

May 13-14, 2017

Readings: Acts 6: 1-7; 1 Peter 2:4-9; John 14: 1-12

This has been an historic weekend in the Church, as we commemorate 100 years since the first apparition at Fatima.¹ The message of Fatima consists of several precise predictions, requests, warnings and promises concerning the Faith and the world that were conveyed by the Blessed Virgin Mary to three shepherd children—Lucia, Jacinta and Francisco—in a series of apparitions at Fatima, Portugal from May to October 1917.

God has definitively communicated to us through His Son Jesus Christ. We just listened to the proclamation of the Sacred Scriptures. The term “public Revelation” refers to this revealing action of God directed to humanity as a whole and which finds its literary expression in the Old and New Testaments. That revelation ended with the death of the last apostle.

But God still continues to communicate with us today. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* notes: “...even if Revelation is already complete, it has not been made fully explicit; it remains for Christian faith gradually to grasp its full significance over the course of the centuries.”² We rightly speak of “private Revelation,” a term that refers to all the visions and revelations throughout the course of the centuries since the completion of the New Testament. The message of Fatima falls into this category, albeit with strong Church approval, such as the canonization of two saints today, the presence of numerous popes in Fatima, to name just two examples.

Nevertheless the Church still stands by the rules set down in the eighteenth century by Pope Benedict XIV that “assent to apparitions is of human faith, following the rules of prudence.”

¹ Also 1st Anniversary of Archbishop Hebda’s installation and ordination of Deacon Peter Ly.

² *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, paragraph #66.

We give divine faith to public revelation, where the Church teaches infallibly; for private revelations, as in apparitions, only human faith is involved.³ Some apparitions have received formal Church approval, while others have been rejected outright by Church authorities. Still others have not received a definitive judgment and are left to the pious judgment of the faithful. Typically, an investigation is not initiated until after the apparition has ceased all together.

As you may know, in the case of Fatima, the local parish priest was far from convinced by the reports of the children. Thankfully, he had the wisdom and foresight to write down very carefully his conversations with the children. A local board of inquiry was established at the insistence of the Cardinal of Lisbon, but it took 13 years before a very carefully executed investigation was completed. The decision of May 13, 1930, held that the claims were worthy of human faith, and official devotion to our Lady of the Rosary of Fatima was approved.

“O God, who chose the mother of your son to be our mother also, grant us that, persevering in penance and prayer for the salvation of the world, we may further more effectively each day the reign of Christ.” The opening prayer at Mass for the feast day held on May 13 clearly alludes to the message of Fatima, though the prayer itself does not mention the word Fatima.

The heart of the Fatima message involves prayer, penance, reparation and the compassionate Immaculate Heart of Mary – the Church's approval here is absolute. No Catholic is free to reject these key aspects of Christian belief and practice, because they are true irrespective of the message of Fatima.

³ Rev. Eamon R. Carroll, “Must Catholics Believe in Fatima? The Place of Private Revelation in the Church,” in “Our Lady’s Digest” 1990.

Words of Mary on May 13, 1917- “Please do not be afraid of me, I'm not going to harm you,” and “Say the Rosary every day, to bring peace to the world and an end to the war.” The children were given several visions during the six months, including “the emergence of Russia as a world power which would ‘spread its errors (including Communism) throughout the world ... raising up wars and persecutions against the Church.’”

“The vision of Fatima concerns above all the war waged by atheistic systems against the Church and Christians, and it describes the immense suffering endured by the witnesses of the faith in the last century of the second millennium. It is an interminable *Way of the Cross* led by the Popes of the twentieth century.”⁴

Part of this call to bear witness to the Lord requires us to truly know Him. “Have you been with me all this time Philip and you still do not know me?” Jesus’s question betrays his own dismay and one senses disappointment. But there will always be misunderstanding and even failure in the mission of the Gospel. This is why it is all the more important for us to ensure that we know Jesus. And the Blessed Mother, in sharing this urgent message from God a century ago, did so entirely for the salvation of souls, so that we might know her Son more closely.

It is always a sure sign of the Holy Spirit when the Church gathers in prayer, centered on Jesus Christ. To truly “know him,” requires willingness on our part to listen, to trust in the Holy Spirit’s guidance, worshipping in Spirit and in Truth. As St. Paul taught: “Despise not prophecies, but prove all things; hold fast to that which is good.” (1 Thess. 5:20-21) The prophecy of Fatima is worthy of belief. Let us heed its message.

⁴ Announcement by Cardinal Angelo Sodano, Vatican Secretary of State, 13 May 2000.