

Pope OKs plenary indulgence for Lourdes' 150th

VATICAN CITY - To mark the 150th anniversary of Mary's appearance to St. Bernadette Soubirous near Lourdes, France, Pope Benedict XVI authorized a special indulgence to encourage renewed holiness.

Catholics can receive a plenary indulgence for taking part in any public or private devotion to Our Lady of Lourdes, said U.S. Cardinal J. Francis Stafford, head of the Apostolic Penitentiary, a Vatican court dealing with indulgences and matters of conscience.

As Christians strive to become more holy, they can look to Mary who "calls the faithful to her son and his sacrifice and to the love of the Father," said the cardinal, quoting from "Lumen Gentium," the Second Vatican Council's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church.

The Vatican published the cardinal's statement announcing the indulgence and outlining the requirements for receiving it Dec. 5.

An indulgence is a remission of the temporal punishment due for sins committed. A plenary indulgence is the remission of all punishment.

Cardinal Stafford said the indulgence can also be applied to the souls of the faithful in purgatory.

Catholics can receive the indulgence during two time frames.

Pilgrims visiting the Massabielle grotto, where Mary appeared to St. Bernadette, can receive the indulgence during the Lourdes jubilee year, which runs from Dec. 8, the feast of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, until Dec. 8, 2008.

Pilgrims who visit any public sanctuary, shrine or other worthy place dedicated to Our Lady of Lourdes may receive the indulgence Feb. 2-11. Feb. 11 is the day the first of 18 apparitions occurred and is the feast of Our Lady of Lourdes. Feb. 2 is the feast of the Presentation of the Lord.

Cardinal Stafford said that to obtain the special indulgence one must fulfill the normal requirements set by the church for all plenary indulgences; these include the person going to confession within a reasonably short period of time, receiving the Eucharist and praying for the intentions of the pope, all in a spirit of total detachment from the attraction of sin.

Those who make a pilgrimage to Lourdes must visit the following sites, preferably in this order:

- The parish where St. Bernadette was baptized.
- The Soubirous family home.
- The Massabielle grotto.
- The chapel where St. Bernadette received her first Communion.

At each location the faithful should end their meditation by praying the Lord's Prayer, the creed and the special jubilee prayer or a prayer to Mary.

Those visiting a holy place dedicated to Our Lady of Lourdes in another part of the world Feb. 2-11 also should pray the Lord's Prayer, the creed and the special jubilee prayer or a prayer to Mary.

Catholics who cannot visit Lourdes or join a communal service dedicated to Our Lady of Lourdes because of illness or other serious reason could still earn the indulgence "in their own home or wherever they are" Feb. 2-11, Cardinal Stafford said.