

Dear Parishioners,

As you know, one of our three annual Hope and Healing Masses was celebrated at 11:00 a.m. on Saturday, February 4th. This has been an important part of the ministry of the Shrine. Pilgrims, both far and near, with faith and confidence present their needs to Our Lady of Consolation. Many of their needs come from illness, mental, or physical. Because of our Lady's powerful intercession, many miracles have taken place.

Over the years, we have gathered so many written testimonies for people or their families how after visiting the shrine or praying at home to Our Lady of Consolation, their prayers have been heard. For some, their petition is answered through a successful pregnancy, a cure from cancer. Others may experience relief from mental torments and doubts. For others still, it is the feeling of peace that lingers after they have visited this holy place.

Occasionally, I have heard comments that the parishioners think that the work of the Shrine takes precedence over the Parish. Nothing could be further from the truth. Rather, Parish and Shrine are like the two lungs in the human body. Although each lung is separate and unique, the two perform the same function to bring oxygen into the blood and remove the carbon dioxide.

Friars and staff are here to serve the needs of all who call Our Lady of Consolation their "spiritual home."

On Sunday, February 11th, although it is the Sunday Liturgy and readings that always take preference, we remember that it is also the Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes. On this day in the year 1858, Bernadette Soubirous, a poor peasant girl from the Pyrenees Region of Southern France, witnessed a "beautiful Lady" standing in the rock in the grotto of Massabielle, just outside the village of Lourdes. Beginning on February 11th until July 16th, the Feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, "The Lady" appeared 18 times to Bernadette.

As we know, "The Lady" revealed herself to Bernadette as the "Immaculate Conception", which four years earlier, had been declared by Pope Pius IX as an official teaching of the church: Mary was conceived in her mother's womb without sin, because she gave Jesus Christ her flesh, which had to be without sin. Mary's words to Bernadette had confirmed what had been declared to be true.

As we know, Mary also commanded Bernadette to dig in the earth. Soon, a spring began to flow. The first miracle was a stone carver, who lost sight in one eye when a chip of marble flew into it. He discovered that he could see. Since that time, thousands upon thousands of miracles have occurred at Lourdes through the miraculous water. That is why the Catholic Church has declared February 11th to be *The World Day of the Sick*. In the year 2000, after hearing confessions at St. Peter's in the Vatican, leaving the basilica as far as the eye could see were all the sick in wheelchairs holding lighted candles and a huge simulcast on large screens depicted the same scene in Lourdes. Words cannot describe the marvels of God that I witnessed.

Since we are a Basilica and a Parish, it is only fitting that we should celebrate the World Day of the Sick in the same way. I invite all of you, especially our parishioners who have someone who is homebound or suffering from any illness, to come to the 9:00 Mass that day to receive the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick immediately following the homily. Bishop Fernandes of the Diocese of Columbus will also be here to celebrate the 11:00 a.m. Mass. There will be no anointing of the sick at the 11:00 a.m. Mass.

Fr. Thomas J. Merrill

Pastor and Rector