

# FATIMA AND SACRIFICE



Image of the Blessed Virgin Mary punching the devil, 13th Century.

This May many will come from around the world, together with Pope Francis, to observe the centenary of the Blessed Mother's apparitions at Fatima, Portugal. These observances give us the opportunity to reflect on the message given to us, which has grown in both importance and urgency. Besides her messages from the apparitions themselves, Fatima also reminds us of the central role given to Mary both in the mission of the Church and in the end times when she will play a decisive role in the final defeat of Satan and his minions.

Mary was the first to receive the "good news" (Gospel) that the Word of God, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, would become man and that she was chosen to give the Word of God a human nature. Remember whenever you hear the baby in the womb referred to as the "product of conception" or a "clump of cells," that the Son of God spent nine months in the womb of Mary receiving his human nature from her. For this, she was prepared by an extraordi-

nary gift from God by being preserved from all sin at the moment of her conception in what we call her "Immaculate Conception." In saying her "fiat" ("let it be done to me according to your will") Mary becomes the first Christian disciple.

At every important moment of the Church's existence Mary is present. When Our Lord performs his first "sign" (miracle) at Cana, she is there. She stands beneath the Cross at his crucifixion and is made "Mother of the Church" when given to the Beloved Disciple (St. John) as his mother. When the Holy Spirit descends upon the apostles on Pentecost, the birthday of the Church, she is there. In the Eastern liturgies Mary is always present with her divine Son. And finally, she will crush the head of Satan, as foretold in the Book of Genesis, and end his evil reign.

From the earliest days, devotion to Mary existed in the Church particularly as the "Second Eve." Just as sin and death entered the world through the disobedience of our first mother

Eve, so through the obedience of Mary, the Second Eve, grace and redemption enter the world with her divine Son. The Ecumenical Council of Ephesus A.D. 431, proclaimed Mary the Mother of God.

As we come to the Fatima apparitions, we notice that a prelude took place with the appearance of an angel on three separate occasions. Lucia recalled how the experiences with the angels left them with an intense experience of the supernatural. *"We felt the presence of God so intensely, so intimately, that we dared not speak even to each other. The next day we felt ourselves still enveloped by that atmosphere. Only very gradually did its intensity diminish within us."*

The appearances of the angel would set the tone for one of the major messages of the Blessed Mother at Fatima: offering prayers and making sacrifices for sinners. The angel knelt on the ground and bowed very low. The children, experiencing what Lucia described above, also knelt and repeated the prayer they heard from the angel: *"My God, I believe, I adore, I hope, and I love Thee. I ask pardon for all those who do not believe in Thee, do not adore Thee, do not hope in Thee, and do not love Thee."*

In a nutshell, that's what sacrifice is all about. Not only would the children of Fatima constantly pray this prayer, but live their lives in a sacrificial way. Shortly after the Fatima appearances of Mary, both Jacinta and Francisco would get influenza during the worldwide pandemic and suffer very much from the effects of the disease. Throughout all their sufferings, they never complained and always offered their sufferings for the conversion of sinners. Lucia herself would enter a Carmel as an enclosed sister for the rest of her life, which in itself is living the sacrificial life.

So one essential aspect of our Faith that we can remind ourselves during this centenary observance of Fatima is the centrality of sacrifice in the Christian life. The Servant of God, Fr

John Hardon S.J. stressed this very much in his teachings: *"The more pain we have in our lives, the more holy God wants us to become. The secret to growing in sanctity is loving the Cross...There is no channel of grace without suffering. There is no happiness on earth without the Cross."* Here is a truth that flies in the face of our anti-culture, which worships personal convenience, materialism, and sexual indulgence. Sacrifice, on the other hand, stresses dying to self – the essence of Christianity.

Fr Hardon continues, *"God sends pain to two kinds of people. Those who are estranged from Him in order to wake them up and those united to Him in order to become more holy."* The desire for many for Christianity "without the Cross" had led many away from Christ. Fatima reminds us that there is no getting to Heaven without going by way of Calvary.

In practice, how do we do this? First of all by accepting whatever cross God sends us. You do not have to go looking for them, God will send them. When the future St. Dominic Savio was a student at St. John Bosco's oratory, he would put rocks in his bed mattress thinking that the discomfiture while sleeping would please God. Don Bosco noticed this and told him that he didn't have to do things like this to please God but instead to accept the sacrifices that come with daily life. These sacrifices help us grow in holiness and are important means for reparation for our own sins, the sinfulness in the world and a means of intercession for others.

Virtually every Catholic family has someone who is estranged from the Church for one reason or another. Making sacrifices for them is an excellent means of intercession. Prayer, fasting, good works for others all become means whereby we get out of ourselves and combat that most deadly of sins: Pride. Remember St. Monica who prayed and sacrificed over thirty years for her son, St. Augustine's, conversion. Never underestimate the power of prayer and sacrifice. It

might take time; God's ways and timetable are not our own.

Also, sacrifice makes reparation for our own personal sins and those of the world. As Fr Hardon recounts, "*We are living in the age in which the Devil has conquered not a small part of the present world.*" Fatima again gives us the weapons to combat this. The picture on the front of the newsletter is a medieval one showing the Blessed Mother punching the Devil reminding us of the central role given to her in his final defeat. Priests who have conducted exorcisms have consistently said that the Devil particularly fears the Rosary. We have in the Rosary the weapon to combat our own sinfulness and

that in the Church and the world. As part of the Fatima apparitions, the Blessed Mother showed the children a vision of Hell. The vision showed that Hell, first of all exists, and secondly, that it is not sparsely populated. Seeing that vision impressed upon the children the urgency of praying for sinners. Hell is taken too lightly today. You might also want to read St. John Bosco's dream of Hell and the vision of Hell given to St Faustina. As a good mother, the Blessed Mother wants all her children to come to her Divine Son in Whom alone is salvation. May the centenary observance of Fatima unite us to her in this work of salvation.

