

Fatima, Sign of Hope for our time

Pastoral Letter in the Centennial of the Apparitions of Our Lady in Fatima

Portuguese Episcopal Conference

In the centennial of the apparitions of the Virgin Mary, in Fatima, we wish to give thanks to God for the chance to live this event, which fills us with joy, and to reaffirm the timeliness of its message to revitalize our faith, our evangelistic commitment.

The centennial event of Fatima

1. The apparitions

The apparitions occurred in Cova da Iria, in 1917, with three children aged seven to ten years, Lucia, Francisco and Jacinta. The national and international context was dramatic: Portugal was going through a profound political, religious and social crisis, and Europe was immersed, as never in its history, in a world war in which our country was also involved.

In the year of 1916, the same children have been already the witnesses of three manifestations of an angel, who presented himself as the Angel of Peace and the Angel of Portugal. On May 13th, 1917, they witnessed the apparitions of the Lady “more brilliant than the sun”¹ on the top of the holm oak tree. The Lady invited them to return to that same place on the 13th of the following months through October. During these encounters, She communicated to them a message of mercy and peace, subsequently transmitted through the questioning of the children, from the beginning, and through the Memoirs written by Lucia some years later.

As soon as the news spread, the reaction multiplied. Many rushed to the place giving credibility to the testimony of the children. Doubt, misunderstanding and even persecution, caused them great suffering. In the meantime, an increasing number of people rushed on the day of each apparition,



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¹ Jesus, Lucia de (2014), *Fatima in Lucia's own words* (19th ed., Vol. I), Fatima, p. 174.

always on the 13th of each month, except in August when the apparition was delayed a few days due to the imprisonment of the seers. The last apparition was on October 13th in the presence of approximately seventy thousand people, some of them believers, other sceptics, who wanted to see the sign the Virgin promised to perform, the so-called “miracle of the sun”, diffused by the press of the time.

A few years later, the three seers left their homeland: the two youngest, the brother and sister Francisco and Jacinta, died from the Spanish flue, respectively in 1919 and 1920; their cousin Lucia, on the advice of the bishop of Leiria, moved away in 1921 to initiate her formation, eventually devoting herself to a religious life. She died in 2005, in the Carmel of Saint Theresa of Coimbra.

The recognition of Francisco and Jacinta’s sanctity spread throughout the entire world and they were beatified in 2000, being the first non-martyr children to be elevated to this level. In 2008, the beatification process of Lucia began, when the canonically established time required was shortened by a concession of Pope Benedict XVI.

2. The reception of the event and the message of Fatima

The *sensus fidei* of all the baptized had a decisive part in the event of Fatima. Their ecclesial function was underlined by the Second Vatican Council and upgraded by Pope Francis: “As part of his mysterious love for humanity, God furnishes the totality of the faithful with an *instinct of faith – sensus fidei* - which helps them to discern what is truly of God. The presence of the Spirit gives Christians a certain connaturality with divine realities, and a wisdom which enables them to grasp those realities intuitively”².

The faithful people of God started very early to gather at the foot of the holm oak tree to pray. In 1919, they made possible the construction of a small chapel, as Our Lady requested. This same people respond with acts of reparation to attacks and profanations of the opponents, as for example the destruction of the little chapel, in March 6th, 1922. The chapel was re-erected and consecrated in January 13th, 1923. The cult and the practice of piety in that place gradually expanded and strengthened. Lastly, the bishop of Leiria, Mgr. José Alves Correia da Silva, based on the Report of the Canonical Commission, named by him, published, in October 13th, 1930, *the Pastoral Letter “The divine Providence” about the Cult of Our Lady of Fatima*, declaring that the visions of the three children were worth of belief and allowing officially the cult of Our Lady of the Rosary of Fatima. According to the words of the Cardinal Mgr. Manuel Gonçalves Cerejeira: “it was not the Church that imposed Fatima, but it was Fatima that imposed itself to the Church”³. The devotion to Our Lady of the Rosary of Fatima and the spirituality, that grows from its message, have indeed marked rapidly the pastoral of the Church in Portugal and in the entire world.

The message is essentially an ineffable gift of grace, mercy, hope and peace, that calls us to acceptance

² Pope Francis (November 24th, 2013), *Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 119.

