

St. Bernardette

Marie-Bernarde Soubirous, also known as Saint Bernardette, was born on January 7, 1844 in Lourdes, France. She was the oldest of five children who had survived infancy. As a young girl, she learned about the hardships in life in that her family was relatively poor so they struggled to survive on modest means. From a very young age, Marie-Bernarde would get very ill. She had cholera and suffered from asthma. Marie-Bernarde was a survivor and held strong throughout her life in her weaknesses.

On 11 February 1858, Bernadette, then aged 14, was out gathering firewood with her sister Marie and a friend at the grotto of Massabielle outside Lourdes, when she had her first encounter with the Virgin Mary. None of the other girls witnessed this miracle, but Bernadette felt the sound of rushing wind, but when she would look around, nothing would move. Then she saw a wild rose in a grotto. With it there came a light and a white figure. Bernardette would go on to continue to have encounters with the Virgin Mary. She had a total of eighteen. When Bernardette would meet with the Virgin Mary, Mary would give forth a message to Bernardette. Mary once told Bernardette to pray incessantly. She also told Bernadette that she would not live a good life on earth, but her reward would be waiting in heaven. Lastly, she asked Bernardette to ask the bishop to build a church at the grotto. Today, this grotto contains spring water that is said to cure those that believe. After having had her encounters with Mary, Bernardette joined a convent, the Sisters of Charity of Nevers. Due to her illnesses that she suffered throughout her lifetime, Bernardette, as a nun, would be read her last rites and eventually die from a battle against tuberculosis. She died at the age of 35 on April 16, 1879.

After Bernardette's death, it would take several years before she would be canonized as a saint by the Catholic Church. She became a saint in 1933 and we recently celebrated her legacy in the year 2009 in which this year was deemed the year of Saint Bernardette. One interesting fact about Bernardette's body, after death, was that it was incorruptible. It remained beautifully intact for years. Even when investigations were done to exhume her body, of which occurred three times, the final one was when relics were taken of her body. Saint Bernadette's body was said to be odorless. If people did not believe of her encounters with Mary while alive, they cannot negate this miracle after death.

Saint Bernardette lived an extraordinary life in that she got to see the mother of Jesus. I chose Saint Bernardette as my Confirmation name because she has always been present in my life. Ever since I can remember, I have received books to read about the biography of Bernardette. Somehow she was always the chosen Saint to read about. This was with reason because in learning about where Saint Bernardette had her encounters with Mary. The Virgin Mary was named after the city. Her associated name became Our Lady of Lourdes. Lourdes is a very special name to me because my mother's name is Lourdes. I feel drawn to Saint Bernardette because I am sure that regardless of being chosen by Mary, she lived a hard life and yet she still had faith and persevered. Saint Bernardette battled with her illnesses and even though I am not necessarily ill, I feel that I can still relate with her, in life's battles. I can ask Saint Bernardette to intercede and pray with me in my spiritual journey. Bernardette was guided by the lady she found at a grotto of which later on, she finds out that it is Mary and I am guided by my mother who shares the same name.