Cathedral of St John the Baptist and the Basilica of Notre-Dame de Fourvière; and it was also our base for visiting La Salette and Ars. La Salette in the French Alps was where Our Lady appeared in 1846 to the shepherd children Mélanie Calvat and Maximin Giraud, warning against and lamenting blasphemy and the violation of Sundays. In this beautiful location I celebrated Mass for the pilgrims, and we prayed the Rosary at the very site of the apparition.

Our next destination was Ars, the parish of St John Vianney (1786-1859), patron saint of parish priests. His incorrupt body is in the basilica there; and it was also fascinating to see the presbytery where he fought his spiritual battles. The basilica is an extension of his parish church, where the holy Curé carried on his great ministry especially of the confessional and of preaching. Here I prayed for priests and bishops, especially those who have helped me on my own life-journey; and for my own priestly ministry.

At Paray-le-Monial we prayed in the Basilica of the Sacred Heart, and in the chapel where the revelations of Our Lord to St Margaret Mary Alacoque established devotion to the Sacred Heart in its modern form (1673-75). The universal Church has just finished a year of celebration for the 350th anniversary of the apparitions, that was the occasion for Pope Francis' final encyclical, *Dilexit Nos*, on which we have been reflecting in recent months.

In Nevers we visited the convent where St Bernadette lived out her vocation. We prayed in the presence of her incorrupt body, and I celebrated Mass for the pilgrims in the very room of her painful illness and death – the place where she entered eternal life. Here both aspects of Our Lady's words to her came true: 'I do not promise you happiness in this world, but in the other.'

Proceeding to Paris, I had the great experience of concelebrating Mass in Notre-Dame Cathedral, now gloriously restored after the 2019 fire. I also celebrated a public Mass in the Chapel of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal in the Rue du Bac, where our Blessed Mother appeared in 1830 to Daughter of Charity, St Catherine Labouré (1806-76), giving her instruction on the design and distribution of the new medal. St Catherine's incorrupt body is on the

sanctuary, as are the relics of St Louise de Marillac (1591-1660), co-founder with St Vincent de Paul of the Daughters of Charity. Our pilgrims led the singing and did the readings, and in my homily I gave testimony of my own experience of Our Lady's special help through this famous medal, that as legionaries we do so much to promote.

Nearby we visited the Chapel of St Vincent de Paul (1581-1660) and prayed in the presence of his relics; I prayed especially for the St Vincent de Paul Society in my parish and throughout the world. Other destinations in Paris for our pilgrims included the Basilica of Sacré-Cœur in Montmartre, and the Basilica of Saint-Denis – the first church built in full Gothic style (1135-44), and burial place of French monarchs.

A day trip into Normandy took us to Lisieux and Alençon, associated of course with St Thérèse of the Child Jesus (1873-97), and her parents, Sts Louis and Zélie Martin – the first saints to be canonised as a married couple. At our Summer School in this centenary year of her canonisation, we learnt more deeply about St Thérèse's life and teachings, so it was wonderful to fill this out by being physically present in these places. In Lisieux, we visited the majestic Basilica of St Thérèse; the family home; and the Carmelite Convent where St Thérèse lived out her vocation. In Alençon we visited St Thérèse's birthplace, and even the bridge where St Louis and St Zélie first met. The day finished with Mass at the imposing Chartres Cathedral, with its stained glass considered a prime example in the whole world of this art.

The second part of our pilgrimage was in Ireland, and here of course, we had many experiences directly connected with the Legion, graciously hosted by Sr Helen Murphy, our Correspondent. In Dublin we visited the grave of Frank Duff in Glasnevin Cemetery; Myra House, the location of the very first Legion meeting on 7 September 1921; and the house where Frank Duff lived and died. A highlight was attending the Concilium meeting on 15 June, where we were specially welcomed by the President.

We made a day trip to Knock, the location of the 1879 apparition in which for two hours, fifteen or more witnesses saw outside the parish church a vision of Our Lady, St Joseph and St John, and a Lamb standing upon an altar. I celebrated a public Mass in the chapel at the very place of the apparition, and we also prayed in the great basilica. From here, we drove to Croagh Patrick on the west coast, the mount on which St Patrick fasted and prayed for forty days and nights. We did not climb to the summit, but made a symbolic climb a short way up the slopes.

In Tullamore we visited the home of Servant of God Alfie Lambe, recalling his great work of extension of the Legion in South America; local legionaries graciously welcomed us, and I celebrated Mass in his house. Another excursion was to the remains of the monastic settlement established at Glendalough by St Kevin (d. 618). In Kildare we visited shrines of St Brigid (451-524), who pioneered Irish female religious life there; and in Drogheda, pilgrims venerated the relics of St Oliver Plunkett, Archbishop of Armagh, martyred in London in 1681.

Sr Caroline will have more to say about the pilgrimage's culmination in Italy. I spent a few more days travelling Ireland alone, and seeing in Northern Ireland more sites connected with St Patrick, recalling his great mission of evangelisation to the Irish in the fifth century: Slemish Mountain, where he was held as a slave as a young man; Armagh, where he established his episcopal see and which remains today the see of the Primate of All Ireland; and his reputed grave at Downpatrick.

We are all so grateful for these blessed weeks – grateful to God, to Our Lady, and to so many Saints whom we honoured and prayed to in the different shrines. We pray that the graces we received will continue to blossom, for ourselves and for all the Legion.