

Our Lady of Fatima, May 13th

(By Fr. Morales)

May 13th, 1917. Lands of Portugal. Leiría, Aljustrel, Boleiros, Valinhos, Cabeço, Fatima. Lúcia, Jacinta, and Francisco are playing at the top of a hill. Beneath them, in the declivity, is the Cova da Iria. They gather stones to surround a bush. Lightning flashes...

The three little shepherds are surprised. Lúcia, the oldest, fearfully suggests: "It is better to go home. That is lightning; there may be a thunderstorm coming." They fearfully run down the slope, leading the sheep towards the road. They get halfway down the slope, and reach a large holmoak tree.

"I am from heaven..."

A sudden flash of lightning. "It was not properly a lightning, rather the reflection of a light that was approaching..." Above the holmoak, they behold a Lady "all dressed in white, more brilliant than the sun, and radiating a light more clear and intense than a crystal glass filled with sparkling water." Astounded, they slow down...

"We were so close we were bathed in the light that radiated from her... just a few feet from her." Our Lady speaks to them: "Do not be afraid. I will do you no harm." Lúcia asks her: "Where are you from?" And Our Lady, God's smile, transmitting serenity, answers: "I am from heaven..."

Words that seduce...

The dialogue continues. Lúcia adds: "And what do you want of me?" Mary answers with a request: "I have come to ask you to come here for six months in succession, on the 13th day, at this same hour. Later on, I will tell you who I am and what I want. Afterwards, I will return here yet a seventh time" (Lúcia, IV Memoir).

A loving warning, an urgent invitation, encouraging confidence. This is Our Lady's message when she appears in Fatima. It is a beauty that captives us, words that seduce us, purity and simplicity that make us fall in love.

Loving warning

A persistent warning charged with maternal anguish: "God is about to punish the world for its crimes, by means of war, famine, and persecutions of the Church and of the Holy Father... If my requests are heeded, Russia will be converted, and there will be peace; if not, she will spread her errors throughout the world, causing wars and persecutions of the Church. The good will be martyred, the Holy Father will have much to suffer, various nations will be annihilated." (Apparition 13/7/1917)

Either reform or succumb. This is the dilemma. Either reform our lives and our thinking in the light of God, fulfilling the Pauline maxim (Rom 12:2), or be shipwrecked for time and eternity.

This is a serious warning for the world, and particularly for Spain. Our Lady asked that "its bishops gather in a retreat and they consider the renewal of its people, clergy and religious orders" (Lucia, letter, 4/8.1943).

Urgent invitation

Souls are condemned. In Fatima as in Lourdes, Our Lady contemplates with pain the gloomy scene... Her children are rushing into hell. They have to be saved. She speaks to us when she addresses the three little shepherds. "Pray, pray very much, and make sacrifices for sinners; for many souls go to hell, because there are none to sacrifice themselves and to pray for them" (Apparition, 19/8/1917).

"The salvation of many depends on the prayers and voluntary penances of the members of the Church", Pio XII would write some years later. "This is a deep mystery, and an inexhaustible subject of meditation" (*Mystici Corporis Christi*, n.44, 6/29/1943).

Our Lady makes us a pressing invitation. Hopeful and pleading, she addresses the three shepherds with emotion from the first apparition: "Are you willing to offer yourselves to God and bear all the sufferings He wills to send you, as an act or reparation for the sins by which He is offended, and of supplication for the conversion of sinners?" (13/5/1917).

On July 13th, the third apparition, the request is more compelling. "Sacrifice yourselves for sinners, and say many times, especially whenever you make some sacrifice: O Jesus, it is for love of You, for the conversion of sinners, and in reparation for the sins committed against the Immaculate Heart of Mary."

Encouraging confidence

Fatima is a message of hope. "You are going to have much to suffer," if you make of your lives a continual offering for the salvation of souls, "but do not be afraid. The grace of God will be your comfort" (13/5/1917). As to Lúcia, she repeats to us: "I will never forsake you. My Immaculate Heart will be your refuge and the way that will lead you to God" (13/6/1917).

There is a deep crisis within the Church. Large sectors are infected. Everything has become naturalism, anthropology, sociology. We live in a narcissist world that insists on self-destruction, with human beings that think they are the supreme being. A Christian Europe that is falling apart. At the same time, the threat of atheistic Communism spreading everywhere. Thousand of men and women are charmed by its fallacies and enslaved to its tyranny. In Spain, there is a progressive degradation of customs, an erosion of the family, a deterioration of the faith of a people who no longer believe in God and His commandments.