³ Cerejeira, Manuel Gonçalves, (1943), *Fátima e a Igreja*, in *Obras Pastorais*. Vol. II (1936-1942), Lisbon 1943, p. 272.

and commitment. This interpellation to the Church is a response to the merciful gift of God, profoundly linked to the dramas and tragedies of the history of the 20th century. It preserves the same strength and requirement for the believers of our time.

In harmony with the piety of our people and under the lighting of the Holy Spirit, we, the bishops, feel the responsibility to deepen the meaning of this event, to highlight its topicality for our Christian life and to explain its potentialities to nourish our spiritual, pastoral and missionary conversion.

A Blessing for the Church and to the world

3. Gift and interpellation

The cycle of the apparitions of 1917 closed on October 13th, and the last words of the account of Lucia, in her "Fourth Memoir", talked about the blessing directed to the world: «After Our Lady had disappeared into the immense distance of the firmament, we beheld St. Joseph with the Child Jesus and Our Lady robed in white with a blue mantle, beside the sun. St. Joseph and the Child Jesus appeared to bless the world, for they traced the Sign of the Cross with their hands. When, a little later, this apparition disappeared, I saw Our Lord and Our Lady [...]. Our Lord appeared to bless the world in the same manner as St. Joseph had done»⁴

This blessing had been announced by the little shepherds the previous months⁵. And it was not something just for them, but for the all of humanity. This blessing was a motivation for what was happening and allows us to enter into the core of the initiative of God who, in the full of light and beautiful presence of the Virgin Mary, showed His merciful proximity, to His pilgrim people.

Amongst the dramatic situations, when many contemporaries were overwhelmed with anguish and uncertainty, when the forces of evil and sin seemed to impose their domination, the Virgin Mary made the salvific will of God shine in all its splendor; a blessing that reveals the grandeur of His tenderness to all creatures. Her invitation to conversion, to prayer and to penance intends to unblock the barriers that prevent human beings from experiencing a goodness that proceeds from God and was installed in the human heart.

The Virgin Mary, Mother of God and our mother, comes out towards her pilgrim children from the glory of the resurrection of her child Jesus to provide them with consolation, stimulation and courage. Involved by this blessing, the three little shepherds showed a willingness, according to Lucia's words, to praise the glory of God⁶ and to fully give themselves to the intentions of mercy that God manifested through the apparitions.

4 Jesus, Lucia de, *Fatima in Lucia's own words* (19th ed., 2014), Fatima, p. 183.

5 Cf. *Documentação Crítica de Fátima*. I. Doc. 3, p. 34.

6 Cf. Jesus, Lucia de, *How I see the Message in the course of time and in the light of events* (1st ed., 2006), Fatima, p. 13.

4. Blessing and interpellation to the Church in Portugal

This blessing spread over our people who had thanked and welcomed it in a constant and varied way. From the very beginning, the Portuguese people found in the Shrine of Fatima, around the little Chapel and the Basilica of Our Lady of the Rosary, consecrated in October 7th, 1953, a maternal home⁷; where they felt welcomed, understood, consoled, forgiven, comforted and renewed. The Shrine of Fatima was converted to the spiritual heart of Portugal⁸; becoming one of the identifying lines of Catholicism, and as a charism of our Church in harmony with that of the three shepherds.

This singular link of the Church in Portugal to Fatima became clearer on the consecration of Portugal to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, in May 13th, 1931, on the occasion of the first national pilgrimage. And it recently became manifest when the Pilgrim Statue visited our dioceses from May 13th, 2015, to May 13th, 2016. It was an invitation to the joyful celebration of the centennial of the apparitions in Fatima and, simultaneously, a spiritual and pastoral return to the roots in the commitment with its message.

Along these hundred years, the pilgrimage to Fatima revitalized the faith of many tired believers, motivated the conversion of many hard-hearted people, reaffirmed the ecclesial affiliation of many confused baptized, made possible for the indifferent to rediscover the Gospel, created a religiosity that modeled the life of the great part of our people. The pilgrimages, in a communal and individual level, have been experiences of God and occasions to praise, incentive to open ourselves to his will and to create our permanent conversion.

Faithful to the mission of spreading and deepen the message of Fatima, the Shrine became a place of welcome to those who look for it, a place that shows solidarity with the necessities and the anguishes of the world. Today, the Shrine is mainly a place of prayer but also of enthusiasm spot, an ecclesial center of theological reflection, from the events which occurred one hundred years ago, and from the challenges that those events continue to offer to the Church.

