

Reflections on Lourdes 2016 Pilgrimage

By Jean Lown, DM

Although I have been on two prior pilgrimages to Lourdes, the pilgrimage with the Order of Malta was different because I experienced Lourdes through the eyes of our malades. I received so many unexpected blessings and insights from my interactions with them. Lourdes truly is a special place of hope and spiritual healing for all of us.

My assigned malade was Bob and his caregiver was Moira, his twenty-five year old daughter. Up until about five years ago, Bob had been a healthy man who regularly ran marathons. Everything changed, however, after a business dinner where shellfish was served. While his companions ended up with fairly minor cases of food poisoning, Bob spent over six weeks in an intensive care unit and was paralyzed for many months. His recovery has been slow but he is now able to walk with the assistance of a walker and braces. In spite of all his suffering, he has no bitterness. He is a joyful person with eyes that sparkle, particularly when discussing sports or his family. I enjoyed watching Bob and Moira interact with each other. The respect and love Bob showered on his daughter and the devotion that Moira demonstrated towards her father were heartwarming.

Bob clearly enjoyed the first few days of the pilgrimage. He was particularly pleased about being able to receive three sacraments (Reconciliation, Holy Eucharist, and the Sacrament of Anointing) on the first day. One afternoon, all of the malades went to the baths. Bob was a bit apprehensive about how he would be able to get in and out of the baths without falling. He was pleased that one knight was particularly kind in assisting him. He returned smiling and feeling peaceful. He loved participating in the various liturgies.

Unfortunately, towards the end of the pilgrimage, Bob became ill and was not able to participate in any further activities. He received loving care from the medical team who took two-hour shifts watching over him twenty-four hours per day. He remained cheerful and encouraged Moira to participate in some of the activities without him. She left his side only for short periods and with reluctance.

The eight-hour plane trip back to New York was particularly hard on Bob. Even with the medical assistance provided, his condition deteriorated throughout the flight. Almost immediately after landing, several doctors from the pilgrimage helped Moira get Bob to a hospital in Connecticut near his home. Please keep Bob in your prayers.