

## **Relics of St. Bernadette UK Visit 2022 Resource.**

### **St Bernadette: The religious relics drawing crowds across the country.**

5 October 2022 By Julia Bryson, BBC News.

The ornate reliquary contains a variety of bodily parts of St Bernadette

Thousands of people have visited a Yorkshire cathedral to see the relics of a 19th Century saint who is said to have seen the Virgin Mary. BBC News spoke to people who had made the trip to Leeds Cathedral to see the remains of St Bernadette to find out what drove them to attend.

The Very Reverend Matthew Habron, dean of the cathedral, is clear why the crowds have come, describing it as an "historic and unique occasion".

There is no doubting the devotion of those attending at the church in the centre of Leeds.

After welcoming 1,000 people on Monday, Canon Habron says that since they opened the doors at 07:45 BST on Tuesday another 1,000 worshippers have passed through.

He expects the total number of people to surpass 3,000.

"This is the first time and probably the only time the relics of St Bernadette of Lourdes will visit us," he said.

"It's a great way for people to express their faith, their love of God, the love of Our Lady and of St Bernadette as well."

But what are the thousands coming to see?

Inside an ornate reliquary perched within a glass case on a pedestal lie pieces of bone, the knee caps and hair of Bernadette Soubirous.

In 1858, the then teenager reported seeing the Virgin Mary 18 times over the course of a few months at Lourdes, France.

As people pass, some want to lay a hand on the stand, some stare reverentially, while others simply pause.

Think of the relics of St Bernadette almost as religious rock stars.

They have already visited Liverpool and will no doubt draw crowds to Sheffield and Doncaster later this week as part of a tour of England and Wales.

Dean of the Cathedral Canon Matthew Habron said the crowds showed the unity that faith brings.

The gently spoken clergyman tells me more about the tour: "It is going to end up in Wormwood Scrubs and in the Ukrainian Cathedral in London.

"As you can see from the crowds, young and old, all diverse backgrounds, it is a sign of the unity that our faith brings to us and that is one of its great strengths and joys."

Dr Simon Hewitt, a theology and religious studies expert at the University of Leeds, said for Roman Catholics, seeing the relics was like a football fan watching a trophy being paraded through a club's home city.

"A bit like how one might have photographs in their house of loved ones, it is an expression of the communion of saints, it is just an expression of that personal closeness and proximity," he said.

"It is definitely not something we are obliged to do, but it doesn't surprise me that a lot of Catholics have an instinct to do."

The cathedral was full at mass on Tuesday lunchtime, with the congregation, including hundreds of local schoolchildren, queuing afterwards to get near the golden box.

### **Who was St Bernadette?**

Bernadette Soubirous was canonised in 1933

Bernadette Soubirous, who was canonised in 1933, claimed to see a vision of a lady in white 18 times between 11 February and 16 July 1858 as she picked firewood by the River Gave at Lourdes - a place now known as the Grotto of Massabielle.

The teenager was taken seriously by the initially sceptical church authorities when she told them the lady had said she was "The Immaculate Conception", a Catholic dogma or teaching defined only four years earlier by Pope Pius IX - and a title a poor miller's daughter would then not know.

Catholics believe Mary the Mother of Jesus Christ was born sinless.

The Catholic Church says her reported visions of the Virgin Mary are "worthy of belief" and has officially declared the healings of 70 people, who either drank or bathed in the waters at Lourdes, as inexplicable cures.

Millions of pilgrims visit the site annually.

Cian Normanton, 13, had made the trip to Leeds along the M62 from All Saints Catholic College in Huddersfield.

The 13-year old explained: "It is obviously quite nice to see my parish priest and the chaplain at our school [here], to see the relics of St Bernadette.

"It is my mum's confirmation name so it means a lot to our family."

Stacey Rhys-Hill, lay chaplain at the college, said she was "overcome" to be able to bring the pupils with her.

"It is just such a blessing. I have not been to Lourdes yet, so to see the relics of St Bernadette I just feel so blessed."

"To be able to bring students here is just such a blessing as well. It is very emotional," she added.

Shirley Ellison, 80, from Settle, North Yorkshire, travelled to Leeds with a group of parishioners.

She said: "It is very important to me. I have been to Lourdes many times and I think she is a very important saint.

"It is the confirmation name of my daughter, so that is why I'm here."

Nun Teresa Okongor, from the Handmaids of the Holy Child Jesus, said the relics were "very significant" to her faith.

"Anything that was in contact with a person's body is a sign of holiness, and we all aspire to be holy," she said.

"That is my own feeling: that people who are holy, we try to emulate them, and try to live the life they live.

"It is a journey. We struggle to be what they are."

The Diocese of Leeds counts some 170,000 Catholics in its congregations.