

The grotto of Lourdes in Santiago, Chile, administered by the Assumptionists, is clear proof of the action of God –community. It is the same at the grotto of Lourdes in France where the original apparitions took place.

From the very beginning, in France as well as at the grotto in Chile, pilgrimages to the shrine have united social classes. Whether it be organized groups or pilgrims who come individually, no matter the age, social status or culture, all come together here.

To the grotto of Santiago come those in good health or bad, farmers, miners, fishermen, intellectuals, those in uniform, stay-home mothers. Those from blue-collar neighborhoods and those from middle and upper-class ones come together at the grotto in Quinta Normal. There are also priest, men and women religious, members of secular institutes and of various Church movements.



Each person, each group prays and pauses reflectively before the image of Mary. At times tears can be seen on the faces of these pilgrims. Tears of joy? Tears of suffering and anxiety? Only God and the Virgin know.

During celebrations, when pilgrims exchange the sign of peace or when they are invited to greet the person at their side, one can see smiles of welcome, of friendship, of fellowship. No one fails to greet a brother or a sister. And it makes no difference whether the one next to you is poor, educated or not. It is an experience of fellowship for everyone.

That is why the grotto is so dear to so many, it is a place where the people who come don't want to leave. There are visitors who spend hours in silent prayer.



From this experience arises a wonderful observation: fellowship, community, is possible in this world which seems to become each day more and more individualistic. The reality is that such individualism is not just an appearance, for there are depths of individualism which Jesus alone can heal.

Bringing this experience which one has had at Lourdes to one's family, one's work-place, or one's neighborhood, one gains greater strength to forgive those who have offended us or done us some harm. And it opens us to accept the forgiveness of others, for no one is blameless when it comes to hurting others in one way or another.

Lourdes is a place of fellowship and from this sacred site God's love radiates. Lourdes might best be defined as the place where we receive the call to be brothers and sisters.