5. Blessing and interpellation to the Universal Church

Meanwhile, this blessing widened to all the Church. Thanks to this blessing, we could experiment the catholicity of our faith and the communion with the Churches of the world, specifically with the pope, foundation of the unity of the Church, so present in the message of Fatima.

The recognition of the apparitions of Fatima by the successive popes, by their bond to Our Lady of the Rosary of Fatima, is for us a grace. Pius XII consecrated the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the apparitions on October 31st, 1942. Saint John XXIII claimed that the apparitions recall the «divine glory» in a world «of materialism and hate»⁹.

Blessed Paul VI, in the solemn closing of the third session of the Vatican II, on November 21st, 1964,

⁷ Cf. Benedict XVI, *Prayer to Our Lady*, Chapel of Apparitions, Fatima, May 12th, 2010.

⁸ Cf. Benedict XVI, *Speech at the meeting with the bishops of Portugal*, Fatima, May 13th, 2010.

⁹ John XXIII, *Letter to the Patriarch of Lisbon for the second pilgrimage of Portugal to Fatima*, October 8th, 1961.

conceded the Golden Rose to the Shrine of Fatima, that he visited on May 13th, 1967, for the fiftieth anniversary of the apparitions. Saint John Paul II, besides his profound personal devotion to Our Lady of Fatima, visited the Shrine in three occasions: May 1982, to thank Our Lady for his survival to the attempt on his life the previous year; May 1991, tenth anniversary of the attempt on his life, to thank the amazing changes in Eastern Europe; in May 13th, 2000, to beatify Jacinta and Francisco and make known the third part of the secret of Fatima. Benedict XVI, who, as prefect of the Congregation for the doctrine of faith, had significantly contributed to the interpretation and the theological deepening of the message of Fatima, visited the Shrine in May 2010. And now we expect Pope Francis to celebrate the centennial. But he has already consecrated the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, in Saint Peter's Square, in October 2013, in front of the statue of Our Lady of Fatima venerated in the Chapel of the Apparitions which, on his demand, was brought to Rome for the Marian Day for the Year of faith. The recognition of the popes has been in harmony with the *sensus fidei* of the Christian people at a global level. In 1947, the statue of the Virgin of Fatima made herself pilgrim, travelling around many countries as messenger of peace and reconciliation. Her presence witnesses the grace that always wins over sin, creating where she passes a cordial welcoming and an overflowing enthusiasm. But Fatima has been spreading itself by numerous other ways: thousands of churches are dedicated to Our Lady of the Rosary of Fatima; in numerous dioceses, May 13th is celebrated with the recitation of the rosary; the devotion of the five first Saturdays has been divulged and the prayer of the Rosary has been intensified; the publications to diffuse the message and the spirituality of Fatima multiplied; diverse confraternities, associations and movements under the invocation of Our Lady of the Rosary of Fatima sprang up; its statue is venerated more or less everywhere; there are chains of spirituality that nourish themselves on Fatima; and there are many institutes of consecrated life whose charism is based on the commitment with this message.

6. Blessing and interpellation to the entire world

This blessing spread over the entire world as a message of hope and source of peace. The invitation to prayer and to commitment with the construction of the peace shook the consciousness in the edge of a conflicted and tragic century. When humanity was dying in a world of violence, the Virgin of Fatima came to ask for the prayer of Rosary for peace, announcing soon the end of the war and asking for conversion of men in order to prevent another conflict; in that sense, that the world and Russia were to be consecrated to the Immaculate Heart under the promise that «in the end [...] it will triumph», and «a period of peace will be granted to the world»¹⁰.

Even today, when we live, as Pope Francis says, «a third war, one fought piecemeal»¹¹, the message of Fatima shakes our consciences in order for us to recognize the task of this historical hour: to not let

¹⁰ Jesus, Lucia de, *Fatima in Lucia's own words* (19th ed., 2014), Fatima, p. 179.

¹¹ Francis, *Homily of the Mass at the Military Memorial in Redipuglia on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the outbreak of First World War*, September 13th, 2014.

us fall in indifference before so much suffering; to respect the memory of so many innocent victims; to not let our heart become insensitive before evil that is so many times trivialized.

In that sense, Saint John Paul II reminds us that «this message is addressed in particular to the people of our century, a century which has been marked by war, hatred, the violation of fundamental human rights, the immense suffering of individuals and nations, and finally by the struggle against God, carried even to the denial of his existence»¹². It is why the message of Fatima continues profoundly up-to-date.

