

## ***The Solemnity of Mary the Mother of God (2017)***

*Hail, Holy Mother, who gave birth to the King who rules heaven and earth for ever.*

Today's Solemnity of Mary the Mother of God celebrates the divine motherhood of the Blessed Virgin Mary. It is the oldest of all Marian feasts and it celebrates not only our Lady's unique role in the Mystery of the Incarnation but also sheds light on our own efforts to live the Mystery of Christ along the path of Christian discipleship; the path of devout humility. This new year marks the one hundredth anniversary of the apparitions of Our Lady at Fatima in Portugal, and we will make every effort this year not only to mark the anniversary but also and most especially, to heed the call of Our Heavenly Father to repentance and penance for this is the message of Our Lady: prayer, penance and devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. We will observe this year as Marian Year. In so doing we will endeavour to renew our own lives and in hope we look to the triumph of Our Lady's Immaculate Heart. In the coming year our Sunday bulletins will include catechesis on the Fatima apparitions. On May 13<sup>th</sup> we will celebrate the Feast of Our Lady of Fatima with solemnity and hold a day congress on the message of Fatima. I will need your help to do this.

Why is this anniversary so important? It is Our Lord Himself Who spoke of its importance in a subsequent apparition to Sr. Lucia in (Tuy) Spain, in 1929. Our Lord spoke of the delay in consecrating Russia to the Immaculate Heart and He spoke of the dire consequences that befell France exactly one hundred years after Our Lord's request to the King of France that he consecrate the nation to the Sacred Heart. Our Lord said to Sister Lucia: *They did not heed my request. Like the King of France, they will repent and do it, but it will be late. Russia will already have spread her errors throughout the world, provoking wars and persecutions of the Church, the Holy Father will have much to suffer.* The errors that Our Lord spoke of are political atheism or communism. In our country and much of the Western world this error manifests itself through a militant and intolerant secularism. Have we collectively responded to Our Lady's requests at Fatima? Is the world a better place than it was one hundred years ago?

Our Lady's call to repentance and conversion of life can be answered with a few simple devotions: the daily rosary, and devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, especially through the devotion of the Five First Saturdays. In the century that has followed the great event at Fatima, we have seen Our Lady's warning come true with startling precision. People did not cease offending God and we have seen terrible wars, nations annihilated and a *diabolical disorientation* (to use a phrase of Sister Lucia) afflict the world and even the Church. Yet, we still await the fulfilment of Our Lady's promises, the triumph of Her Immaculate Heart, and a period of peace to be granted to the world. Perhaps our resolve to repent and convert may bring this about this year; and so we are not without hope.

I have spoken to you of the Apparitions on other occasions but for those who are not familiar with these events, Our Lady appeared to Jacinta, Francisco and Lucia over a period of six months from May to October on the 13<sup>th</sup> day. 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. 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.

The New Year is always a time of resolutions. As we begin this important Marian Year, I propose that as a parish community we resolve to heed the message of Fatima with three simple words: **work, prayer, sacrifice**. *The reason why we work and pray, is to know and love God as He is in Himself, so far as that is possible, in imitating His earthly life in Christ, the chief act of which was sacrifice* (John Senior, *The Restoration of Christian Culture*, p. 54). Let us be faithful to our daily duties and faithful also to a daily discipline of prayer; undertaking both work and prayer in a spirit of sacrifice, a willingness to be conformed to Our Lord. The Sacrifice of Our Lord is re-presented for our benefit in the celebration of the Mass as He has entrusted this great Mystery to His Church. So I exhort you to resolve to pray the Mass with greater devotion. Don't live for the weekend; live for Sunday. Live the Mass in lives of devotion to God and of humble service to one another; mindful that as we worship so we become. If you can, in addition to your Sunday obligation, attend Holy Mass out of devotion at least once during the week. *Nothing is to be preferred to the Work of God*, that is, His worship (Prologue, *The Rule of St. Benedict*). Pray the rosary daily, just as we do before every Mass. Be generous in your prayers for the conversion of poor sinners.

This statue of Our Lady of Fatima will grace our Sanctuary for the year as a reminder of this important anniversary. This statue was carved at the instructions of Sr. Mary Lucia of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart. Sister Lucia interpreted the maternal gesture of the hands: *with the left hand [She is] lifting the son who fell and with the right hand sustains and blesses him. This son is each one of us* (*A Pathway Under the Gaze of Mary*, p. 318). To each one of us Our Lady says what she said to Sister Lucia: *My Immaculate Heart will be your refuge and the way that leads you to God*. The Holy Father has granted the privilege of a plenary indulgence to the faithful who pray before a statue of Our Lady of Fatima from the 13<sup>th</sup> of May to October 13<sup>th</sup>.

With great confidence then, we go to Jesus through Mary. More importantly, we go to them with faith and trust in the hope that saves. At the beginning of this New Year, let us, each one of us consecrate ourselves to Our Lady's Immaculate Heart. What this means very simply is that we will endeavour to make our very own the dispositions of the Heart of Our Lady: purity, faithful obedience, charity, humble service. Let us begin each day this year with the words of Our Lady: *Behold, I am the servant of the Lord*, and endeavour *to lead every soul with Mary to the Sacred Heart of Jesus* (St. Maximillian Maria Kolbe).

To all of you and your families, my best wishes for the New Year!