

Pilgrimage to France July 7 to July 18, 2023

Summary: In July 2020, Fr. Michael was scheduled to hear confessions in Lourdes for 10 days and then take this very pilgrimage. Everything was cancelled because of lockdowns. In December 2022, Father decided that it was time to try it again. 206Tours needed a priest to lead this pilgrimage. Father advertised this pilgrimage in the St. John XXIII bulletin in January. The trip filled up. There was a total of 27 people, including 14 people from St. John XXIII and the tour guide, Alessandro Gaj.

Before departing, several pilgrims were advised to pray for good health, good weather, and safe travel. God delivered the goods! No one got sick, travel was smooth, and the weather was fantastic. Blessed be the name of the Lord!

July 7 (Fri). Departed DIA at 4:10 p.m. Arrived in Munich. Departed for Toulouse on Saturday at 10:30 a.m.; then a two-hour bus ride to Lourdes.

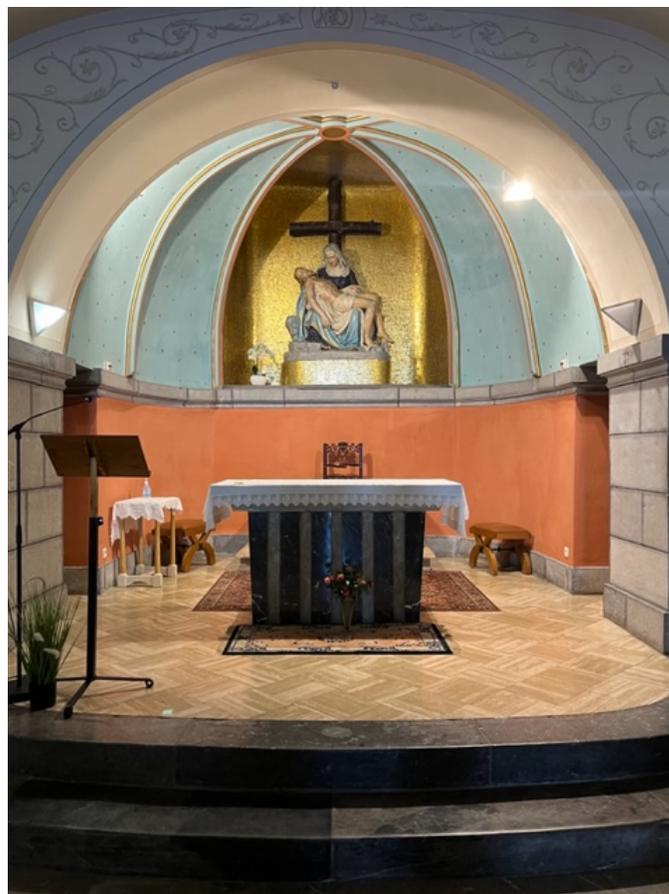
July 8 (Sat). We arrived at about 5 p.m. and settled in at the Hotel Moderne. Below is a small picture of the group!



Mass began at 6 p.m. at the Church of Hospitality of Saint Frai, known as Accueil Marie Saint Frai. We prayed for the repose the soul of Grace Russell, a 12-year-old who was killed by a steer in Texas last year. After Mass, we began a novena to Our Lady of Lourdes for our needs, including growth in holiness of our parishioners.



Entrance into the Church



After dinner, we made a quick visit to the famous Lourdes Grotto. We prayed that all the holy souls (those in Heaven or Purgatory) who received any sacraments from the altar in the Grotto would pray for our intentions. Then we got in line for the nightly Rosary procession, which begins at 9 p.m. daily.

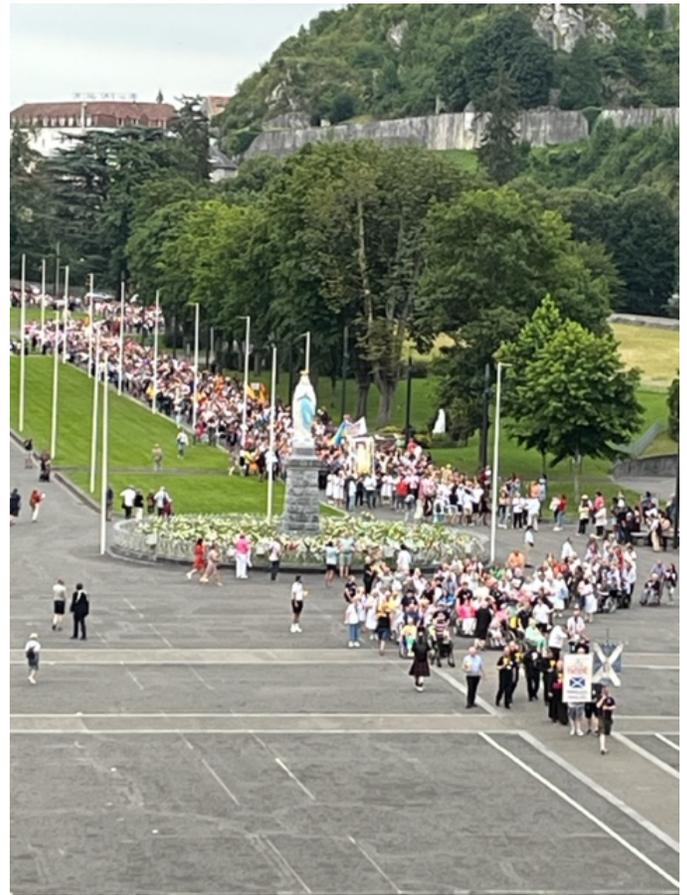


It was awesome to see so many families and young people. There was a great core of young women attired as nurses to take care of the needs of the disabled and push them in their wheel chairs and carts during the procession.



The Rosary Procession—approximately 9:40 p.m.

