



(From August 11 to 16 the 140th National Pilgrimage to Lourdes will take place organized by the Our Lady of Salvation Association and animated by the Assumptionists. For families this pilgrimage to the city of Mary is always a high-point.)

- Have you noticed an increased interest on the part of families to get involved in an experience of faith during the vacation period?

- Fr. Fabien Lejeusne : I have been the director of the Assumptionist-sponsored National Pilgrimage to Lourdes for the past two years. This event takes place around the feast of the Assumption in August. We have noticed that the participants are getting younger, especially as a result of many more families taking part. What we have seen is that different generations of a single family, living in different parts of the country, meet in Lourdes. Traditionally the families of the those (known as hospitallers) who care for our sick and handicapped pilgrims are accompanied by their families, including their children. For the latter we have set up a program beginning with children 6 months old; they are divided in various age groups. The program is adapted to their age so that they can fully experience the pilgrimage to Lourdes --- with games, skits, prayer, classes, and other events.

- Teenagers, beginning at age 15, can become young hospitallers and help the sick and handicapped or younger children. It's an opportunity for them to participate in the pilgrimage in a different and more hands-on way adapted to their age and interests.

- This year, the 140th edition of the National Pilgrimage, has been organized with the theme, «Lourdes, a gateway to the faith». For families who choose not to get involved with care for the sick and the handicapped, we are proposing another experience of the faith, a kind of mini-retreat. All families will take part in the four major celebrations specifically scheduled for them between August 12 and 15



- **Who are the families that come to Lourdes?**

- **Fr. Fabien :** They are varied, but often committed Catholics. They're not simply unquestioning Catholics who are not struggling with their faith and the challenges of modern life. They haven't been spared by these problems: divorce, struggles in passing on the faith, employment issues, etc....

- **Is the current financial crisis affecting the National Pilgrimage?**

- **Fr. Fabien:** It is true that those who are coming have been changing. Older pilgrims have seen their purchasing power diminish and are coming less frequently. We have seen a slight increase in the number of families coming. But you have to remember that a pilgrimage to Lourdes has a significant cost attached to it. Regional committees in the country (eight in all) organize trains or buses. In order to reduce travel costs, many families prefer to come by car but, still, between travel costs and lodging you have to count on 500 euros (\$700) per person. So, the cost remains high. In spite of everything, one finds at Lourdes some lasting and sure values in a time of crisis: a rock-solid foundation on which to stand; water, the symbol of the life; light for one's way. This has always been the case at Lourdes and even more so in a time of crisis.

- **Doesn't making a pilgrimage to Lourdes mean stopping the course of one's life for a time?**

- **Fr. Fabien :** Coming to Lourdes is first and foremost leaving home to meet the other. This year we have organized workshops and conferences meant to allow participants to deepen their

faith and discover ways of transmitting it. There will be opportunities to discuss how one can take the Lourdes experience and apply it to their daily lives because once one gets back into the hustle-bustle of daily living one's spiritual life can often be put on the back burner. The Lourdes pilgrimage is an opportunity to step back from the everyday, from the need to be productive and efficient, and to get recharged spiritually, emotionally, humanly.



- Part of this break comes as a result of being in touch with those in need and those who suffer, the sick and the handicapped.

- Fr. Fabien: As a matter of fact, the rhythm of events at Lourdes is based on this reality. The whole schedule turns one's ordinary schedule upside down. In fact, this is a dimension of a pilgrimage to Lourdes that distinguishes it from any other.

- Does this pilgrimage allow one to easily have an experience of God?

- Fr. Fabien: Pope Francis has given a great answer to this question: it is when one experiences poverty and simplicity that one encounters God. Those who are in need bring us in touch with what is essential.