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## The 160th anniversary of the recognition of the Apparitions is an opportunity to resume the journey with renewed devotion and impetus

This year marks the thirtieth Day of the Sick, proclaimed by Pope John Paul II in 1992. This year's theme is: "Standing beside those who suffer on a path of charity." It falls on February 11th, the liturgical feast of Our Lady of Lourdes. Since then, hundreds of thousands of people have flocked to the Grotto of Massabielle in Lourdes to implore support, strength and consolation from the Holy Virgin to help them cope with the inevitable hardships of life. *Throughout the years, Lourdes has continually been visited by many sick persons, lovingly accompanied by volunteers, to ask for healing and the ability to accept the heavy burden of suffering through faith.* Christian hope guides the path of many people. Mary is present here, with her maternal gaze, and she does not allow despair to prevail. Entrusting themselves to her, many set out again with a heart full of confidence and joy. No one is left alone and astray. Instead, a renewed breath of life sustains everyone's steps. It is the beauty of a regenerating encounter full of hope. On this day, pastoral workers gather together in Lourdes to draw up various programmes: pilgrimage directors, hospitality coordinators, and volunteers. *This year, despite the restrictions linked to the pandemic, as many as 500 registered participants are expected to arrive.* This is a great achievement and a promising sign. When organising a pilgrimage to Lourdes, nothing can be left unplanned, given the fragility of so many people afflicted by illness. Charity requires professionalism. Lourdes thus becomes a sign of seriousness and competence. A large number of Italian pilgrims are expected to arrive on this special occasion. This further highlights the attachment to this Marian shrine, which has seen countless Italian pilgrims over the years. It shows deep fondness for this place. The opportunity of travelling to this site is partly due to the discontinuation of the previously required negative swab test for re-entry into Italy. This measure had formerly discouraged many from travelling. This is a great comfort to us and an additional encouragement. In fact, for this year, 2022, there is great anticipation of recovery. *After two years of substantial difficulties linked to the pandemic, there is some light on the horizon.* The system is being set in motion again, reservations are growing with the prospect of life slowly returning to normal. The shrine continues its commitment towards offering a safe and fraternal welcome. Clearly, some regulations are still in place, but the general outlook is very positive. All of us are somewhat "convalescing", yet there is a desire to restart with a renewed spirit. In biblical terms, I would venture to say, *we are animated by the commitment and the hope that had animated the Jewish people as they returned to the Promised Land after the terrible experience of the Babylonian exile.* Indeed, nothing happens by chance. The year 2022 marks the 160th anniversary of the recognition of the Apparitions. In fact, on 18 January 1862, the then Bishop of Tarbes, Monsignor Laurence, approved the authenticity of the apparitions. *It is a beautiful opportunity to set out again with renewed enthusiasm and devotion.* Lourdes awaits you anew, and, above all, the Holy Virgin welcomes you to the blessed Grotto of Massabielle. (\*)rector of the Shrine of Our Lady of Lourdes

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