For whatever reason, their time zone is set to have lots of daylight in the evening. It did not get dark until about 10:30 p.m.



It looked like over 5,000 people participated in this Saturday night procession.



July 9 (Sun). We had Mass with other pilgrims from 206Tours in the crypt of the Basilica of the Immaculate Conception.



The main altar of the crypt



Check out the beauty of the tabernacles below the exquisite murals.



After Mass, we prayed the Stations of the Cross.

The Rosary Basilica has 16 altars—one main altar and 15 side altars representing the original 15 decades of the Rosary. Some of us went to each of the 15 side altars to pray the Rosary and meditate on the mysteries.



July 10 (Mon). Our last day in Lourdes.



We had Mass at 10 a.m. in the Grotto with Bishop Marcus of Leeds, England. There were about 20 priests concelebrating.



Some of us visited the relics of St. Bernadette and lit a candle, asking for intercession.

As this was the last day, many pilgrims went to various places in the sanctuary to pray. Some went to the Eucharistic Procession at 5 p.m. It was a time to buy sacramentals, statues, and pictures. We had visited the home of St. Bernadette the day before. Over the three days, we participated in the Rosary Procession from different places—marching, from the “balcony” of the Basilica, and from standing on the sideline.



The Rosary Procession—our last evening here



Our Lady of Lourdes, we love you, and we really enjoyed glorifying God and seeing you. You are fair as the moon, glorious as the sun, and most favored of all women. Thanks for your smile!

July 11 (Tue). This was a big travel day. We drove from Lourdes to Toulouse, and spent time in prayer and touring for a few hours here.



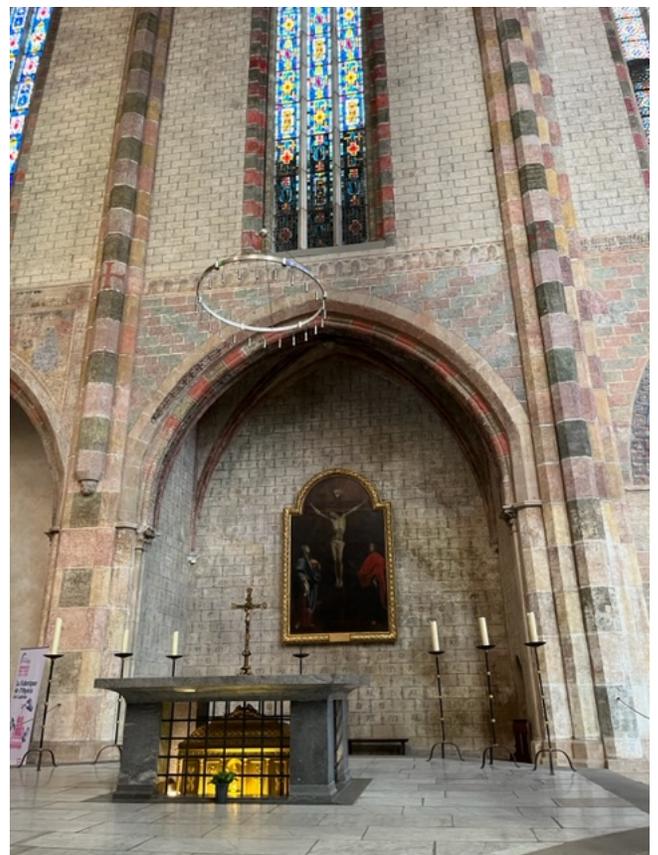
Basilica of St. Sernin—martyred in 257 A.D.



A closer look at the main sanctuary



Mass in front of the relic-bust of St. Sernin



Church of the Jacobins. The relics of St. Thomas Aquinas are below this altar.

July 12 (Wed). We arrived in Rocamadour on Tuesday evening. We had a great time at all the stops, but many people felt that this was the most intriguing. It is beautiful and peaceful.

The shrine of Rocamadour was one of the most celebrated Marian pilgrimage sites during the Middle Ages. The first reported Christian use of the site dates from early in the 11th century when pilgrims made their way to Rocamadour to see a Black Virgin statue in a small chapel built into the cliffs.

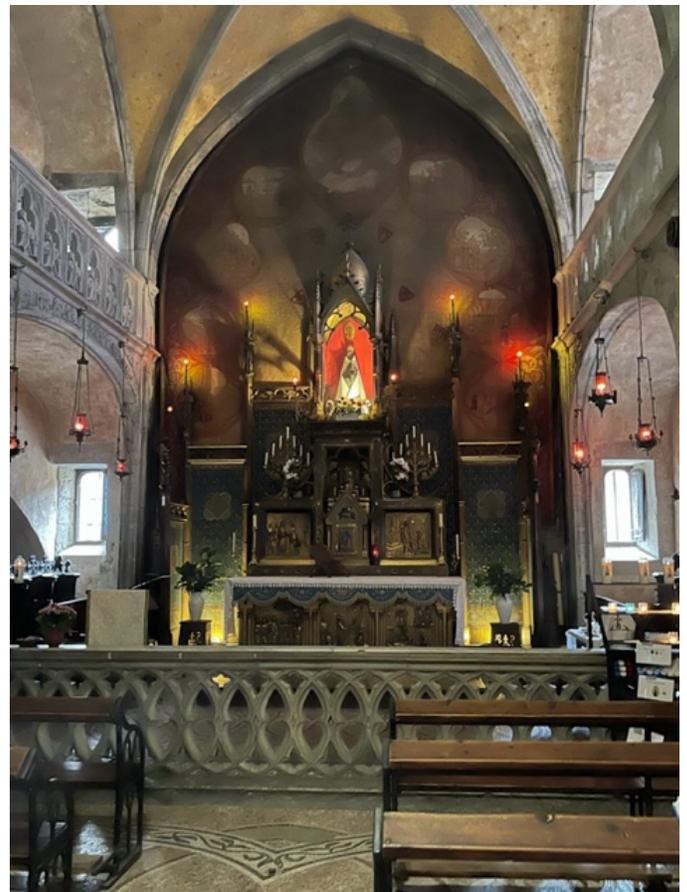
Historical records show that in 1166 an incorrupt body was discovered buried in a cave next to the chapel and thus began the story of St. Amadour.

