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Radiate

MORE STORIES OF
DARING
TEEN SAINTS

Colleen Swaim



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Imprimi Potest: Harry Grile, CSsR
Provincial, Denver Province, The Redemptorists
Published by Liguori Publications, Liguori, Missouri 63057
To order, call 800-325-9521 or visit www.liguori.org

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Swaim, Colleen.

Radiate : more stories of daring teen saints / Colleen Swaim.—1st ed.
p. cm.

1. Christian saints—Biography—Juvenile literature. 2. Catholic teenagers—Religious life—Juvenile literature. I. Title.

BX4655.3.S935 2012

270.092'535—dc23

2012024595

p ISBN 978-0-7648-2147-9

e ISBN 978-0-7648-6739-2

Excerpts from English translation of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* for the United States of America © 1994, United States Catholic Conference, Inc.—Libreria Editrice Vaticana; English translation of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church: Modifications from the Editio Typica* © 1997, United States Catholic Conference, Inc.—Libreria Editrice Vaticana.

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Additional sources and permissions: pages 142-144

Printed in the United States of America

16 15 14 13 12 / 5 4 3 2 1

First Edition

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HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

You'll notice when you start to turn these pages that *Radiate* isn't your ordinary stories-of-the-saints book. I've filled these pages with tons of extras that will bring these zealous young Christians to life and will inspire you to live out your faith with their same fire. The main focus of each chapter is the story of the particular saint. But as you'll see, there is so much more.

Since our Catholic faith has been practiced in so many different ways and because the teens featured here come from a variety of times and places, you'll find info and important definitions in the boxes scattered throughout the text. Read up—you just might learn something!

To help you apply what you're reading to your own life, I've included reflection questions throughout each story to think and write about. Writing space can be found throughout the book.

You will also find Scripture verses, pictures, quotes, and other fun tidbits scattered throughout the stories. Take them in, write them down, think about them for a while—they are all meant to bring the saints to life and inspire you with their holiness!

At the end of each story is a prayer, usually one that the person you've just read about said or wrote. Take a moment while you're in a thoughtful mode and inspired by these saintly stories to pray. We know that these men and women are powerful intercessors with God.

You'll find "Saintly Challenges" at the end of each chapter. These are ideas of things you can do to connect even deeper with the life of the person you've just read about. There is something for everyone, so dig in.

At the end of the book are sources that can help you delve into the teachings that connect to the stories in this book. Remember to check them out!



Radiate

SAINT BERNADETTE



A SIMPLE YOUNG GIRL



“...A simple young girl from Lourdes,
Bernadette Soubirous, saw a light, and in this
light she saw a young lady who was ‘beautiful,
more beautiful than any other.’”

—POPE BENEDICT XVI, SEPTEMBER 13, 2008, TORCHLIGHT
PROCESSION HOMILY, LOURDES, FRANCE

FEAST DAY: APRIL 16

PATRONAGE: BODILY ILLNESS; SHEPHERDS AND SHEPHERDESSES;
AGAINST POVERTY; PEOPLE RIDICULED FOR FAITH;
LOURDES, FRANCE

In 1858, Mary appeared a total of eighteen times in a grotto used as a shelter by pigs. Perhaps even more amazingly, the person she came to see was a four-foot-seven-inch-tall girl named Bernadette, who was unable to read, write, or speak French. Instead, she spoke a regional dialect of her native Lourdes and had been accused of being “incapable of learning” such an extent that her catechist wanted to delay her reception of her first holy Communion.

At age eleven, Bernadette contracted cholera, which affected her growth. She had to deal with profound asthma and, later, tuberculosis in her lungs and bones. This explains why her sister Marie and friend Jeanne cried out when crossing the very cold water where the River Gave and the mill water converged. If they thought the water was much too frigid, they figured sickly Bernadette didn't have a chance of making it across to follow them. It was cold as ice, and being subjected to wading through water like that was one of the last things Bernadette needed to be doing, as her mother regularly reminded her.

Bernadette was initially afraid of the “Lady” surrounded by white light, with her blue eyes, white dress, blue belt, white veil, one gold rose on each foot, and holding a rosary with white beads. In fact, she wondered if the Lady could possibly be real. She finally got her rosary out of her pocket and tried to make the sign of the cross but couldn't.

