



La Maintenance
des Penitents de
France

THE ORGANIZING COMMITTEE OF THE
INTERNATIONAL PILGRIMAGE OF CONFRATERNITIES
LOURDES 4/6 APRIL 2008



Confederazione delle
Confraternite delle
Diocesi d'Italia

Responsible Organizing Committee International Pilgrimage Confraternities Lourdes 2008

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PRESS RELEASE

**“World Pilgrimage of Confraternities–
Lourdes 4/6 april 2008”**

Rome, 1 dicembre 2006 – An International meeting of Confraternities is planned for the 4th, 5th, and 6th April 2008 at the shrine of Lourdes, for a communal Pilgrimage of Prayer in the place where the Blessed Virgin appeared to Bernadette in 1858.

In the traditional spirit of confraternities, which always look towards the Blessed Virgin as an intercessor with God, members from all over Europe will meet for days of prayer and of witness to personal faith, which is always manifested by that popular piety which the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments has recently declared “a true treasure of the people of god” (Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy, 2001, §9 [Catholic Truth Society Do 682, 2002]).

An occasion of meeting with the Confraternity of the H.N.D.L known in the world for its work of acceptance of the pilgrims will be this. This International Meeting will be realized in those days of opens them with one common procession with Torchlight procession, international Mass, Way of the Cross, Blessed Sacrament Procession and other common moments between the much Confraternities that will take part.

The need for lay associations was felt by Christians from the very first centuries, in order to bring about that brotherhood and that love of Christ mentioned in the gospel: “where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them” (Matthew, 18:20).

References to lay associations among Christians exist as far back as the seventh century. However, the first certain documentation regarding the erection of confraternities goes back to the first centuries of the recently closed millennium, when there spread throughout Italy, Spain, France and Germany the formation of popular movements which showed the important contribution of the laity to the great process of the renewal of the Church.

Among these movements, the appearance in Italy of confraternities which sprang up in the wake of the *Disciplinati* (also known *Flagellati*) in the fourteenth century and of the *Bianchi di Provenza* (“white-clothed people of Provenza”) at the beginning of the sixteenth century were of great importance. It showed that, over the course of the centuries, and even today, these movements are a gift which belongs to the whole ecclesial community, at the service of the local diocese, living in the church, for the church, and in the union with the bishop.

Meaningful on this subject they were the words of Pope Giovanni XXIII who addressing to the Confraternities said in 1960: *Continued on the way, than has been assigned from your constitutions, you maintain yourselves faithful to the spirit of they, wishing of being in means to the society like the yeast in the mass.* And subsequently, in the 1984 those of John Paul II: *The incidence that still today the Confraternities can not only have in the practical sphere of the religious one, but also in the field of the folklore inspired to the Christian tradition: all it can and it must serve to the ecclesiale apostolate, especially liturgic and catechistic.*



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Today, members of confraternities have their own dress, which is a reminder of the call to poverty and equality. In confraternity celebrations and processions the crucified Christ is always present, a sign of Christ's sacrifice and a witness to the faith of the confraternity's members. The processions are led by large banners, which encapsulate the confraternity's history in a representation of the holy Patron or, more often, of the Blessed Virgin. These banners often represent the Blessed Virgin -- under the one of the titles of the Rosary; as the Sorrowful Virgin; as the one Assumed into Heaven -- but they can also figure the great saints who have appeared in the history of the Church, or again the Blessed Sacrament or Death and Intercession.

The devotion of the confraternities to Mary, which has already been referred to, was renewed during a difficult period in the history of the Church when in 1536 the Blessed Virgin appeared to a confraternity member of Savona (Italy), Antonio Botta, to whom She addressed these words: "if it were not for those few prayers and good works carried out be even more troubled than it is".

It was precisely this call to prayer and to good works which brought forth a new growth in confraternities and in fraternal spirit, both in Liguria and in the whole of Italy. The life of a confraternity is ordered towards works of charity to one's neighbour, to helping the sick and the dying, and to the support of the poor. Today these actions are recovering their former fervour, responding with Christian charity to the needs of today's poor. In the past, confraternities were called upon to undertake the burial of the dead; today there remains the important need of prayer in suffrage for the Holy Souls.

The religious practices of confraternities strengthens and confirms the devotion of popular piety -- the Rosary; the Way of the Cross; the Office of the Dead; adoration of the Blessed Sacrament; the celebration of Mass in their churches (oratories) -- thereby also giving an important service of support to parishes.

Seen in a broad context, Confraternities should work locally, in their own parishes. However, modern technology should be used in order to promote contacts with confraternity members of different nationalities, so as to create links, to encourage collaboration, and to share and learn from different experiences and methods of evangelisation.

It is hoped that the meeting in Lourdes will begin this common pilgrimage of the third millennium. The Lourdes Pilgrimage 2008 is being organised in Italy by the "Confederation of Confraternities of the Dioceses of Italy"; in France by the "Maintenance", which represents the confraternities of the "Langue d'Oc"; and in Spain by various different bodies and institutions.

In order to facilitate these aims, a special multi-lingual internet site has been set up at www.confraternitelourdes2008.org where appropriate information may be found or requested (e-mail segreteria@confraternitelourdes2008.org) and from where a pre-booking application form can be downloaded.