Over the ensuing centuries, the crypt of St. Amadour and the chapel of the Black Virgin underwent periods of prosperity and decline. In the mid 16th century, the chapel was pillaged and burnt by Protestants and the body of St. Amadour was destroyed. The statue of the Black Virgin, however, remained unharmed.

Reconstruction of the shrine began in the 1800's. The chapel and its legendary statue continue to be venerated, and Rocamadour remains one of the most popular Marian holy places in all of France.

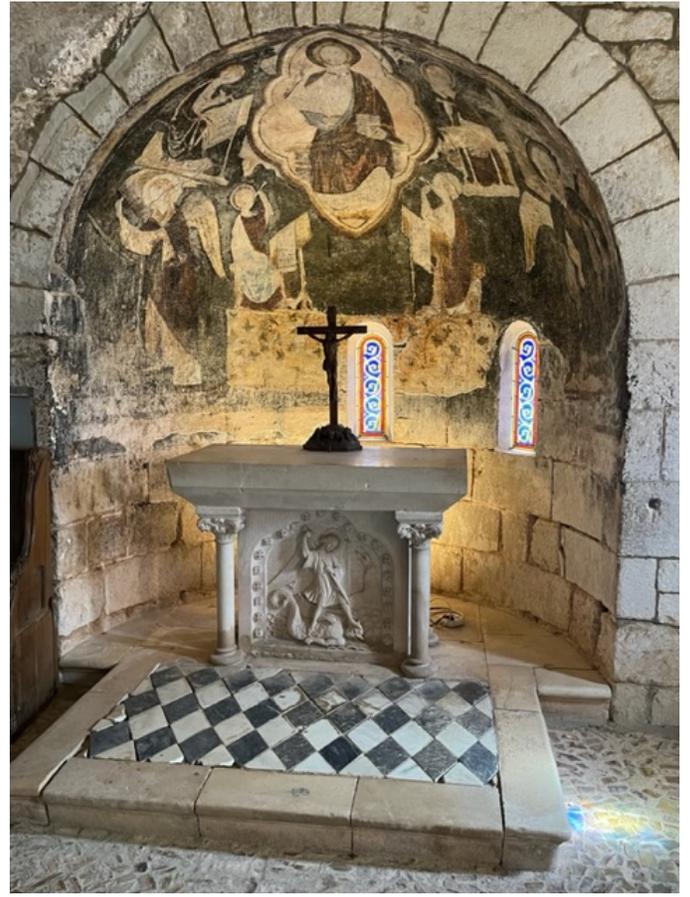


Main entrance into the chapels



We had Mass here at 9 a.m.

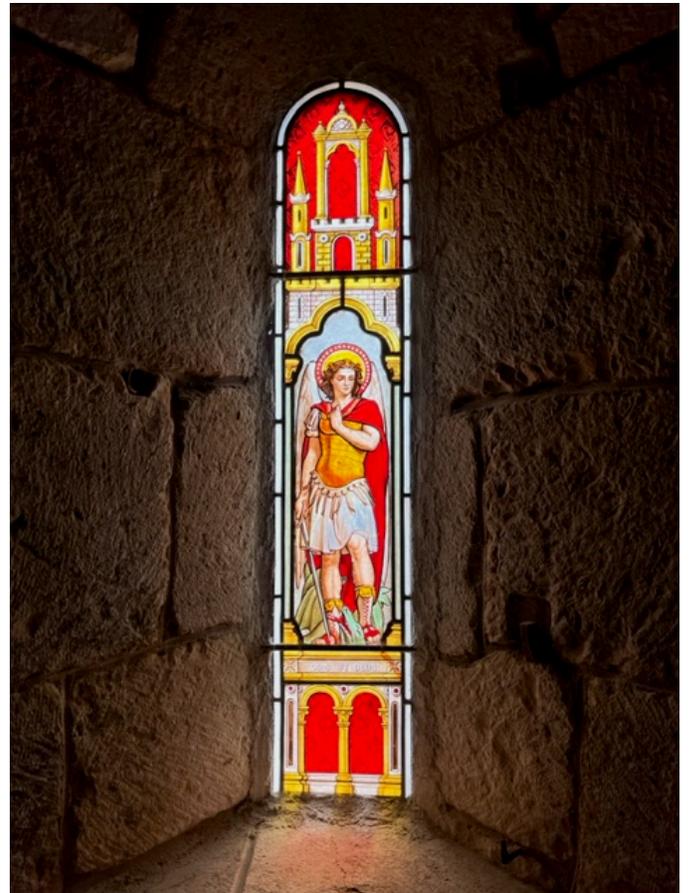




The Chapel of St. Michael at Rocamadour



The place where the incorrupt body was found in 1166





The Adoration Chapel at the Rocamadour Shrine



The view from the hotel in Rocamadour



The first course of our meal at the hotel

We departed for Nevers, France, for the evening. This city has the convent in which St. Bernadette resided.

The next day, Thursday, we headed for Paray-le-Monial, the city where Jesus appeared to St. Margaret Mary and showed her His Sacred Heart.



