

The Parish of St Swithun Wells Inaugural Pilgrimage to Lourdes

On Sunday 21st August 2011 51 parishioners, led by Fr Michael Dennehy and Fr George Lyons, left Southampton Airport which is in the newly formed Parish of St Swithun Wells for Pau in France on the inaugural pilgrimage to Lourdes.

In the evening, after supper, the party of pilgrims set off for the Domain where we joined the Torchlight Procession of 65,000 pilgrims and proudly walked behind our new Parish banner, which had been made by one of our pilgrims.

The following morning, after breakfast, we had a short tour of Lourdes ending up at the Convent of the Poor Clares where Fr Michael and Fr George concelebrated Mass in the chapel. In the afternoon the party split into two, the more able led by Fr Michael did the High Stations of the Cross and Fr George led the rest of the group taking in the Lower Stations.

On the morning of day 2 we set off for the City of the Poor where Mass was once more celebrated by both Priests and in a moving moment the bundles of Petitions and the Mass Intentions were handed round from person to person, who silently prayed, before Mass started. Fr George commented afterwards that it was a moving moment for both Priests.

In the afternoon those of us who wanted to went to the baths, which many found to be a very emotional and spiritual experience. Later in the afternoon we banded together and joined the Blessed Sacrament Procession with the Sick ending in the Underground Basilica of St Pius X for another moving and awe inspiring service.

On our third and final day, we walked behind our banner and made our way once more through St Joseph's Gate into the Domain where outside the Basilica of the Rosary we took a group photograph and carrying a ten day candle, which carried the names of all the pilgrims and the St Swithun Wells logo, we proceeded to the Grotto for Mass which was jointly concelebrated by Fr Michael and Fr George together with two Bishops from Ireland.

This was followed by Fr George lighting our candle whilst he said a prayer and a blessing.

What a wonderful moment for us all.

Our pilgrimage was a mixture of laughter and bonding with new friends; sharing moments of sadness, feeling most humble but seeing how strong the spirit is and how much time, love and compassion exists in this special place.

Yes I don't think our First Pilgrimage to Lourdes as a newly formed Parish will easily be forgotten and it was an honour and a pleasure to be one of the Pilgrims.

Next year, August 2012, Fr Michael and Fr George hope to take 70 pilgrims to Lourdes.

Our Lady of Lourdes, Pray for Us.

Colin Pritchard