

MGR PERRIER

INTRODUCTION: It gives me great pleasure now to introduce Bishop Perrier, Bishop of Lourdes.

TALKING IN FRENCH

So because Father Brito has already welcomed us, Monsignor Perrier will not be repeating all of that.

He may be a new Rector but he's very well known as being coming to Lourdes for a very long time.

So he knows us. He knows HCPT well.

So what we have asked Monsignor Perrier to do is to give us in just a few moments his reflections on this particular time towards the end of the Jubilee Year.

So there is obviously what we can all see about the Jubilee Year.

So that most of us will think being the enormous number of pilgrims who came to Lourdes this year.

So for the regular pilgrimages, those who come every year, it would seem that the numbers of those pilgrims increased by something like 40 to 50 % this year.

And because we've prolonged the year and for once in Lourdes, a year has meant 12 months.

(LAUGHTER)

Monsignor is going to throw in a few jokes because that way he can see who understands French.

(LAUGHTER)

And those who're asleep.

(LAUGHTER)

Or those who don't react to either French or English.

(LAUGHTER)

So watch out ... (LAUGHS) ...

9 to 10 millions of pilgrims have visited Lourdes this year.

So that's the quantitative aspect which has been the joy of the hotel keepers when they're open.

Still on the very visible aspect of what's been memorable about this year, the Jubilee Way is an evidence element.

So Monsignor Perrier is expressing his admiration for a large number of pilgrimages who did everything in their power to make sure that the disabled pilgrims were able to walk the Jubilee Way.

And with the help of Martine Gina at OCH, they had set up a system by which pilgrims who couldn't walk through the town could nevertheless do a Jubilee Way, their Jubilee Way within the domain itself.

So Monsignor Perrier isn't going to go into details about how the inspiration for the Jubilee Way came about.

But just briefly ...

... so the aim of it was to resituate the experience of Bernadette the visionary within the life of Bernadette, the Christian Bernadette the believer.

So the time of the apparitions was an extremely special time.

But which for Bernadette, are only part of a strong Christian life beforehand and a very long Christian life afterwards.

So that explains the four steps of the Jubilee Way, the baptism, the cachou where she lived in such miserable conditions, the grotto, the place of the apparitions and then the hospice where she made her first holy communion.

And it's also a way of placing the site of the apparitions within the Christian world.

So one of the criteria of the messages of the apparitions was this message, don't say anything.

If the message says something which is anything other than what is already in the bible, then it's not a message of the Holy Spirit.

It might be a little repelling, a little rebarbitive for today's mentality.

Which always wants to think that it's said something new and original.

Where in fact we're just repeating what others have said before us.

(LAUGHS) ... whereas what is particular to places such as Lourdes is that we sometimes say banal things, trite things but in a new way.

So the Jubilee Way was a plea for banality.

(LAUGHTER)

And as far as life as Christian goes, an ordinary thing.

Everyone can draw on his or her baptism.

Everyone can in some way or another help the poor.

Everyone can in some way or other receive the Eucharist.

So Monsignor Perrier says we haven't quite finished drawing all the lessons we can from the Jubilee Way and we hope to be able to do this in a congress which will take place just before the close of the Jubilee Year.

The Jubilee Way was every day.

And Monsignor Perrier wanted it to be organised in such a way that whatever time of the year any pilgrim came to Lourdes, they were able to say, I profited from the Jubilee, I experienced the Jubilee.

But the three days where that didn't work was the days of the Papal visit ...  
(LAUGHS) ...

Monsignor Perrier was extremely touched by the fact that the Pope, in his own way, wanted to indeed do the Jubilee Way.

And he fulfilled all the conditions to receive the Indulgence which he himself had granted.

(LAUGHTER)

But he's not sure that he knew about that.

(LAUGHTER)

It was extremely touching to see the way that the Pope did the Jubilee Way, with the innocence of a child.

So remember the Jubilee badges, our round badges with our stickers.

And the sticker at each stage.

The Pope didn't get one of those.

(LAUGHTER)

Because Monsignor Perrier was worried that the nun who would have been sticking the sticker on would be a bit too trembling of the hand.

