



## Lourdes at Home

### PILGRIMAGE FROM YOUR ARMCHAIR

This week, people from across our diocese will begin the 1,000 mile journey to the small French town of Lourdes, embarking on a pilgrimage that has been at the heart of our diocese for 100 years.

As our pilgrims make their way to this special place of pilgrimage, we're taking a moment to consider what exactly what we mean by a pilgrimage and how you can join us on this fulfilling journey - even from the comfort of your armchair.

The concept of pilgrimage is one that dates back thousands of years, spanning a number of different religions and faith groups.

Traditionally, pilgrimage is centred on a journey; the act of travelling to a particular place of great holiness to help us better connect and feel the presence of God in a tangible way. But, regardless of the hundreds - if not thousands - of miles a pilgrim travels on their quest, no matter the destination, the one fundamental



aspect of that sense of travel remains the journey we make in our own hearts.

On a visit to Santiago de Compostela in 2010, Pope Benedict XVI said: "To go on pilgrimage is not simply to visit a place to admire its treasure of nature, art, or history. To go on pilgrimage really means to step out of ourselves in order to encounter God where he has revealed himself, where his grace has shone with particular splendour and produced rich fruits of conversion and holiness among those who believe."

Put simply, the true essence of pilgrimage is the decision we make to step away from the distractions of everyday life and make the choice to actively seek out God's presence in our lives - in the people we meet, the life we lead, the world around us, the Sacraments we receive from our parish, in the quietness of private prayer. It's an invitation to look at the world around us in a different way, to open up our eyes, ears, and minds to learn new lessons about ourselves and to discover what God is asking us to do and who he is asking us to be - opening the door to a renewed relationship with Christ.

This invitation requires no more mileage than a willingness to say "yes" and a commitment to embarking on this spiritual journey within whatever parameters you're able to set in that moment. Perhaps it's simply praying the Rosary each day, or substituting TV time to read through the Gospels? Perhaps you could attend daily Mass this week, or receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation? It might simply be spending more time each day in prayer. Whatever you choose, it's that raw desire to journey closer to God that is the key to true pilgrimage.

Throughout the pilgrimage, please be assured of our constant prayers as we present them to Our Lady in Lourdes.