The gift and the invitation of the message of Fatima

7. A message that calls us, today

The message of Fatima shows us a universal and permanent experience: the confrontation between good and evil that remains in the heart of each person, in the relationships, in the field of politics and economics, within each country and at an international level. Each one of us is called to correspond to the calling of God, to fight evil from the inner part of oneself, to understand the sense of conversion and sacrifice to the benefit of others as the three little shepherds did in their innocence and pureness.

8. To center our look back in God the Trinity: the attitude of prayer

The events at Fatima were from the beginning centered in God, Holy Trinity. The light and the beauty that radiated from the presence of the Angel and from the Lady and that overwhelmed the three children were the extended hands of God that, by the kindness of his Love, embraces us all. The presence of God, as Lucia reminds us, «was so intense that it absorbed us and almost completely annihilated us. It seemed to deprive us even of the use of our bodily senses for a considerable length of time. [...] The peace and happiness which we felt were great, but wholly interior, for our souls were completely immersed in God»¹³.

This experience so intimated of God doesn't have to be understood as a simple extraordinary perception of the sacred and the mystery. God is not simply the architect of the world or the key to explain reality. God is alive and is near his creatures. The shepherds were the protagonists of a personal encounter with Someone who came to meet them, unveiling his designs of mercy: they understood then «*who God is, how He loves us and desires to be loved*»¹⁴. This God who loves and wants to be loved is the Trinity, «which penetrated our inmost souls»¹⁵. That is why one of the most original and genuine prayers of Fatima was directed to the Holy Trinity: «Most Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, I adore You profoundly...»¹⁶.

¹² John Paul II, *Homily of the Mass for the consecration of the Church of the Immaculate Heart of Mary*, June 7th, 1997.

¹³ Jesus, Lucia de, *Fatima in Lucia's own words* (19th ed., 2014), Fatima, p. 172-173.

¹⁴ *Fatima in Lucia's own words*, p. 171-172.

¹⁵ *Fatima in Lucia's own words*, p. 147.

¹⁶ *Fatima in Lucia's own words*, p. 172.

The three children lived this encounter with God as a source of profound happiness and joy. The prayer rises then spontaneously in their intimacy as a constant tendency, which kept a dialogue alive that would definitively transform their lives. And from the beginning, they feel that adoration is the way to stand before The One who is above all idols which strive to seduce the human beings.

9. Contemplation, compassion and announcement: the charisms of the seers

Francisco, Jacinta and Lucia lived the spirit of adoration differently, equally profound, but in a way that makes visible their mystical experience. The different charisms of each one will profoundly mark the spirituality of Fatima and still attracts pilgrims.

Francisco recognizes simultaneously the transcendence of God and the joy by his presence. He confesses: «what I loved most of all was to see Our Lord in that light from Our Lady which penetrated our hearts. I love God so much! »¹⁷ . He feels they «were on fire in that light which is God, [...] What is God? We could never put it into words! »¹⁸ . This union with God makes him realize the pain that human offences provoke. He is down for «He is so sad» and then arises in him the touching answer: «If only I could console Him! »¹⁹ .

Jacinta was especially sensitive to the crucified Christ; she condensed to her the love of God giving rise to a great gratitude: «she was moved to tears» by contemplating him, «because He died for us»²⁰ . She was driven to develop a constant dialogue of love: she loves Jesus and his Mother so much, that she never gets tired of telling them that she loves them²¹ ; she searches for loneliness «to be alone for a long time with the Hidden Jesus and talk to Him»²² .

As life's mission, Lucia will be tasked with transmitting to all the love of God revealed in the Immaculate Heart of Mary²³ . She will live to remind the world not the misery of what exists, but the greatness of the divine mercy, letting show «the more intimate aspects of Our Lady's Apparitions in the Cova da Iria»²⁴ . Even from the cloister of her monastic life, it is from that faithfulness to that mission that she will bear witness to the world that the secret for happiness is to live in the love²⁵ .

10. Icon of kindness and mercy: the presence of Mary

The leading role of God, Holy Trinity in our history, His proximity and His providence are visible in the Virgin Mary, and in a more concrete way in her Immaculate Heart. To the little shepherds, the heart of the Lady was the sanctuary of their encounter with God: «Does not the Holy Gospel tell us that Mary kept all things in her heart? And who better than this Immaculate Heart could have revealed

¹⁷ *Fatima in Lucia's own words*, p. 143.