The main street in the town

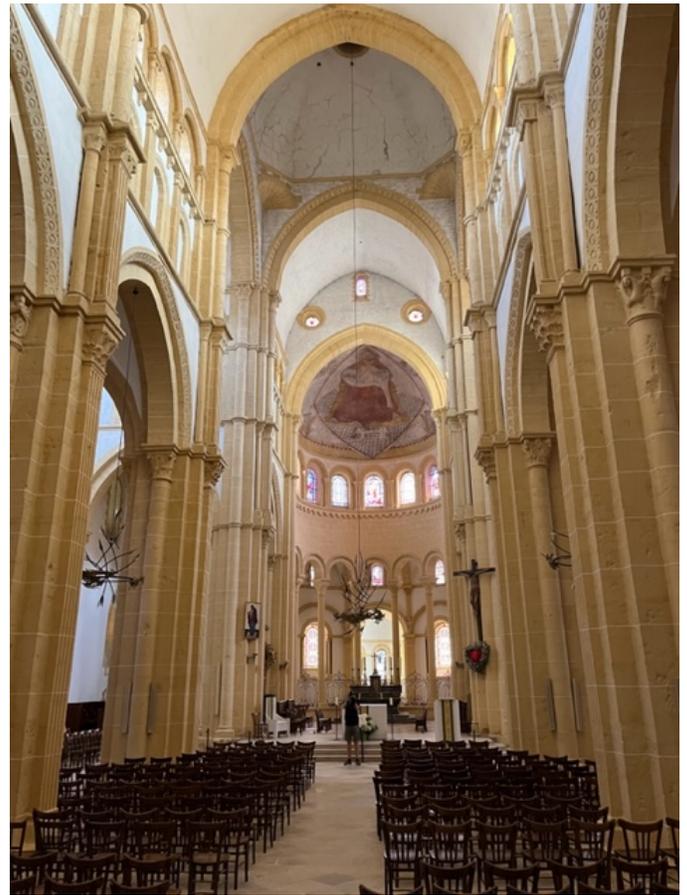
July 13 (Thu). We arrived in Paray-le-Monial at about 9:30 a.m.



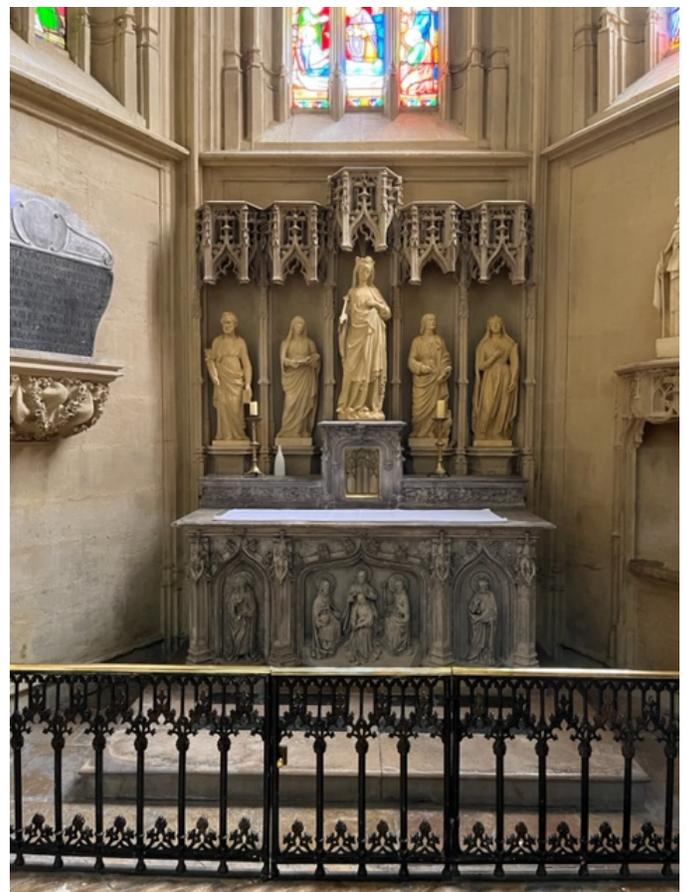
Chapel of St. Claude La Colombiere. He is the Jesuit priest who assisted St. Margaret Mary in establishing devotion to the Sacred Heart.



Fr. Michael in the confessional where St. Claude listened to Margaret Mary for 90 minutes and discerned that her visions were true

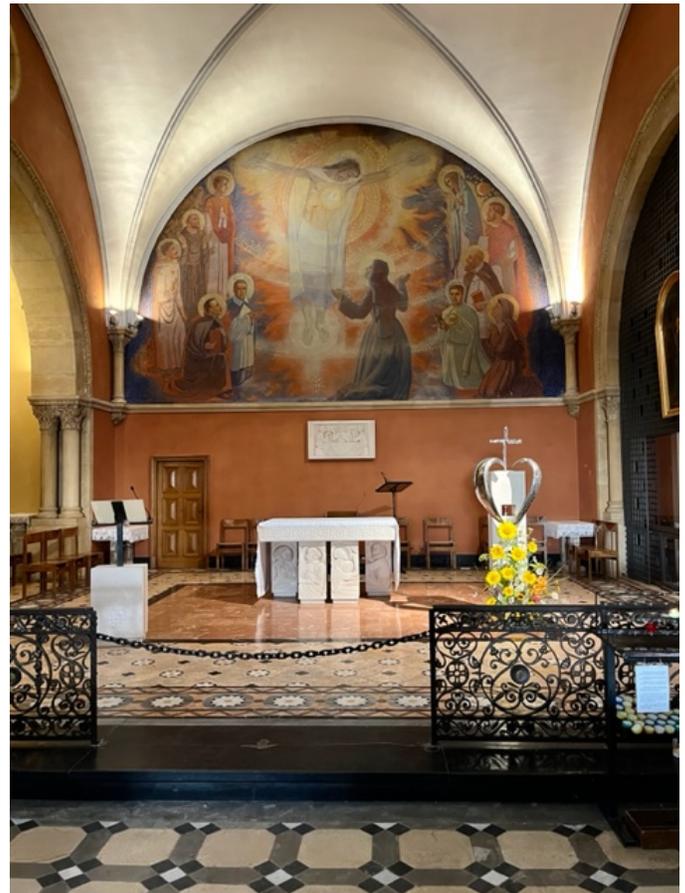


The Cathedral in Paray-le-Monial



A side altar in the Cathedral

In December, 1673, St. Margaret Mary received the first of four great apparitions of the loving Heart of Jesus. In the first one, she experienced a mystical phenomenon which also happened in the life of St. Catherine of Siena—a mystical "exchange of hearts" with Jesus Christ. St. Margaret Mary wrote: "[our Lord] allowed me to recline for a long time on His divine breast, where He disclosed to me the marvels of His love, and the unutterable secrets of His Sacred Heart."



