



February 11, 2016

In the early hours of the morning the first Mass on this feast of Our Lady of Lourdes was celebrated by the shrine's rector, Fr. Aldo Gajardo Álvarez, who recalled the message of Lourdes, highlighting the figure of Mary as mother and of Bernardette as her messenger.

During the morning, defying a scorching sun, thousands of pilgrims came streaming to the shrine from every corner of Santiago and from other cities as well. One pilgrim from Parral, Mercedes, commented, "I have been coming to the feast of Lourdes since I was a child and now I am almost 70 years old. I follow the same schedule--- I get up early, stay all day and go home only late at night". She was happy with this year's event, adding "I inherited this tradition from my mother and I have tried to transmit it to my children. This year I had to come by myself because all my children are at work and couldn't get away. One of my daughters who comes with me every year will be going to the evening Mass near her home. At least we'll be united in prayer at that moment".

This is just one of the many testimonies of faith that one encounters year after year on this feast of Our Lady of Lourdes.

The basilica of Lourdes has been graced during this Year of Mercy with the title of "jubilee church" As a result throngs of visitors could be seen passing through the Holy Door to gain the special graces of the year. The first group to pass through, and perhaps the most moving, was a group of senior citizens living next door with the Sisters of the Poor. There must have been a hundred of them. Because there are steps to reach the Holy Door, one could see other pilgrims and some of the nuns lending them a hand so that they could make it up to the site. In addition, throughout the day, many pilgrims took advantage of the "Mercy Path," an itinerary through the

shrine grounds recalling aspects of the mercy of God.

Many priests, religious (men and women), and lay volunteers helped out. Masses and the Sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession) were available all day long



The closing Mass was celebrated by Most Rev. Jorge Concha Cayuqueo, auxiliary bishop of Santiago. It was his first Mass as bishop at the shrine.

In his homily, he underlined the humility and poverty of Mary and Bernadette, the two central figures of the Lourdes message. The bishop also called the faithful to observe Lent in a true spirit of simplicity and poverty.

Bishop Concha later accompanied the candle-light procession through the streets of the neighborhood. During this procession, he spoke to many and blessed others, not to mention receiving many signs of affection himself.