

Twenty-seventh Sunday Per Annum (C)

October 2, 2016.

Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise (Hab. 1:3).

Our first reading today is taken from the book of the Prophet Habakkuk, one of the Minor Prophets. It is a book that is only three chapters long that addresses a serious question: the problem of evil. *O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not listen? ... Why do you make me see wrongdoing and look at trouble? Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise.* In this prophecy for the first time in Israelite literature a man questions the ways of God. Habakkuk calls God to account for His governance of the world. And so the book moves from a certain doubt about the evil around us to a vision of how God will deal with it and finally to a basic trust in God no matter how bad things may appear to be. *For there is a vision for the appointed time: it speaks of the end, and does not lie. If it seems to tarry, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay... but the righteous person lives by faith (Hab. 1:3).* Both St. Paul and the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews quote this text from Habakkuk in order to stress the importance of faith and perseverance in times of persecution. So we read in the Epistle to the Hebrews: *'But my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him.'* *But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and keep their souls (Heb. 10: 38-39).*

It would seem that we are living in the *appointed time* and the *vision for the appointed time* was given almost one hundred years ago at Fatima in Portugal. The 13th of this month will mark the ninety-ninth anniversary of the last of the apparitions of Our Lady and the miracle of the sun, witnessed by approximately seventy-five thousand people; one of the most remarkable events in human history. These events have led many to associate Our Lady of Fatima with the *Great Sign* described in the Book of the Apocalypse of St. John (Revelation), which states: *And a great sign appeared in Heaven: A woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars (12:1).* The six apparitions of Our Lady at Fatima comprise the key to understanding what has transpired and continues to unfold both in the world and in the life of the Church. We do well to heed the request of Our Lady to pray the rosary every day, for peace in the world and for the conversion of sinners.

Our Lady appeared to Jacinta, Francisco and Lucia over a period of six months on the 13th day, and in the course of these apparitions the children were given to hear and to see prophetic signs. What is certain is that there is great significance even in the smallest details surrounding the works of God. Lucia noted that Our Lady of Fatima *always had a star on her tunic...the light of Our Lady was white and the star yellow.* Some statues depict this important detail. The five-pointed star on Our Lady's tunic is believed by many to be a heavenly reference to the Biblical Queen Esther; the young Jewish girl named *Hadassah* who would later become Queen and save her people from destruction. Another point of reference to the Book of Esther is the fact that Our Lady appeared on the 13th of the month from May to October. In the Book of Esther we read that the 13th of the month Adar was the date set when all the Jews in the ancient Persian empire of King Ahasuerus were decreed to be massacred on account of the evil manipulations of Haman, the king's servant. Queen Esther's intercession before the king was able to obtain the reversal of the death sentence. To this day the Jewish people celebrate the day following the 13th of the month of Adar as the Feast of Purim and so celebrate the deliverance of the Jewish people from destruction. In their commentaries on Sacred

Scripture, the Fathers of the Church see in Queen Esther the figurative role of the Blessed Virgin Mary as intercessor for humanity before the throne of Christ the King. The Fatima message is indeed an apocalyptic warning to our times to help us avoid ruin in this life and in the life to come. We must not be *of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and keep their souls* (Heb. 10: 38-39).

When we look at the recent history of the Church in light of the message of Fatima, more than the violent persecution in so many parts of the world, the Church has experienced and continues to experience a mass apostasy. On October 13, 1977, on the 60th anniversary of the apparitions, Pope Paul VI observed: *The tail of the devil is functioning in the disintegration of the Catholic World. The darkness of satan has entered and spread throughout the Catholic Church even to its summit. Apostasy, the loss of the faith, is spreading throughout the world and into the highest levels within the Church.* These are very sobering words spoken by a pope. A few years earlier, this same pope who had brought the Second Vatican Council to a close had observed: *We believed that after the Council would come a day of sunshine in the history of the Church. But instead there has come a day of clouds and storms and of darkness of searching and uncertainties...It is as if from some mysterious crack, no it is not mysterious, from some crack the smoke of satan has entered the temple of God* (Sermon of June 29, 1972). How are we to understand these events and how can we assure, to quote a phrase used by Our Lady herself, that *the dogma of the faith will always be preserved* here?

The answer may be found at least in part, in a vision of the Third Secret of Fatima. In this vision, an angel with a flaming sword cries out, *'Penance, Penance, Penance!'* This is a warning to us to amend our lives and to practise our faith with a firm commitment and devotion. In the Garden of Eden also there was an angel with a flaming sword. Like Adam and Eve, in our folly we too have attempted to make ourselves God's equal. Ours is a time in which men have made gods of themselves, arbiters of life and death. We have created a man-centred religion, alluded to by Pope Paul VI, and so we seek in our churches not the worship of God but the celebration of ourselves; and the cult of man has damaged the Church of God. What has become of us? From many churches God has been banished and man has been enthroned. Sacred Tradition has been criminalized. How is it possible that what we once revered and treasured, like our patrimony of sacred music, is now held in contempt? Many Catholics no longer believe in the Real Presence, no longer attend Holy Mass with any regularity and profane the Blessed Sacrament with impunity. In 1970, Sister Lucia spoke of a *diabolical disorientation* afflicting the Church, and it would seem that her assessment was correct. The Holy Rosary and devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary are our two last resources if we wish to keep our souls. I have spoken to you of these matters today in very sober terms in the hope that you will heed the message of Our Lady of Fatima. Deepen your love of Our Lady, pray the Rosary every day and return to the traditions of our fathers in the faith. The tyranny of novelty has emptied our churches and has ruined many lives. The time is short. Let us amend our ways and seek refuge in the Immaculate Heart of Our Lady, Our Mother and Our Queen who interceded for us. In the end her Immaculate Heart will triumph; but we like the Jewish people in Queen Esther's day – we must turn to God with all our hearts and pray for the conversion of poor sinners and for the grace of perseverance; for *we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and keep their souls* (Heb. 10: 38-39).