(LAUGHTER)

So instead of the little medallion which we have, there was a ceramic designed with a little figure for each of the four stages.

So Bishop Perrier would like to add, although it's not strictly to do with what he's saying.

That what is remarkable about the Pope is the way in which he can pass very easily from very learned conversations with theologians in Paris to very simple gestures and a simple way of doing the Jubilee Way in Lourdes.

So the very visible, the number of pilgrims, the Jubilee Way, the exceptional visit of the Pope ...

But deeper still ...

Particularly with regard to the future of Lourdes ...

Is the work that was put in to the preparation of the Jubilee by all those connected with the pastoral work in Lourdes.

The question was the following.

So what in 2006, 7, 8, what is the place of a mining town such as Lourdes, a mining site such as Lourdes, in today's life?

So just as the Jubilee Way allowed us to place the period of the apparitions in the whole of Christian life ...

The message of Lourdes is placed within the biblical message ...

And so in the same way we can place the mission of Lourdes within the mission of the whole church.

Many of us in order to come to today's conference have crossed the Channel.

Lourdes is not an island.

In the church and evangelisation today.

So the group preparing this year searched for the areas in which Lourdes could bring something to the world of today.

So we can't operate in all the aspects of the church's mission.

So we can't offer anything to people who have a very long term mission. We just receive here pilgrims for a day, a few days at a time.

But within the experience of Lourdes, there have always been the presence of people helping the sick pilgrims.

I was sick and you visited me.

And in the whole history of the church, care of the sick has always been part of Christian education.

And many religious orders have had the care of the sick as their priority.

So the little novelty that we introduced this time was ...

The fact that Lourdes has a certain evangelical ability with sick people, that's nothing new.

But what is perhaps new this time is that we separated out the mission of Lourdes with regard to sick pilgrims and the mission of Lourdes with regard to disabled pilgrims.

Quite a lot of people with disability do not like to consider themselves as sick pilgrims. They're not ill.

There's no clear division, there's no clear demarcation line.

But it's perhaps a mark of respect to make this type of distinction, that there are sick pilgrims, there are disabled pilgrims and not just lump everyone together.

In the universal prayer of the church, we have this sometimes.

So that everything just gets piled in together.

Sinners, widowers, divorced people, all get mentioned in the same prayer.

And we're not all just one thing. You could be a widow and disabled or etc.

So it also meant that within the year of the 12 missions in Lourdes, we were able to have twice, one the mission for the sick, the other the mission for disabled and that reflects the importance that our pilgrims have in this town.

So for a very long time, any kind of mental disability was not considered well in Lourdes.

And in this domain, HCPT has played a very important part.

And what we must try and distinguish now is between mental disability and mental illness.

And even if at the moment in Lourdes there are only a small number of people who are making these kind of distinction, Monsignor Perrier thinks that this is a very important way that things should go in the future.

The final reflection is that this Jubilee has allowed us all to think about the potential that Lourdes has for the future.

So among the 12 missions that we distinguished, they didn't all appear at the same time.

So there's just been a 2 day conference on the mission of the church for inter denominational dialogue.

So there were important speakers from the traditions of Judaism and Islam on the importance of pilgrimage in their own traditions.

But Lourdes will not become a syncretist shrine.

One of the Muslims just being a bit provoking asked Monsignor Perrier when was he going to open a mosque.

He doesn't intend to do that.

(LAUGHTER)

But if Muslim people came, they would do everything in their power to give them what they require to do their own prayers.

Mecca's over there.

(LAUGHTER)

So the final message is that the Jubilee Year might be coming to a close but it isn't over. There's a huge amount of potential for the mission of the church of Lourdes for the future and just take the image of the spring, always there but always renewing itself, always fresh, always luminous.

So at the same time as our conference, there is another conference going on, a national French conference on health.

They've come here because in Lourdes you can find rooms which will take 2000 people.

But there is obviously an affinity between pastoral health work and Lourdes.

Not merely because there have been cures and there still are cures.

Not only because Bernadette herself was ill.

But because Bernadette was ... and few people know this generally ... Bernadette was an excellent nurse.

So the Bishop told them to call on St Bernadette.

(APPLAUSE)