¹⁸ *Fatima in Lucia's own words*, p. 147.

¹⁹ *Fatima in Lucia's own words*, p. 147.

²⁰ *Fatima in Lucia's own words*, p. 39-40.

²¹ *Fatima in Lucia's own words*, p. 56.

²² *Fatima in Lucia's own words*, p. 55.

²³ Cf. *Fatima in Lucia's own words*, p. 132.

²⁴ *Fatima in Lucia's own words*, p. 192.

²⁵ Cf. Jesus, Lucia de, *Calls from the Message of Fatima* (2000), Fatima, p. 42

to us the secrets of Divine Mercy? »²⁶ . That heart is the “place” where they experienced the divine light and the message that was delivered to them: «How would they feel if they only knew what she showed to us in God, in her Immaculate Heart, in that great light!»²⁷ . The mercy of God, the pounding of his heart before the sinners and the wretched, finds a privileged icon in the heart of Mary. It is reflected in that immaculate heart the power of grace, the action of the Spirit, at the moment of the annunciation, covered her with His shadow, and who right at the moment of her conception, the Spirit had anticipated in her the redemptory action of the pascal mystery: she is chosen to be «Mother of God entirely holy and free from all stain of sin, as though fashioned by the Holy Spirit and formed as a new creature»²⁸ . The heart of the Mother is truly icon of «grace and mercy», words that illustrate the vision of the Trinity, in the apparition of Tuy, on June 13th, 1929, and that Lucia welcomes; two words that consolidate so well the message of Fatima. Therefore, the devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary became a characteristic feature of the spirituality of Fatima.

The fact that Mary is present relates to the dynamism of the story of salvation and to the part the Virgin played in the mystery of incarnation²⁹ . Having participated totally in a singular way in the work of the Savior, her maternal mission to men carries on incessantly in the economy of the grace. With her assumption to heaven, she didn't abandon this mission: she continues, more intensively, taking care of the brothers of her Son who are pilgrims in this world, among much anguish and danger, and seeks to reach, with her intercession, the gifts of salvation, showing in that sense the efficacy of the unique and insuperable mediation of Jesus Christ³⁰ . From her glorious position, Mary shows in her apparitions the always permanent meaning of Easter, the constant triumph of grace and mercy.

In that sense, in the Virgin Mary, in her maternal heart, the merciful will of a Trinity God is visible, a God who is not indifferent towards the situation of his creatures, who doesn't abandon the sinner in his guilt, who doesn't forget the wretched in their suffering, who doesn't ignore the victims and the underprivileged, who always offers his forgiveness and consolation, who always opens the door of hope, when human beings close themselves in their egoism and their thoughtlessness.

11. An invitation to conversion and to fight against evil: a prophetic message

Among the signs of the times, said Saint John Paul II, «Fatima stands out and helps us see the hand of God, our providential Guide and patient and compassionate Father also in the 20th century»³¹ . Benedict XVI had in his turn strengthened that aspect by saying that Fatima is «the most prophetic of all modern apparitions»³² . In fact, it denounces the masks of evil that provokes so much pain in the world, so much injustice and affects sometimes the members of the Church: on one hand, the

²⁶ Jesus, Lucia de, *Fatima in Lucia's own words* (19th ed., 2014), Fatima, p. 34-35.

²⁷ *Fatima in Lucia's own words*, p. 146.

²⁸ II Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 56.

²⁹ Cf. II Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 57.

³⁰ Cf. II Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 60-62.

³¹ John Paul II, *Message to the Bishop of Leiria-Fatima for the 80th Anniversary of the Fatima Apparitions*, October 1st, 1997.

³² Benedict XVI, *Regina Coeli*, Square of the Shrine of Aparecida, May 13th, 2007.

mechanisms that lead to war, the atheism that wants to erase the footprints of God in this world, the economic powers that just seek to benefits more at the cost of the poor and weak, the persecution of the Church and the saints who oppose to idols created by human interests; on the other hand, the hypocrisy and the unfaithfulness of those who in the Church let themselves be dominated by apathy or by a worldly spirit: the convenience, the corruption or the pursuit of power. The suffering of the Church, has mentioned Benedict XVI on his way to Fatima, comes also from the sin that exist inside the Church, for we need to learn the penance, to accept purification, ask forgiveness³³.

