

WE ARE ALL AT HOME HERE

The very first step in any pilgrimage is to leave home. We go from our familiar surroundings, the people we know and love, the routine that we are used to. And when we come to Lourdes, and especially to this Grotto, we find that we are sharing our pilgrimage with thousands of other pilgrims who have left their own homes to come here.

But the strange thing is that, gathered here with people of other nations and languages and traditions, we find that what we have in common is not a sense of being away from home but, the very opposite, a sense that we are all at home here.



It is no accident that, when the Apostles were filled with the Holy Spirit, they began to speak in foreign languages. It was a sign of barriers dropping and divisions being overcome. That was not just because people of many different languages understood them but because the message the Apostles proclaimed was that we are all one family, God's children. All of those people on the first Pentecost realised, as we do at this Grotto, that we are at home together, members of one family.

We are God's children, sisters and brothers of Jesus, God's eternal Son. Jesus, dying on the Cross, made that clear in a warmly human way when he told John, and us, that his Mother is our Mother. We are his brothers and sisters. As they waited for the Holy Spirit to come, the apostles joined in prayer with Mary, the Mother of Jesus.

One of the reasons why we come on pilgrimage to Lourdes is to see things more clearly, to get the bigger picture. We come, and rightly so, with our own worries and intentions. We come to pray with and for the invalids who are with us, we come to pray for our families and friends, for our diocese and our country. But we find ourselves here with other people on our own pilgrimage and with people on countless other pilgrimages who are praying for their own intentions and worries, their invalids, their families, their countries.

By the very fact of doing that, we see more clearly that Mary is *their* loving Mother too, that Jesus is *their* brother, that *they too* are filled with the Holy Spirit, that God is *their* Father, who holds them in his hands.

Our pilgrimage is one small step in a much greater journey. Mary, as the Preface puts it, "cares for the pilgrim Church with a mother's love, following its progress homeward."

We may well have come on pilgrimage feeling overwhelmed or fearful or downhearted. But we are part of a great gathering – not a crowd but a family – of people who know that our Father's love is stronger and greater than anything we fear. When Jesus said, "This is your mother", he was saying to John, and to the whole human race, that we are part of God's family.

We are on a journey to a house that has many mansions. There is room in it for every person of every place and time to be fully at home, fully transformed, fully healed. The wonder of God is not just that he can and will care for each one of us with a love so powerful that it will fully answer all our deepest hopes and longings – the wonder is that God's love offers and equally complete fulfilment to every human being who ever lived or who ever will live – to the peoples from every nation and from every period of history.

St John describes the fulfilment of God's promise: There was a multitude that no one could count from every nation, from all tribes and people and languages, standing before the throne... they cried out... 'Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne and to the Lamb.

May our pilgrimage to Lourdes be for each of us a step on the road to the completion of our journey.

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