Fatima is a dawn of hope within this chaos. The White Virgin will triumph. "Russia will be converted" after "she spreads her errors throughout the world, causing wars and persecutions of the Church." A jubilant cry of victory: "In the end, my Immaculate Heart will triumph" (13/7/1917).

Mary will triumph using insignificant souls, in Fatima, now and always. To one of them Jesus has revealed: "My Mother will overcome Satan. She is the Mediatrix. She is My Mother and yours. She is the pillar of My Church. Little souls, guided by my Holy Mother, have power to change the course of events."

"Living on dark and true faith..."

The message in Fatima, as well as in Lourdes, is both a warning and an invitation, the eternal and always current echo of the Gospel.

It is an irresistible encouragement to pass through this earth looking at heaven, “living here below like pilgrims, the poor, the exiled, orphans, the thirsty, without a road and without anything, hoping for everything in heaven.” To “live only in dark and true faith and certain hope and complete charity” (Saint John of the Cross’ letter to Juana Pedraza, 12/10/1589). It is to live in undisturbed serenity, for “if we believe that Jesus ascended on high, we do not lose our peace on earth, *non ergo turbemur in terra*” (Saint Augustine).

Surprising identity

The message of Fatima is the eternal message of the Gospel. If the apparition of Our Lady means warning, invitation, confidence, so too does the Gospel... It cannot be otherwise. If Mary brought us the Gospel when she became the Mother of Jesus, today she reminds us of it, without adding anything or taking anything away.

The Gospel of Jesus is a warning. It announces that we are just passing through this world, that we have a soul to save. “What profit is there for one to gain the whole world yet lose or forfeit himself?” (Lk 9:25). It averts us of an ever-present risk, namely, that of us becoming caught up in what is temporal and obsolete. “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and worried about many things. One thing is needful. Mary has chosen the better part and it will not be taken from her” (Lk 10:41-42).

The Gospel is also an invitation to conversion. “If you do not repent, you will all perish” (Lk 13:5). And it is an invitation to follow Jesus. “Come, follow me” (Mt 4:16). “Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me” (Mt 16:24; Mk 8:34; Lk 9:23).

A warning, an invitation, but also a reassurance. “Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid” (Mt 14:27). “Take courage, I have conquered the world” (Jn 16:33). “Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for your souls” (Mt 11:28-29).

Exquisite fidelity

The sensitivity of those little shepherds is moving. They fulfil with exquisite fidelity the request of Our Lady. They multiply the sacrifices offered for the conversion of sinners, and so repair the offenses against the Immaculate Heart of Mary. The three of them pray constantly. They tirelessly repeat the prayer Mary taught them.

The three of them offer themselves unconditionally, but each has his or her nuances in their own sacrifices. They print on them a particular stamp. Francisco wants to “console God.” A few days after the first apparition, he leads the sheep to the pasture. He climbs up to the top of a steep rock and says to the other two: “do not come up here, let me stay here alone.” They go off, chasing butterflies. Hours later they offer him some food. “No - he says-, you go ahead and eat.” Later, they approach again inviting him to pray the rosary. “What have you been doing all this time?”, Lúcia asks. He answered: “I am thinking about God, who is so sad because of so many sins! If only I could give Him joy!”

Francisco “was a boy of few words. Whenever he prayed or offered sacrifices, he preferred to go apart and hide, even from Jacinta and myself. Quite often, we surprised him hidden behind a wall or a clump of blackberry bushes, where he had ingeniously slipped away to kneel and pray, or ‘think’, as he said, ‘of Our Lord, Who is sad on account of so many sins’.”

On the way to school, he used to say to Lúcia: “Listen! You go to school, and I will stay here in the church, close to the Hidden Jesus. It’s not worth my while learning to read, as I’ll be going to heaven very soon. On your way home, come here and call me.” Once he was ill, he often told Lúcia, when she visited him on her way to school: “Go to the church and give my love to the Hidden Jesus. What hurts me most is that I cannot go there myself and stay a while with Him” (Lúcia, IV Memoir).