Bernadette was so fearful that she couldn't move. The Lady then made the sign of the cross with her own rosary, and Bernadette was able to mirror her and felt calmed. The girl then knelt down and continued to pray the rosary, and the Lady moved her fingers along the beads but

How does the Church

discern whether visions of Mary are valid or fake? For instance, how do we know the difference between Bernadette's vision and a fictitious story? Since 1974, the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has used very specific criteria to evaluate reported Marian apparitions. The questions the Church considers include such data as: What is the mental state of the person reporting the apparition? Does the message conflict with Church teaching? Does this appear to be an attempt on the part of the supposed visionary to gain money off of the gullibility of others?

did not move her own lips. When they finished, the Lady gestured for Bernadette to come closer, but she stayed back and the Lady left.

Bernadette reunited with her sister and friend, and she questioned them about what they had seen. Her sister and friend were confused and stated they hadn't seen anything at all. Trying to keep her cool, Bernadette initially denied that anything had been out of the ordinary. Eventually, though, Bernadette relented and told her friends about her encounter, asking them to promise that nothing would be mentioned to anyone else. Marie and Jeanne, however, thought that the Lady meant to do them ill and suggested that Bernadette not go back to see her. Bernadette insisted that the Lady did not have any bad intentions. Whatever their reasons, the girls broke their promise to Bernadette when they arrived home. This resulted in being forbidden by Louise (Bernadette and Marie's mother) to make any more trips to the grotto.

Reflect on a time when you had your confidence betrayed. Were you hurt by the incident? Did the person(s) at least have good intentions?

The next Sunday, Bernadette promised her mother she wouldn't fall into the water and would be home for vespers if she could just go down to the grotto for a bit. Her mother concedes as Bernadette promised to be very careful and be back to the family home in time for prayer. After being given permission, she proceeded with other village girls to the grotto, still partially second-guessing what she had previously experienced.

It is crucial to Bernadette's story to remember that she obeys her parents always, even when they misunderstand the Lady's intentions. Was there ever a time when you had to be obedient to your parents, knowing that they had your best interest at heart, even though it was difficult?

After praying one decade of the rosary, she saw the Lady and, prepared, began to throw holy water on her! Bernadette's rationale was that

if she wasn't of God, she would go away. Far from simply disappearing, the Lady smiled, lowered her head and beckoned to Bernadette, who started to become fearful. The apparition discontinued when Bernadette finished praying the rosary.

The following Thursday, Bernadette came to the grotto with a different kind of reinforcement: adults. They told Bernadette to take a pen and paper and ask: "If you have something to say to me, would you be kind enough to write it down?" The Lady answered that this was not necessary and responded with an invitation back to the grotto for fifteen more visits. This request was made with such kindness and politeness that Bernadette, an impoverished teenager with little to no education, was taken aback.

Think of the people in your own life who aren't used to being treated in accordance with their God-given worth as human beings. What can you do to better pay them the respect they deserve?

On a subsequent visit, Bernadette was asked to drink and wash in the grotto's spring water. The young girl thought the Lady was referring to the Gave River, as she did not know of a spring, and was surprised to see her indicate a space under the grotto. The space that our Lady referred was a little muddied water, barely enough to be scooped up. When Bernadette attempted to drink it, she vomited the first three times and finally drank a bit down.

Appearances can be deceiving. When was the last time you were surprised to find beauty or goodness in an unexpected place?

As Bernadette continued to visit the Lady at the grotto, she followed the Lady's requests to kiss and crawl on the ground for the salvation of sinners, as well as to pray for their conversion with a marked humility; not for the increasing amount of attention that was being drawn to the simple place. It was becoming clear to all involved that the message of Lourdes would be one of penance and, soon enough, healing.

The practice of lighting a candle at the Lourdes Grotto began when Bernadette started to bring a blessed, lighted candle. This practice continues today as surely as the miracles that flow from the place, such as in the case of Catherine Latapie, a woman from Lourdes whose paralyzed arm healed after bathing in the grotto's spring on Monday, March 1, 1858, within the period of time that our Lady was still visiting Bernadette.

Shortly thereafter, the Lady had a message for Bernadette to deliver to the local priests: Build a chapel and hold processions at the grotto. Bernadette saw Father Peyramale to go about fulfilling the request. This priest asked her to find out who exactly this Lady was and report back to him with the information. When Bernadette did inquire of the



"I am the Immaculate Conception."