We had Mass at noon in the Apparitions Chapel where Jesus appeared to St. Margaret Mary. After Mass, we prayed the Act of Consecration to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, written by this saint.



Saint Margaret Mary's bones are kept in a wax figurine on display at the Visitation Monastery in Paray-le-Monial, France. Her heart is kept in a reliquary inside the cloister, away from public view.

St. Margaret died in 1690. One hundred and seventy-four years later her body was exhumed as part the beatification process. Her head was completely intact.



During lunch break, some pilgrims went to Adoration for a while before getting a snack and getting on the bus to depart back to Nevers.

On the same day, before going back to our hotel, we visited the convent of the Sisters of Charity—the Order that St. Bernadette joined in 1866.



This is the convent door that Bernadette entered.



The chapel where St. Bernadette prayed as a religious sister



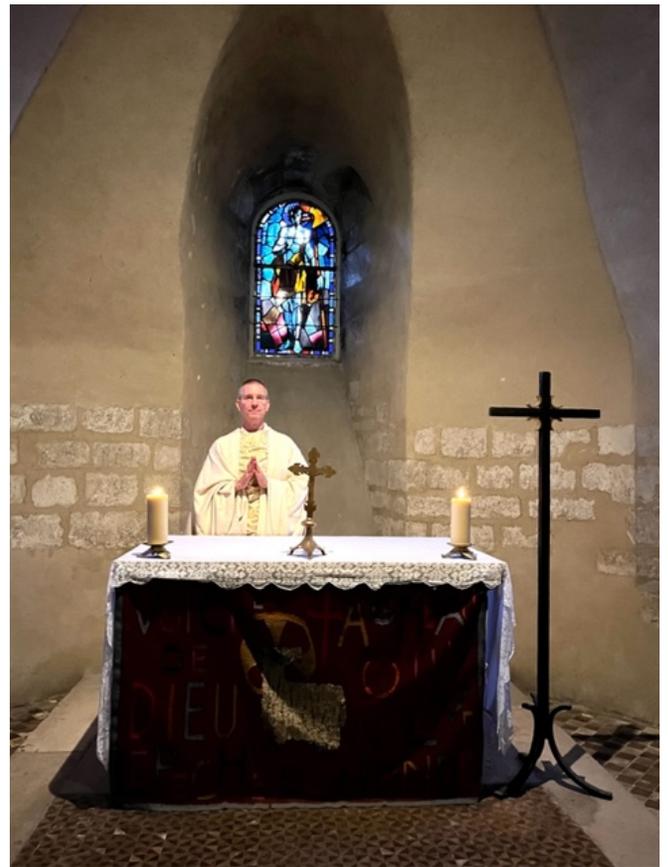
One of her favorite statues at the convent



We prayed the Rosary in front of St. Bernadette's incorrupt body, which was on the right side of the sanctuary of the above chapel.

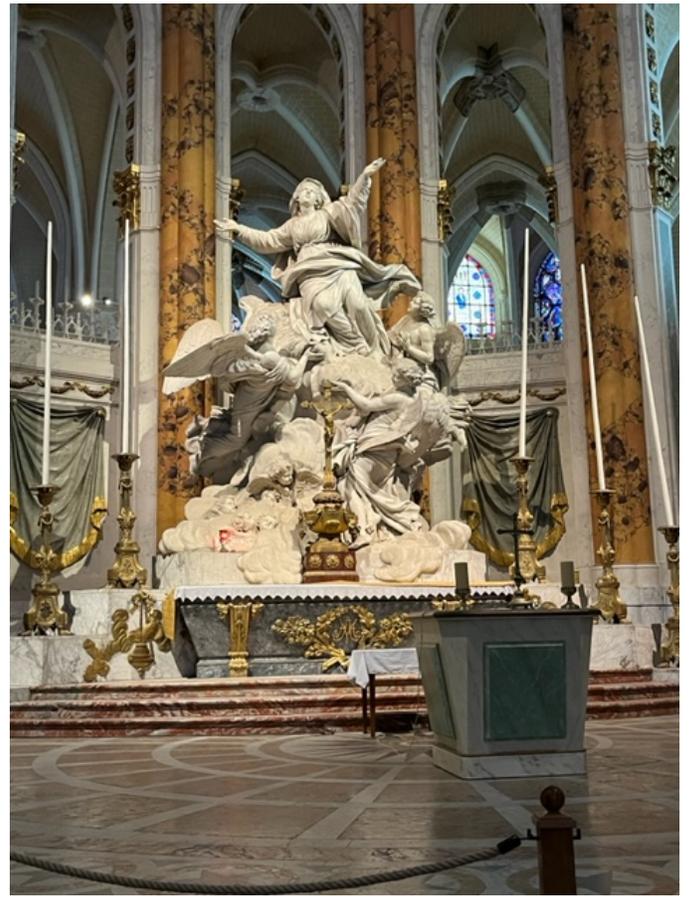
We ate our evening meal as a family and went to rest. We prepared our hearts to head to Chartres the next day.

July 14 (Fri). We arrived in Chartres close to 11:30 a.m. and headed into Cathedral Notre Dame to pray Mass.



