

**Pastoral Letter regarding the  
Visit of the Relics of St Bernadette of Lourdes**  
(To be read or made available at all Masses on Saturday 8/Sunday 9 October 2022)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

We have a special visitor in our diocese next week: St Bernadette of Lourdes. Having travelled through the Channel Tunnel, and after some weeks of visiting various parts of England and Wales, the relics of St Bernadette will come to us. She will be at Brentwood Cathedral next Sunday and Monday morning, and then, at Our Lady of Lourdes, Wanstead, in East London, from Tuesday to Wednesday. This has never happened before.

St Bernadette was only fourteen years old when a beautiful lady, dressed in white, with a blue girdle and carrying a rosary, appeared to her in a grotto by the bank of the River Gave. During eighteen apparitions, the lady said three things to her. She asked Bernadette to pray for sinners. She told her to go to the parish priests and tell them that ‘people should come in procession to the grotto and build a chapel here.’ And, finally, the beautiful lady revealed who she was: ‘I am the Immaculate Conception.’

To begin with, no one believed Bernadette but, over time, both the priests and the townspeople became convinced. Why? Because of the clear sincerity and goodness of St Bernadette. She asked nothing for herself, continued to live simply, and chose to disappear into a convent. Throughout she was an example of prayer and humility. At the same time, Lourdes was becoming a place of pilgrimage where many were experiencing conversion and the sick great care. Lourdes remains a shrine of great love and service.

St Bernadette can be an example to us. She shows us the beauty of faith and trust in the Lord. We can ask her to pray for us. We do not need to be close to her relics to learn from her and seek her prayers. But her relics are a powerful reminder of the truth of this woman’s life and God, in his kindness, has often particularly blessed us when we come close to the shrines of the saints. Having come to us, it would be beautiful for us to go to Bernadette, whether at Brentwood or Wanstead.

There is another particular reason why we may want to venerate the relics of St Bernadette. The patroness of our diocese is Our Lady of Lourdes. For us, Lourdes is not a faraway place but our spiritual home from which we can draw much inspiration in East London and Essex. Every year, I lead a diocesan pilgrimage to Lourdes at the end of July. It is my hope that the visit of the relics of St Bernadette will inspire many of us to join this pilgrimage and go to Lourdes as Our Lady hoped.

A wonderful website has been created for this national tour of the relics. Simply go to [StBernadette.org.uk](http://StBernadette.org.uk). There you will find much more information. After the difficulties of the pandemic and with much to concern us both nationally and internationally, let us seek the prayers of St Bernadette and place our trust in the loving concern of that beautiful lady, the Immaculate Conception.

+Alan, sm  
Bishop of Brentwood