Jacinta, on the contrary, was passionate about the conversion of sinners. Before and during her illness she offered many sacrifices to deliver them from hell. She hated milk. Her mother brought her a cup to her bed on a hot day. She also brought her a bunch of fresh grapes. Jacinta remembered Our Lady and she refused the grapes and took the cup of milk. When she was alone with Lúcia, she said: “I offered it saying to Jesus: ‘it is for love of You, and for the conversion of sinners’.”

Her mother approaches them while they were playing. She offers them some tempting figs. Jacinta sits down next to the basket, with the two of them. She picks up the first fig. She suddenly remembers and says: “Today we haven’t yet made a single sacrifice for sinners! We’ll have to make this one.” She puts the fig back in the basket, and while it falls, she repeats the offering: “Jesus, it’s for love of You...”. “There we left our figs in the basket –Lúcia concludes–, for the conversion of sinners.”

Jacinta was ill and was still in Fatima. Lúcia is next to her. “Are you better?”, she asks. “You know I’m not getting better. I’ve such pains in my chest! But I don’t say anything. I’m suffering for the conversion of sinners.”

It’s the beginning of July, 1919 and she is in the Hospital at Lisbon. Lúcia asks her if she is suffering a lot. “Yes, I am – she answers– But I offer everything for sinners, and in reparation to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Oh, how much I love to suffer for love of Our Lord and Our Lady, just to please Them! They greatly love those who suffer for the conversion of sinners” (Lúcia, I Memoir).

Simple lesson

The simple and eloquent lesson that the three little shepherds give us with their offered lives surprises us. We see a generosity and constancy which is not normal in children. They point out the path to people of all ages. So aware and responsible, so mature in their faith. They are pioneers of a Council that “preaches that the reform of the Church is based on changing own thoughts and preferences according to the will of God” (Paul VI, 8/7/1968).

Francisco, Jacinta, Lúcia are truly mature believers. At their tender age they reach adulthood in the faith. It was a maturity that consists precisely in achieving the spirit of childhood, casting off the scientific jumble, a false coming of age. They climb that peak

looking at Mary. She, who is sublime simplicity, reminds them with ineffable love the words of Jesus: “Unless you become like children...” (Mt 18:3).

“Fulfil one’s duties...”

The message of Fatima and Lourdes is Christ in His Church. It is the Gospel that enlightens the heart and is incarnated in the life of each baptized person.

A life that becomes constant prayer, this is the Christian: total self-offering for the conversion of sinners, for the salvation of souls. He is not happy with just a few hours or single days. His whole life becomes a prayer, with the plea of Fatima always in the heart. His thirst for souls is not quenched with isolated performances. It demands the apostolate of every minute living with Mary “hidden with Jesus Christ” (Col 3:3), under the Father’s gaze...

A life that burns like the flame until it is extinguished in silence. The Catholic repeats unceasingly: “Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his footsteps” (1 Pe 2:21). If He laid down his life for me, so I ought to lay down my life for my brothers too (cf. 1 Jn 3:16). A life lived consciously and responsibly. They sacrifice themselves with permanent and martyrial fidelity, to the point of generously shedding their own blood.

A life convinced that “Spain and the world will be saved by prayer” (The Heart of Jesus to Saint Maravillas of Jesus, Escorial (Spain), 1923). But by constant prayer that becomes life, that “helps the souls to understand that the true penance He wants and demands now consists, above all, in the effort that each one must put in to fulfil one’s religious and secular duties.” (Lúcia, letter May 4, 1943)

“Entire worlds pass away... while remain...”

A life who trusts looking at Mary. She can “gather into one the dispersed children of God” (Jn 11:52). Within the heart of everybody, however far away they may seem to be, the voice of God always echoes. Even in the existentialist or Marxist atheist.

In a moment of sincerity, we may all hear an admission such as this: “I went as far as intellectual atheism, to the point of imagining a world without God, but now I see that I always kept a hidden faith in the Virgin Mary. In moments of affliction I would find myself automatically exclaiming, "Mother of Mercy, help me!" (...) Of all mysteries, Mary is the sweetest. The woman is the basis of tradition in all societies. She is calm in the midst of turmoil, repose in struggle. The Virgin is simplicity, the mother of tenderness. (...) *Sedes sapientiae*. Mark well, *sapientiae*, not *scientiae*: throne of wisdom...

Empires, theories, doctrines, glories, entire worlds all pass away. All that remains is the eternal calmness, eternal Virginity and eternal Maternity, the mystery of purity and the mystery of fertility” (Unamuno, *Diario intimo*).