We had Mass in the crypt of the Church at a private altar named Saint Jean Baptiste.

On the next page, you will see some of the beauty of the interior of the Cathedral. We give thanks to God for American Colonel Welborn Griffith, who defied an order to bomb the Cathedral. The leadership thought that Nazis were hiding in the Church. He was given 20 minutes to search the entire place. No one was in there. So, the order was rescinded. Soon after this endeavor, he was killed at another location by German soldiers. He died on August 16, 1944.



The 176 holy windows in the Cathedral teach about salvation history. We learned how to read!

The veil of the Blessed Virgin Mary is reserved here.

July 15 (Sat). This was a busy day. We went to Normandy Beach and then to Mont-Saint-Michel.



Normandy American Cemetery and Chapel



We walked Omaha Beach where the soldiers died.



We had the privilege of having Mass in the chapel and offering it for the repose of the souls of those who died at Normandy.



It was a very emotional experience. We know that we have freedom to practice our Catholic faith that Jesus taught us because our soldiers were willing to die for us!

Then we headed to Mont-Saint-Michel.

A monastery was founded about the year 708 by St. Aubert, Bishop of Avranches. St. Michael the Archangel appeared to the bishop in a dream on three separate occasions, telling him to build a monastery on this remote island.

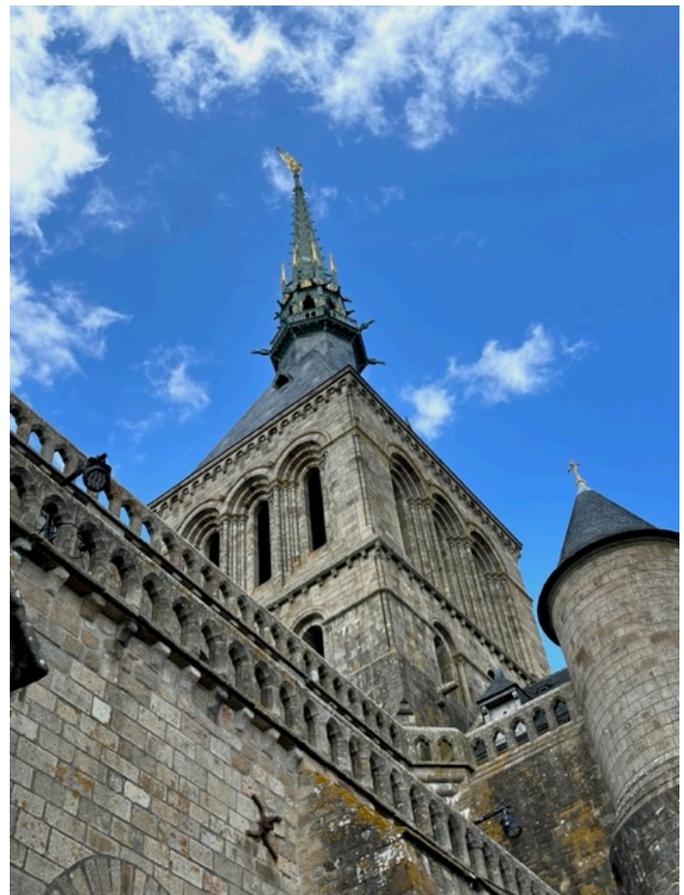
The statue of St. Michael at the very top of the structure was installed in 1897. It is made of bronze, but covered with pure gold leaf. The statue weighs more than 1,200 pounds. It is 15 feet tall, and the wings act as a lightning rod for the abbey church.



Mont-Saint-Michel at low tide. We walked a long distance to get there. Twenty-nine people live on the island, including four priests and seven religious sisters.



This is a stone carving of St. Michael touching the head of the bishop in the third dream, because the bishop was slow to believe. We noticed throughout our trip that some religious artwork was defaced by the enemies of Holy Mother Church because of the French Revolution. Our tour guide told us that St. Michael's face was broken away by a revolutionist.



We began walking the narrow paths upward.



Mont-Saint-Michel Abbey. We prayed an Act of Consecration to St. Michael here.



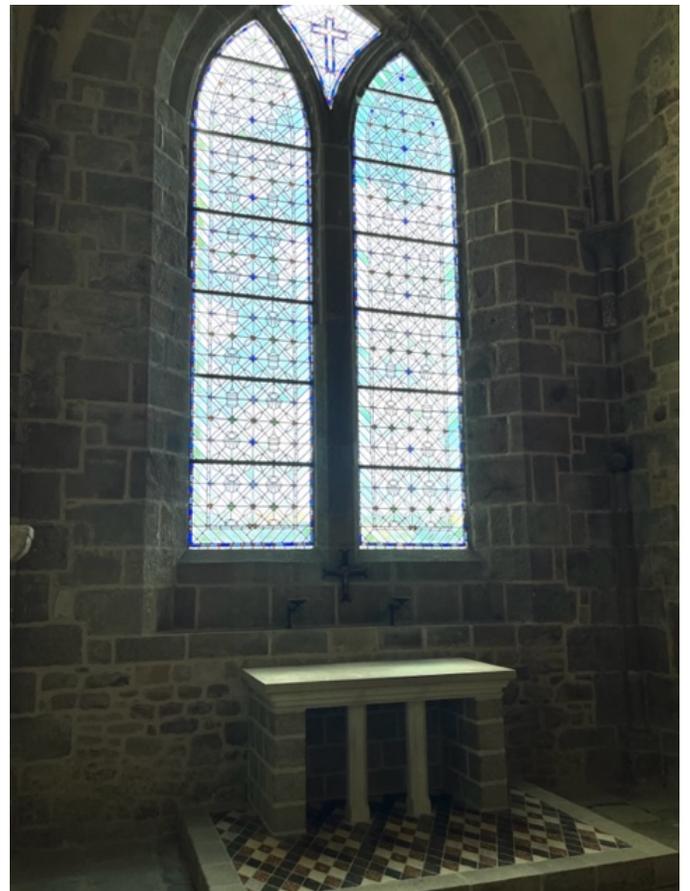
The original refectory (dining hall)



