

An apparition is categorized by the Church as:

- **“Not worthy of belief”** — lacks characteristics of something originating with God
- **“Nothing contrary to the Faith”** — may or may not be of divine origin
- **“Worthy of belief”** — shows traits of an occurrence arranged by God

### “Worthy of Belief”

Apparitions found to be “worthy of belief” are also called “approved” or “recognized” by the Church. In 2008, Father Salvatore Perrella, a theologian from the Pontifical Marianum, an institute in Rome that studies Mary, said that down through the centuries, out of hundreds of claims, full Church approval has been given to only twelve apparition reports. In these apparitions that are “worthy of belief,” Mary seems to foster spiritual conversion and reconciliation. She reminds people to pray, worship God, and live in peace. Often, Mary appeared to simple, humble people or to children.

### Mary’s Continued Presence

Mary continues to appear in the contemporary world. In May 2016, final approval was also given to a thirteenth claim — the appearances from 1983-1990 of Our Lady of the Rosary at San Nicolas in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Formal approval was never given to the apparitions of Our Lady at Guadalupe. They occurred in 1531, centuries before modern guidelines for studying apparitions emerged. And yet, the Church has clearly endorsed the Guadalupe claims. A feast day was assigned to honor Our Lady of Guadalupe on December 12. In 1945, Pope Pius XII named Our Lady of Guadalupe as patroness for both North and South America.

#### Apparitions of Mary Approved by the Church:

- Laus, France (1664-1718)
- Rue de Bac (Miraculous Medal apparitions) in Paris, France (1830)
- La Salette, France (1846)
- Lourdes, France (1858)
- Pontmain, France (1871)
- Knock, Ireland (1879)
- Fatima, Portugal (1917)
- Beauraing, Belgium (1932-33)
- Banneaux, Belgium (1933)
- Akita, Japan (1973-1981)
- Kibeho, Rwanda (1981-1989)
- San Nicolas, Argentina (1983-1990)
- Betania, Venezuela (1984)

The Church permits special devotions — pilgrimages, prayers, liturgies — to approved apparition sites. In addition to a feast associated with Our Lady of Guadalupe, the Church calendar for the dioceses of the United States includes the feast of the Our Lady of Lourdes on February 11 and the feast of Our Lady of Fátima on May 13.

Modern Church teaching reminds Catholics that Mary is indeed the “Mother of the Church.” Perhaps it’s safe to assume that this Mother will always be nearby, ready to come when and where the world needs her most.



### Prayer to Our Lady of Knock

*Our Lady of Knock, Queen of Ireland, you gave hope to your people in a time of distress and comforted them in sorrow. You have inspired countless pilgrims to pray with confidence to your divine Son, remembering his promise, “Ask and you shall receive, seek and you shall find.” Help me to remember that we are all pilgrims on the road to heaven. Fill me with love and concern for my brothers and sisters in Christ, especially those who live with me. Comfort me when I am sick, lonely, or depressed. Teach me how to take part ever more reverently in the holy Mass. Give me a greater love of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. Pray for me now and at the end of my death. Amen.*

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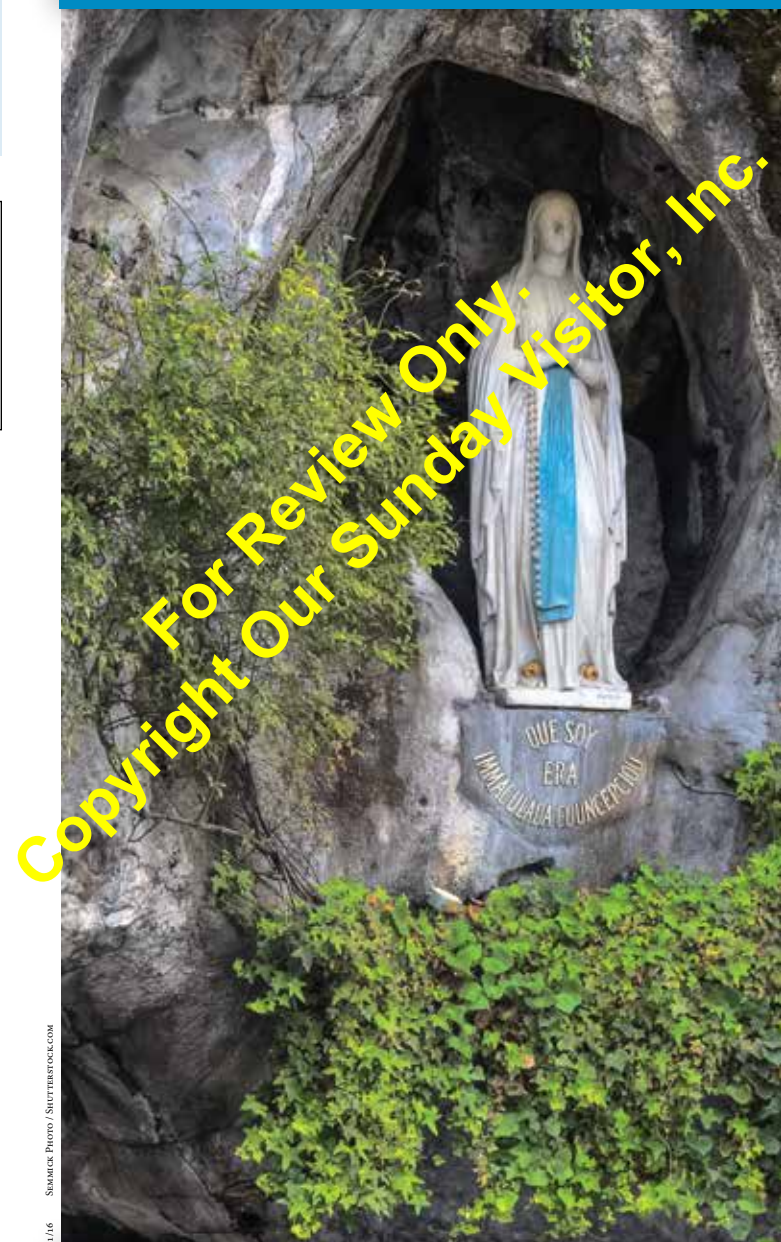
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# When Mary Comes

## APPARITIONS OF THE Blessed Virgin Mary



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## Does Mary, the Mother of God, really appear to people on earth?