Lady's name, she simply answered with a smile, which made Bernadette's priest think that the Lady was making a mockery of the girl and that she shouldn't go back to the grotto. After the fifteen promised visits, having been asked four times, the Lady told Bernadette who she was and continues to be: "I am the Immaculate Conception." This title was so unfamiliar to Bernadette that she was afraid she would forget it, so she repeated it over and over again to herself on the way back home. While Father Peyramale didn't initially believe that Mary announced, "I am the

Immaculate Conception,” thinking a person couldn’t be an event, he eventually became one of Bernadette’s biggest supporters and greatest friends.

The last Marian apparition to Bernadette at Lourdes was on July 16, 1858. Bernadette was forced to pray in a field across from the river because the grotto had been blocked off by the police. To Bernadette, though, it made no difference, as, “It seemed to me that I was at the grotto, at the same distance as the other times. All I could see was the Virgin. I had never seen her so beautiful.”

Over the eighteen visits with the Lady, Bernadette was given three messages that were to be for her ears only, while also being told that “she did not promise to make me happy in this world, but in the next.” While we still do not know what the messages entailed, it was certainly true that Bernadette’s earthly journey wouldn’t be easy.

The Sunday following Bernadette’s final visits with the Lady, the young girl was taken by the police during her departure from the church and interrogated. After being threatened by a tour of the local prison, she was brought into the chambers of the police commissioner and asked to recite the occurrence of events at the grotto. When Bernadette realized the recounted story had been recorded incorrectly, she pointed out the discrepancies. She argued her point over the validity of her own statements the problematic errors being recorded in the account for an hour and a half. Meanwhile, her father and other villagers clamored outside for her release, banging entryways and windows, shouting, “If you don’t let her leave, we will kick the door in.” Bernadette was finally released by the police commissioner, but her trouble with the local authorities wasn’t over yet.

Later that same week, she was interrogated by the office of the imperial prosecutor and was made to recount the same sequence of events yet again, but this time her mother was present. Crowds were again at the entryways and windows, refusing to desist until the pair were allowed to leave. Both mother and daughter were forced to stand while being interrogated, and yet again errors were recorded in the official account. Bernadette was accused of having her current story conflict with the earlier version from the police commissioner, but she denied

this while the police commissioner threatened imprisonment. As a result, her mother broke down and cried. At this, the imperial prosecutor, realizing perhaps that he had gone too far, finally offered them chairs on which to sit. While her mother Louise accepted, Bernadette courageously said her thanks and sat cross-legged on the floor rather than accept a chair from the men who were doubting the authenticity of her story. It is notable that Bernadette never changed her story in official recordings of her experience.

Bernadette wrote many letters for a girl with a limited amount of education until the middle of her teen years. In the fall of 1858, she entered into a school with the Sisters of Charity and Christian Instruction in Lourdes. It was there that she started to learn to read, write, and speak French. Despite her education, throughout her life, sisters would proofread her correspondence before she rewrote letters and sent them out. By 1860, Bernadette was continuing her schooling and lived with the sisters. There was an influx of pilgrims visiting Lourdes while Bernadette concentrated on her studies. The interest of pilgrims



The rock cave at Massabielle, where Saint Bernadette Soubirous claimed to have seen the Blessed Virgin Mary. Now it is a religious grotto.

would conflict with her daily tasks of working in the infirmary and with the younger students. For the rest of her life, this would pose a challenge, with Bernadette commenting that, “All I do is receive pilgrims from morning to night,” and that she was “weary of seeing so many people.” From the beginning of the apparitions, Bernadette—later Sister Marie-Bernarde—was humble. She refused to accept presents, whether in the form of money or otherwise, from pilgrims to Lourdes, and she deflected glory and prestige from herself to the primary message of Our Lady as given at the grotto in Lourdes, France: a call to penance and renewal.

Not only pilgrims were interested in Bernadette’s encounters with Mary, the beautiful Lady, but also the Church. The Bishop of Tarbes, Monsignor Laurence, questioned Ber-

nadette about the apparitions between November 17, 1858, and December 7, 1860, and finally made a joyous announcement on January 18, 1862, that the diocese had officially approved the Lourdes apparitions and messages.

Being a follower of Christ does not guarantee everything going your way without hardships. This was especially true for Bernadette, who suffered from non-stop illness throughout her life. Due to her illness, Bernadette received Last Rites a total of four times, the first time occurring when she was still a teenager on April 28, 1862. It is amazing, though, that she never felt sorry for herself through her earliest trials and later through serious asthma attacks and a bout with pneumonia. Instead, she poured her heart into caring for her family and friends, especially through her letters and prayers, saying, “I will not forget anyone” in her petitions to the Lord through the intercessions of his Mother.