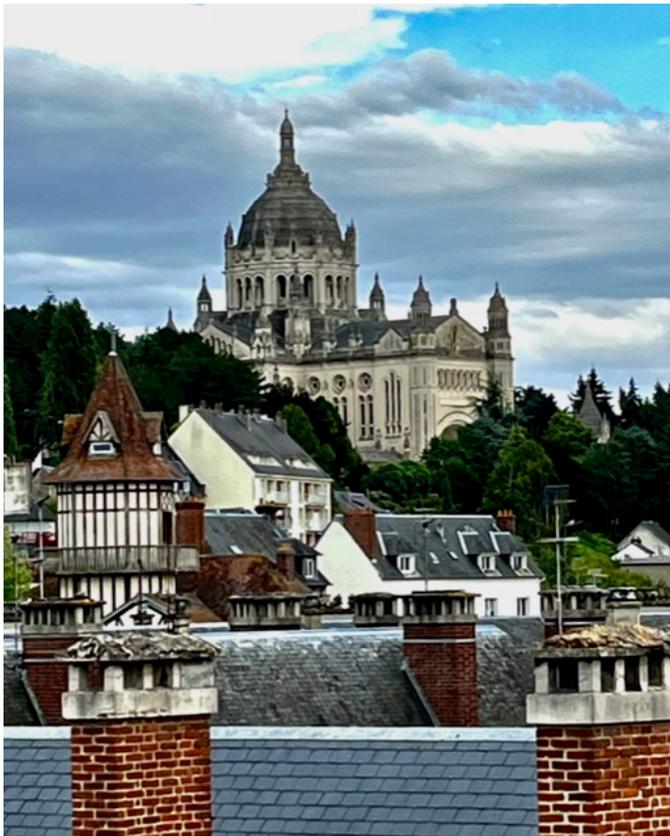
A view from "way up." You can see the foot bridge leading to the Mont and that the water is at low tide. The tide was to come at 6:30 p.m.



Gothic arches



July 16 (Sun). We spent most of the day in Lisieux getting to know more about St. Therese and her parents, Saints Louis and Zelie.



View of the Basilica of St. Therese from our hotel



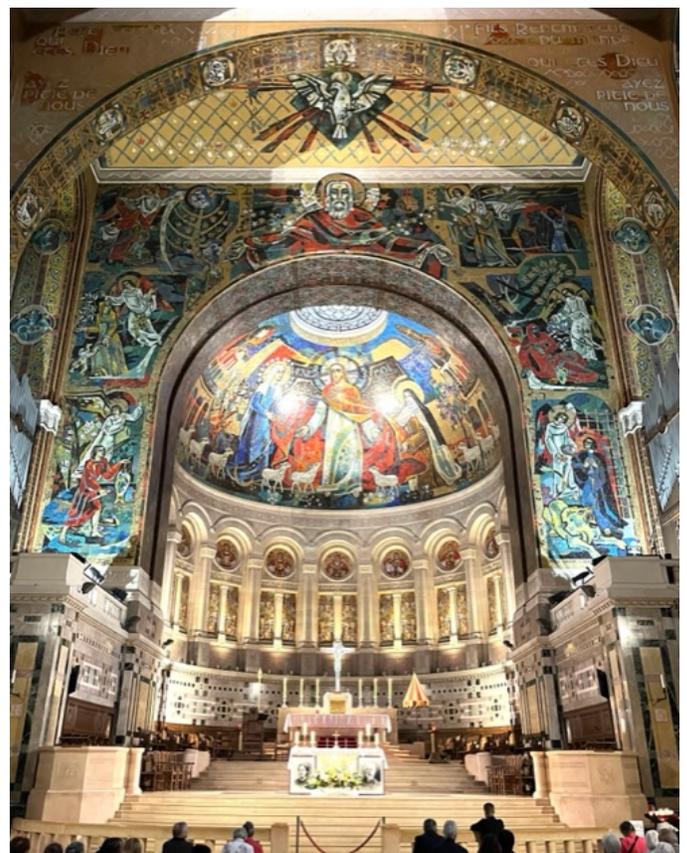
View from the back of the Church



An outdoor altar on top; burial place below



The façade of the Church



Main sanctuary



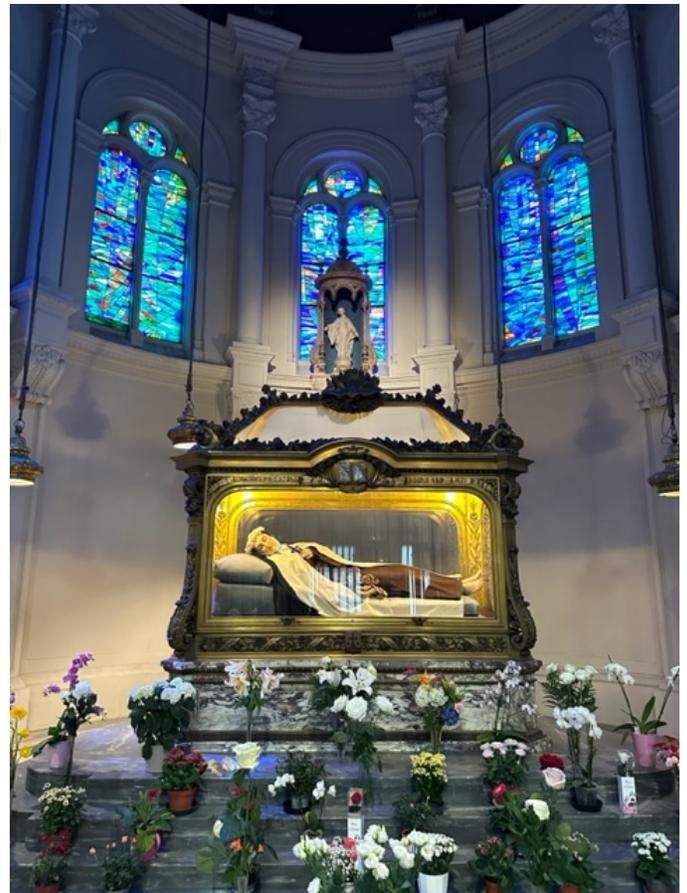
We asked for St. Therese's intercession in front of her relics. Many lit a candle.