The message of Fatima is a vehement appeal to conversion and to penance. The repeated request for men to not offend more God, the sadness of Our Lady as an expression of non-indifference before the committed sins, the invitation to prayer and sacrifice for sinners are simultaneously a denunciation of evil, an appeal to conversion and a categorical affirmation of the love of God. As cardinal Ratzinger said, in his theological commentary on *the secret of Fatima*, «the key word of this third part is the threefold cry: "Penance, Penance, Penance!" The beginning of the Gospel comes to mind: "Repent and believe the Good News" (Mk 1:15). To understand the signs of the times means to accept the urgency of penance – of conversion – of faith»³⁴.

12. Sacrifice and reparation: the identification with Christ

The event of Fatima is an invitation for us to take part in the designs of mercy, according to the example of the little shepherds. The question directed to them on May 13th, 1917, is also directed to us: «Are you willing to offer yourselves to God and bear all the sufferings He wills to send you, as an act of reparation for the sins by which He is offended, and of supplication for the conversion of sinners?»³⁵.

The little shepherds replied right away with prayer, for in their act of adoration to God, the others are present: «My God, I believe, I adore, I hope and I love You! I ask pardon of You for those who do not believe, do not adore, do not hope and do not love You»³⁶. From the first words of the Angel, they discovered that their vocation was a mission and that the gift received had in itself the entrustment of their own life to the others. The urgency of the need of the others require penitence, sacrifice and reparation. The Christian's sacrifice can only be lived from prayer and as prayer.

From their profound union to God, the little shepherds realized that others are so important that they sacrificed themselves for them. Their responsibility was in that way awakened: they couldn't leave the sinner with his guilt or the one who suffers with his suffering. It is like Lucia later said: they couldn't go happy to heaven alone, they couldn't be happy without the others³⁷. The call for conversion and reparation challenges us not to resign ourselves before the trivialization of evil, to beat the dictatorship of indifference before the suffering around us. In this personal purification path

³³ Benedict XVI, *Interview with the journalists during the flight to Portugal*, May 10th, 2010.

³⁴ Joseph Ratzinger, *Theological Commentary, in Jesus, Lucia de, Fatima in Lucia's own words* (19th ed., 2014), Fatima, p. 229.

³⁵ Jesus, Lucia de, *Fatima in Lucia's own words* (19th ed., 2014), Fatima, p. 175.

³⁶ *Fatima in Lucia's own words*, p. 171.

³⁷ Cf. Jesus, Lucia de, *How I see the Message in the course of time and in the light of events* (1st ed., 2006), Fatima, p. 31-32.

to solidarity, a spirituality is present, a spirituality that deepens its roots in the core of the Christian mystery. This spirituality is taught and takes place in practices that feed the theological attitude and the identification with Christ: in the Eucharist where Christ is sacramentally present, and in the prayer of the Rosary where He is present on a narrative manner by the meditation of his mysteries. From the intimate experience of God and the trust communicated by the Lady, the little shepherds are witnesses of the triumph of the Love that embraces the entire creation and is visible in the Immaculate Heart of Mary. It is precisely in the background of the vision of hell that the words of the Lady become important: «In the end, my Immaculate Heart will triumph»³⁸, in the final analysis, the triumph of the love of God who revealed himself to humanity. Therefore, the message of Fatima converts to a hymn of hope. As cardinal Ratzinger said³⁹, the Virgin Mary doesn't cause fear nor does She make any apocalyptic expectations, instead, She leads us to her Son, to the essential of the Christian revelation. Cardinal Ratzinger repeated as pope: the message of Fatima, condensed in the promise of the Lady, is «like a window of hope that God opens when man closes the door to him»⁴⁰.

Fatima in the future of the Church, Portugal and the world

13. The evangelistic pedagogy of the spirituality of Fatima

In its two dimensions, mystical and prophetic, Fatima – in its message and in its Shrine – has a mission to achieve in the Church and in the world: to be leading a light and incentive for the pastoral conversion of the Church and the criteria and compass to guide the commitment of the Christians in the conflicts of our world.

The spirituality of Fatima, that accompanies and sustains the pilgrim, purifies and rises purely natural attitudes of the religiosity to transform them into filial attitudes. It offers the pedagogy of the mystagogy: by the figure of Mary and the three little shepherds, the spirituality of Fatima makes it possible the encounter with the God, Holy Trinity in his beauty and his proximity, as a salvific experience. It shows in that sense how insufficient all project of auto-redemption is, so attractive to our contemporaries. Our God is not an authoritarian God, nor a competitor to human beings, He is instead source of hope and humanization.

