



# eUSTHOMASIAN

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The City of Lourdes felt very warm despite the dreary and wet weather that was in the forecast perhaps because of the nice people that we were with. Everybody was fresh and felt rested after a good night sleep following the long journey from the United States that was punctuated by the rewarding experience at the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao.



*Chapel of Sts. Cosmas & Damian*

Breakfast was prompt and quick as everybody got ready to celebrate mass in English at the Chapel of Sts. Cosmas and Damian (the patron saint of the various charity works of the USTMAAA that benefit the indigent patients of UST Hospital, how appropriate) in the grounds of the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Lourdes.



There was time to absorb the scenic surroundings of the Shrine and take group pictures and of course loads of individual and smaller group photos as everybody excitedly looked for a pose that would "include everything". Most everybody went on to take a bath and to drink the water that welled from the spring at the foot of the hill that St. Bernadette first dug into during the apparitions of the Blessed Mother. The ladies took longer to fall in line and part of the group could not finish before 12 noon when the volunteers took a break. The ladies made good use of their two hours of waiting by practicing on the songs and line dances under the leadership of Ched Gonzales.



*The ladies in waiting.... for a bath*

The men made use of their time exploring the Shrine going to the three churches that are one on top of another, and even venturing farther up the hill to follow the Stations of the Cross depicting beautiful bronze-colored life-size statues. In addition to the main church, the Rosary Basilica, there is the Crypt, the Chapel of the relics of St. Bernadette, that also contained marble markings of generous donors on the second level behind the crown that topped the ground church. The third level is the Basilica of the Immaculate Conception that are topped by



*Agony in the garden of Gethsemane inside the Rosary Basilica*



*Dr. Roger Liboon visiting the relics of St. Bernadette in the Crypt*



*Basilica of the Immaculate Concepción*



*Dr. Ludy Bengson & Ms. Esperanza Vasallo at the Station of the Cross*

Gothic spires that jut into the sky.

The highlight of the trip was going to the Grotto of the Apparitions on the side of a hill above which the Shrine with the three churches were built. While it is a site to behold during the daytime, it is even more remarkable and inspiring at night under dim candle lights. The little sacrifice of falling in line to actually



get inside the shallow cave was rewarded by an exhilarating touch of the wall that is polished by millions of hands of pilgrims that have walked the path.

The city tour followed later in the afternoon going to the



enormous underground and very modern Basilica of St. Pius X that looked like a scene from a "Space Odyssey" movie. Just behind it is the Museum of St. Bernadette that featured the multiple apparitions that she experienced at age 14. Behind the museum across the river *Gave de Pau* is her birth house at the foot of the walled fortress of King Luros, the Moorish king that defied the French monarchy for decades before finally capitulating and converting into Christianity.

A long walk back to the main square to watch a movie of the life of St. Bernadette and to catch on lunch and rest before finishing the day followed. At 5 PM, the Adoration of the Cross inside the underground Basilica took place with all its pageantry and spiritually enriching and inspiring music.

It was time to go back to the hotel for dinner but not before stopping for last minute shopping, the favorite items being bottles for holy water and rosaries for our loved ones and friends back home. Fetching water springing from the side of the church was a big part of the ritual of Lourdes. Lighting candles that come in various sizes was likewise worthwhile experiencing.

The candle light procession at 9 PM was the climax of the visit at the Shrine of the Our Lady of Lourdes. After soaking in the spirit of the pilgrimage in the most famous Marian site, it was time to thank our hostess, St. Bernadette, for an amazing experience in the village of Our Lady of Lourdes, the Blessed Mother, the Virgin Mary. With lighted candles the procession wound its way in the dark of the night going the full length of the long and broad plaza from the grotto of the Apparition on the side of the Rosary Basilica to the gate of St. Michael, then back again to the Basilica. With prayers and hymns in various languages and answered by the pilgrims in their own



native tongues was a good reminder of the Pentecost when the word of God could be spoken and understood in any dialect. Yes, indeed, it was an experience of a lifetime that we will not soon forget.

*Sunday - Oct 18, 2015 at Lourdes*  
Greg Tolentino, MD'72

Hotel Mediterranee, Lourdes France.

First day. After a hectic trip - Chicago - Madrid - Bilbao - Lourdes we settled for the night but it was "Nessun Dorma". Morning came slowly but the breakfast was...yes...fast! Croissant, French bread, cheese, ham, hard boiled eggs, assorted fruits, orange juice and coffee. At 8 am it was still dark outside - but the CME was enlightening with education on medical photography by Primo Andres.

While digesting the sumptuous breakfast we walked down to the shrine complex and attended the 9 am mass celebrated by 3 priests with loud baritone voices. After the mass the group proceeded to the "bath spring" where the pool water temperature was probably 50 degrees F. The wait for some of the women was very long - but they passed the time accumulating "heaven points" by praying, fasting and singing hymns. The group reconvened to trace back the St Bernadette's life story. Then back to the hotel.

After another delicious dinner the night culminated with another hike back to the shrine to process with the throng of devotees while reciting the rosary (in different languages) and singing praises to the Notre Dame du Lourdes. To see and more accurately to be part of the sea of moving candlelight was quite a religious experience of a lifetime.

We went to bed in bliss. Tomorrow on to the Camino!