While she felt the call to religious life, she was unsure of what particular order she should join. Even though she had been invited by several different ones, she was worried that her health conditions would make her ineligible. Her worries turned out to be well-founded. Mother Louise Ferrand, the superior general of the Sisters of Charity and Christian Instruction, objected for this very reason, saying: “she does not know how to do anything.” Fortunately, she was not the one to make the final decision, as on July 7, 1866, Bernadette was accepted into the Congregation of the Sisters of Charity and Christian Instruction and joined as a postulant.

Recount a time when you had to make a decision on what path to take, whether it be spiritually, educationally, athletically, etc.

Not everyone had such negative feelings toward Bernadette’s entrance into the community life. According to the community’s official journal, “At last our prayers have been answered! Bernadette is in the novitiate! How anxious we have been to have this privileged visionary

of the Grotto of Lourdes among us! She is exactly as she is reputed to be: humble, simple, modest, smiling and sweetly happy in spite of her long illnesses.” The very next day after she arrived, Bernadette personally told the community her experiences with the apparitions conditionally, as she demanded that it would be the only time and she wouldn’t be asked about it again. Later that same month, on July 29, 1866, she took the habit and became Sister Marie-Bernarde, in honor of the special Lady and Saint Bernard, her patron saint.

She took on the humble work of assisting as a nurse in the infirmary, but the public still sought after her, and bishops visited her. Many requested pictures, as this was the beginning of an era when photography was made possible. But Bernadette was afforded relative peace in the convent, especially with the protection of her mother superior. When the public asked the order for Bernadette’s prayers, these intentions were wisely brought before and prayed by all the women of her community, as she was living a communal religious life.

A description of Sister Marie-Bernarde from her doctor sums up her nature throughout her time with the sisters. The doctor noted that “she is a small, rather sickly looking, twenty-seven-year-old woman. She has a calm and gentle nature, and she cares for her patients with a great deal of intelligence. She carries out every order impeccably; hence, she inspires respect and she has my entire confidence. As you can see, this young sister is far from insane. I shall go further: her calm, simple, and gentle nature does not dispose her in the least to being susceptible to insanity.” In October 1866, she again received Last Rites, and due to the severity of her condition made religious vows. Thereafter, she was confined to the infirmary for four months. Later that year, her mother died, and the following October, she made her first profession (restating the vows that were given during Last Rites).

in articulo mortis (at the point of death).

The year 1870 brought the Franco-Prussian War, and the sisters cared for wounded Frenchmen. Even with so many immediate cares occupying her time, Bernadette was most concerned for her siblings, especially her youngest brother and godson, Pierre, who she was un-

able to see for the entirety of time that she was away at the convent. In 1871, her brother was an eleven-and-a-half-year-old junior high school student in a family that had just lost their father. Bernadette wrote to him frequently to inquire about how things were at home and how her brother was coming along with his studies, an opportunity that she had not been able to have at his age. Similarly, she advised her younger cousin Bernadette that “you will surely be happy if you love the dear Lord who protects you in a special way by allowing you to receive a Christian education. There are so many who do not enjoy the same advantage as you.”

Do you take your education in the faith for granted? Who is an individual who has helped guide your path in Christ?

Sometimes, as is the case with practically all human beings, the people who Bernadette cared for the most frustrated and let her down. She would become annoyed when family members, especially her brothers and sisters, did not return her letters, or, even worse, when she was “told that my letters are circulating everywhere. It hurt me so much to discover this and if it happens again I will not write anyone anymore.” Additionally, her brother Jean-Marie entered religious life but later did not tell Sister Marie-Bernarde when he left or even when he eventually married. She was deeply wounded, feeling hurt to have to find out the news from others.

Has someone reached out to you, perhaps via social media, that you have not taken the time to respond to? Take the chance to remake that connection.