We asked for the intercession of Saints Louis and Zélie in front of their remains.



We had Mass in the Crypt, below the main sanctuary.



We visited the Carmelite monastery in Lisieux, where St. Therese became a nun. This is a replica of her body in the monastery. Some of us were able to pray a Rosary here.

Later in the afternoon, we headed for Paris. As we drove in, we spotted the Eiffel Tower from a distance. It turned out that our hotel was in walking distance from it. Some pilgrims went to see it after dinner.

July 17 (Mon). Our day in Paris.



We had Mass in the Chapel of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal. This is where Our Lady appeared to St. Catherine Laboure in 1830 and gave her the designs to create the Miraculous Medal.



St. Catherine's incorrupt body



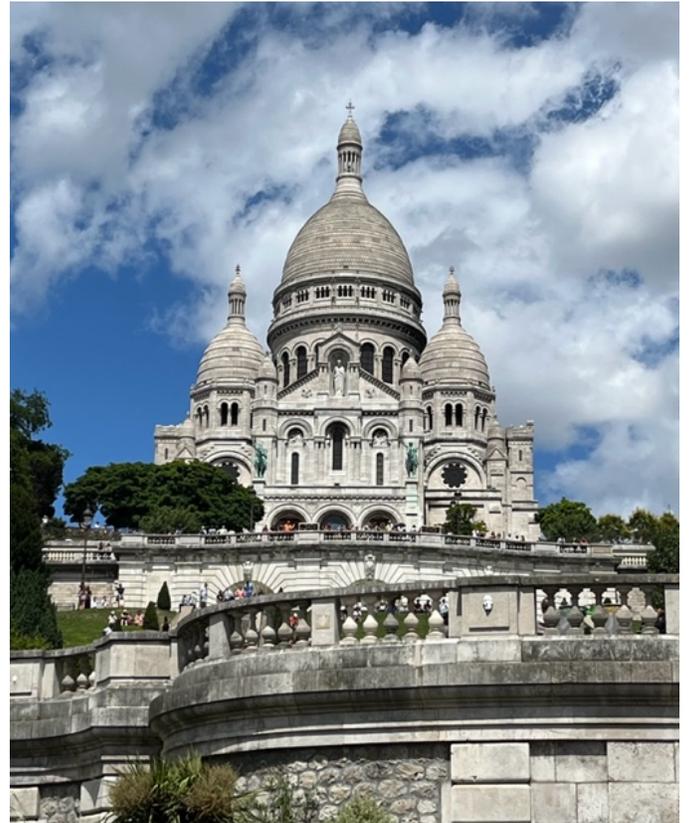
St. Vincent de Paul's incorrupt heart at the Chapel of the Miraculous Medal. St. Catherine was a member of the religious order he established—Daughters of Charity.



St. Vincent de Paul Chapel in Paris



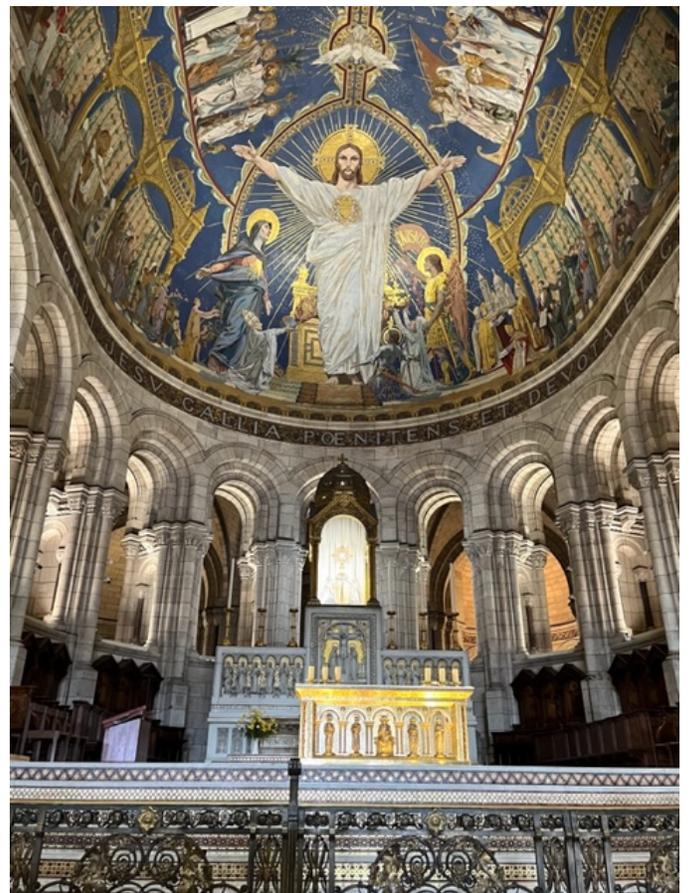
Arc de Triomphe



Some pilgrims walked to the Basilica of Sacre Coeur de Montmartre to pray a Holy Hour.



The Notre Dame Cathedral is scheduled to be open to the public in 2024.



There has been perpetual adoration of the Holy Eucharist at Sacre Coeur since 1885.