Fatima irradiates the evangelizing dynamism sustained on the popular piety, which means on « a spirituality incarnated in the culture of the lowly» according Pope Francis: as «a legitimate way of living the faith, a way of feeling part of the Church and a manner of being missionaries»⁴¹. Setting out on pilgrimage, journeying together, it brings us to come out of ourselves and open ourselves to others by listening to them and sharing their own existence with a missionary and synodal spirit,

³⁸ Jesus, Lucia de, *Fatima in Lucia's own words* (19th ed., 2014), Fatima, p. 179.

³⁹ Cf. *A Voz da Fátima*, November 1996.

⁴⁰ Benedict XVI, *Official reception address in Portugal*, May 11th, 2010.

⁴¹ Francis, *Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 124, quoting the Fifth General Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean Bishops, *Aparecida Document*, June 29th, 2007, 263 and 264.

expected today from the Church.

It is particularly significant the attention given, in Fatima, to the more vulnerable and the weaker – the children, the sick, the elderly, the disabled, the migrants – who find in this place and in this spiritual proposal hospitality, carefulness, energy and a way.

14. A Church with a Marian face

The message of Fatima inspires the Church to find and deepen the features of its Marian face. By welcoming this interpellation, the Church, universal sacrament of salvation, is led to welcome with Mary and as Mary the mission that proceeds from God, to follow Jesus as faithful and Godly disciple, to be sensitive to the needs of our neighbors and to the clamors of those who are more distant, to be willing to stand next to the cross, to irradiate the glory and the beginnings of the resurrection, to be the “field hospital” that goes towards the wounded and not the “customs” that closes the doors. Finding consolation and strength in the maternal heart of Mary, the Church will act that way, as mother of the baptized and will offer maternal care to those who see her from outside, no matter how far they are.

Mary, as new Eve, is for each Christian a model of the human being inviting him to personal conversion: although dictatorships disappear, economics conditions improve and armed conflicts eliminate, the temptation of domination that establishes itself in human heart must be eradicated. Mary, immaculate and assumed, and therefore model to humanity, helps to understand the grace as gift that transforms us, the faithfulness as attitude that humanizes us, the generosity and the service as expression of respect towards the others, the universal love as dignification of all the children of God. Thus, the Church finds in Our Lady of the Rosary of Fatima, the Lady of the Immaculate Heart, and in her message, a valuable instrument to its life and its evangelizing mission in our millennium.

15. Prophetic announce of mercy and peace

The message of Fatima also feeds the prophetic commitment with the present world before the injustices and all kind of experiences of exclusion, whatever their roots are. From its origin, the event of Fatima reveals the designs of mercy that God wished to realize through the little shepherds under the maternal gaze of the Mother of Jesus. After the Holy Year of Mercy, it is necessary to keep and develop this spring, to give primacy to mercy, in a contemporary culture that want to eradicate it, as Saint John Paul I and Pope Francis remind us in the Bull *Misericordiae vultus*. Mercy is what impels us to open our heart to the other who is trapped by evil or by suffering, and to be touched by the questions remembered by Pope Francis in Lampedusa⁴² and which have been already revealed in Fatima by Benedict XVI⁴³: «Adam, where are you? Where is your brother? Are we able to weep before exclusion and marginalization experienced by the weaker? ».

⁴² Francis, *Homily the victims of the shipwrecks*, Lampedusa, July 8th, 2013.

⁴³ Benedict XVI, *Homily on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the Beatification of Jacinta and Francisco*, May 13th, 2010.

Faithful to the charism of Fatima, we are called to welcome this invitation for the promotion and defense of peace among peoples, by condemning and opposing to the wicked mechanisms that nations and races face: the rationalist and individualist arrogance, the subjectivist and indifferent selfishness, the immoral economy or the insensitive politics. Fatima stands as a prophetic word for the denunciation of evil and commitment with the good, for the promotion of justice and peace, for the value and respect of each human being's dignity.

The mission of Christians manifests itself in doing his utmost to detain the power of evil and to allow the forces of good to grow. The strength of God reveals itself in the strength of the Mother;

Fatima, December 8th, 2016,

Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary

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