In 1874, Sister Marie-Bernarde became an assistant to the sacristan, however from October 1875 to July 1876, the only chapel she was able to find herself was the one she referred to as her “White Chapel,” which was better known as her infirmary bed. So sick that she could not even go to Mass, she nonetheless kept up her spirits, writing, “What can I do but be patient and keep saying: Fiat!” Her sickness continued for the last years of her young life, but her faithfulness to her vocation continued to the end, as she took her perpetual vows

Sacristan: A person who prepares the things needed for Mass

Fiat: Let it be done

on September 22, received Last Rites for the last time on March 28, and finally passed at 3:15 p.m. on April 16, 1879, at the age of thirty-five. Her last words underlie that, at heart, Sister Marie-Bernarde was still the simple young girl a beautiful Lady had appeared to: “Pray for me, a poor sinner!”

Ask Jesus, our Savior, to come prepare a place for himself in your young hearts so there will be nothing to grieve him when he arrives. Think only of Jesus, since he is choosing to rest in your souls. Make his dwelling place like a sanctuary of innocence and peace.

Catechetical Connection: Vocation

From Sister Marie-Bernarde Soubirous to her brother Pierre: “Have you made a decision about your vocation? What do you plan to do? Dear friend, you have no idea how interested I am in the welfare of your soul. Not a day passes that I do not pray for you to our Lord and to the most holy Virgin to give you discernment about your vocation and to show you God’s holy will. This is not the kind of decision we make overnight; it is for the rest of our lives and usually our eternal happiness depends on our vocation. So pray much, dear friend, that God will show you the choice you should make, both for love of him and for your own salvation.”

Just as it has strict guidelines for approving Marian apparitions, the Church is also very careful when it comes to officially approving miracles. Since Lourdes is known to be a site where many healing miracles have been reported, it has become a place the Church has paid special attention to since Bernadette's visions. Well over 6,000 miracles have been reported from Lourdes pilgrims, but the Church has only approved a few dozen. In order to be approved, a reported case has to be reviewed by panels of theologians, doctors, and Church officials to make sure that what has taken place is authentically miraculous. After all, think of the scandal that would be caused if an approved miracle was later found out to be a fraud!

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: The Vocation of Lay People

"Lay believers are in the front line of Church life; for them the Church is the animating principle of human society. Therefore, they in particular ought to have an ever-clearer consciousness not only of belonging to the Church, but of being the Church, that is to say, the community of the faithful on earth under the leadership of the Pope, the common Head, and of the bishops in communion with him. They are the Church" (CCC 899).

For the most part, the apostolate of pastors cannot be fully effective without the activity of:

PRAYER WITH ˆBERNADETTE:

*O my God, I do not ask you to keep me from suffering
but to be with me in affliction.*

*Teach me to seek you as my only comforter;
sustain my faith; strengthen my hope; purify my love.*

*Grant me the grace to recognize your hand in the midst of suffering
and to want no other comforter than you.*

Amen.



"O Hope of Israel, LORD!
all who forsake you shall be put to shame;
The rebels shall be enrolled in the netherworld;
they have forsaken the LORD,
source of living waters."

Do you ever ignore your commitments to God? How so?

Bernadette's advice to her seventeen-year-old brother Pierre:

"I implore you not to spend time with young people
who have a bad influence on you. It will do you harm
without you even suspecting it."

Saintly Challenges

- Keep a rosary handy in your pocket, purse, car, etc., imitating Bernadette on the first day she saw the apparition of Mary at the Grotto of Lourdes.
- Bernadette used her letter writing as a way to help those in need, such as the time she wrote to a priest friend asking him “to take up a collection for a family in dire need.” Take the opportunity to participate in a collection for a worthy cause, such as a needy family in your own community.
- Bernadette was truly a prayer warrior. Make a concerted effort to take time out and pray for the intentions of at least one other person today.
- Make a conscious effort, perhaps starting small with just one class subject, to work to your greatest potential at your studies. In her writings, the saint said, “I would almost like to add this one resolution to yours so that you make the most of your time: ‘I will also work very hard in class so that I may please Jesus.’”
- “I have just learned of the death of my father,” said Saint Bernadette in her writings. “He died Saturday. Always have a great devotion for the agonizing heart of Jesus, for it is a consolation to know that we have prayed for those we love when we lose them and cannot be there. That is what I was doing on Saturday, praying for those in the final agony of death, never suspecting that I was praying for my poor father, who at that very moment was entering into eternity.” Pause to pray for someone, whether known to you or anonymous, who is on the verge of death.

- Several movies have been made about the life of Saint Bernadette, among them *The Song of Bernadette* (1943), *Bernadette of Lourdes* (1960) and *Bernadette* (1988). Watch one or more of them and compare their telling of her story to the way you've pictured the events of Bernadette's life taking place.