Since the first Christian centuries, many followers of Jesus have insisted that she does. In the third century, St. Gregory the Thaumaturge (213-270), a bishop in the Eastern Church, wrote that Mary came to visit and advise him. She also came to St. Athanasius (fourth century) and St. John Damascene (eighth century) — both Doctors of the Church. In the centuries that followed, the founders of many religious orders similarly reported that Mary came to guide and encourage them. Over time, accounts of visits from Mary have come from all over the world.

### What Are Apparitions?

What does it mean when someone claims that Mary has appeared?

According to Father René Laurentin, a renowned French Mariologist, an apparition is a “manifestation perceived by a subject of a being, the vision of whom in this place and in this moment is unexplainable according to the normal course of things.” Genuine apparitions are unexplainable because they come from God.

But this definition does not mean all apparitions are the same. Even in apparitions that the Church has approved, those “manifestations” of Mary were often wonderfully different. Visionaries had contact with Mary through different physical senses — especially touch, hearing, and sight.

For example, twenty-four-year-old Sister Catherine Labouré, the visionary of the 1830 Rue de Bac apparitions of Mary in Paris, said she knelt before the Virgin, who was seated in a chair, in the convent chapel as they talked. Catherine, whose mother had died when she was nine years old, impulsively placed her hands upon the silk-robed knees of her heavenly Mother. That contact was unforgettable. “I am sure that it was the happiest moment of my life,” she later wrote.

That same happiness was shared by fourteen-year-old Bernadette Soubirous, to whom the Virgin appeared in 1858 at Lourdes in southern France. Bernadette never touched the Mother of God, but she never forgot her heavenly smile.

In several other apparitions, those who saw Mary did not hear her speak. That included apparitions at Pontmain, France, in 1871 and at Knock, Ireland, in 1879. At Pontmain, villagers were bracing for invasion by the Prussians. Mary appeared only to four children standing among the villagers. Beneath Mary’s feet a banner unfurled that asked the village to pray and reassured them, “God will hear you in a little while.”



### Apparitions and Mary’s Holiness

The first followers of Jesus agreed that Mary was very close to God. They cherished and honored her as Christ’s mother. And Jesus wanted her to be close to those he left behind. From his cross, Jesus told his mother to see the apostle John as a son. Then he told John, “This is your mother,” asking him to care for Mary from then on (Jn 19:26-27).

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches us, “When the course of her earthly life was finished, [she] was taken up body and soul into heavenly glory, and exalted by the Lord as Queen over all things, so that she might be the more fully conformed to her Son, the Lord of lords and conqueror of sin and death” (966). Mary was holy in a totally new way.

Luke’s Gospel confirms that holiness when the Angel Gabriel asks Mary to be the Savior’s mother; Gabriel greets Mary with, “Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you!” (1:28). As a result of her unique holiness, God wouldn’t allow Mary’s body to decay. St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430), a Doctor of the Church, explained that Mary’s body was sacred, like the Ark of the Covenant described in the Old Testament. It had held and carried God.

So, Mary’s unique holiness makes her especially “qualified” to appear as God’s messenger in our world.

### Belief in Mary’s Apparitions

In the last 500 years or more, claims of Marian apparitions have increased enormously. Mary has reportedly come to different countries on all six major continents. But along with the apparitions approved by the Church, there have been false “copycat” claims. Following the



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apparitions of Our Lady of Beauraing in Belgium in 1932-33, nineteen “visions” of Mary were reported within weeks. They were studied and soon denied by the Church.

How should Catholics view these supernatural claims?

The Church teaches that Scripture and Tradition (doctrine transmitted by the apostles and later by the Church) have already provided what Catholics *must* know and believe. Scripture and Tradition comprise Revelation, the revealed and complete truth about God and salvation. No new teachings or truths are needed or can be added.

Consequently, belief in the approved appearances of Mary is optional. Catholics are free to believe or ignore them. Did Mary really appear long ago on a hilltop to Juan Diego at Guadalupe in Mexico? Or to three children tending sheep in 1917 in Fátima, Portugal? Or, could she have appeared in 1984 to hundreds of people gathered on a beautiful little farm in Betania, Venezuela? Each individual may discern where approved apparitions fit in his or her faith life.

### How the Church Evaluates Apparitions

The Church carefully studies claims of apparitions, as it has for centuries, to protect the faithful from false claims. Sorting out false claims is important for Catholics. The Church still evaluates apparitions with an approach developed in the eighteenth century by theologian Prospero Lambertini. Lambertini, who later became Pope Benedict XIV, established categories for the evaluation of apparitions.

Every study is to be done under the direction of the bishop in the diocese in which an apparition claim is made. No apparition may contradict Church teaching or the Gospel.

It is thought that the local Church will make the best judgment about a local apparition report.

