Reflection on a Pilgrimage to Lourdes 2013
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Two weeks before my graduation from Boston College, I left campus for a weeklong pilgrimage to Lourdes, France with the Knights and Dames of Malta. Every moment of the journey was a true blessing that I will forever hold close to my heart.

Annually, members of the Order sponsor malades – men, women, and children in need of physical healing – and their caregivers to make the pilgrimage to the Lourdes holy spring water. Each May, the small town nestled in the beautiful Pyrenees Mountains completely fills with Knights, Dames, malades, caregivers, and hopeful pilgrims from associations all over the world. As an auxiliary member, I cared for a malade throughout the week by pulling and pushing him in a three-wheeled voiture across the town from our hotel to the Domaine. Throughout the week, I became very close with Buzz and his wife, Bonnie, and made memories that I will always cherish. I was also very blessed to spend time with several of the generous Knights and Dames, many of them doctors and nurses, who made the pilgrimage possible.

At the Domaine, we attended various services in the beautiful chapels and basilicas. In 1858, when the Virgin Mary appeared to Bernadette at the Grotto, she told young Bernadette to have pilgrims come to the spring in procession. Throughout the week, we participated in a number of processions, including a beautiful one by candlelight. It was during the procession into the International Adoration and Benediction that I so tangibly felt God’s presence. The underground basilica with a seating capacity of 30,000 was overflowing with people from over forty different countries. As I sat in a pew watching the malades proceed in with their loved ones - some even on stretchers - I was overwhelmed by the amount of faith radiating around me. Tens of thousands of people were gathered in that basilica because they believed in the power of the Blessed Sacrament. Every one of those people journeyed to Lourdes because of their devout belief in miracles and Our Lady. In that moment, I was completely overcome with emotion. As I began to tear up, the Italian woman at my side began digging through her bag. She then handed me a tissue and held my hand. We spoke no words, but were connected through faith. Never before had I seen the Catholic community at this magnitude.

I am overwhelmed by the amount of beauty that surrounded me on this pilgrimage. Not only were the sights breathtaking, but the amount of love and faith radiating throughout the town was incredible. During my week in Lourdes, I said midnight rosaries at the Grotto, lit candles for those lost in the Boston Marathon tragedies, helped women from all over the world bathe in the spring water, befriended Sister Fatima, the Spanish-speaking nun at the Convent of the Poor Claires, looked out onto the town below me from the Château fort de Lourdes, and prayed the Stations of the Cross along the River Gave. I was inspired by the stories and optimism of the many malades suffering from various physical ailments, and the Knights and Dames who shared stories of the Lourdes miracles they had seen and experienced in past years.
My experience in Lourdes was the perfect synthesis of my passion for nursing and my Catholic faith. As I transition from my role as a student to that of a professional nurse, I will carry my memories of Lourdes with me. Although I have been trained in the latest medical technologies, I will always remember the healing power of faith and Our Lady of Lourdes.