



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO THE BISHOP OF LEIRIA-FÁTIMA
FOR THE 80TH ANNIVERSARY OF
THE FÁTIMA APPARITIONS**

*To my Venerable Brother Serafim de Sousa Ferreira e Silva
Bishop of Leiria-Fátima
Fraternal greetings in Christ the Lord!*

The 80th anniversary of that 13 October 1917, when the miraculous "dance of the sun" occurred in the sky, is an excellent occasion for me to turn in spirit to that shrine, since I cannot do so in person, with a prayer to the Mother of God for the preparation of the Christian people — and in a certain way of all humanity — for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, and with an exhortation to families and ecclesial communities to recite the Rosary daily.

On the threshold of the third millennium, as we observe the signs of the times in this 20th century, Fátima is certainly one of the greatest, among other reasons because its message announces many of the later events and conditions them on the response to its appeals: signs such as the two world wars, but also great gatherings of nations and peoples marked by dialogue and peace; the oppression and turmoil suffered by various nations and peoples, but also the voice and the opportunities given to peoples and individuals who in the meantime have emerged on the international scene; the crises, desertions and many sufferings of the Church's members, but also a renewed and intense feeling of solidarity and mutual dependence in Christ's Mystical Body, which is being strengthened in all the baptized, in accordance with their vocation and mission; the separation from and abandonment of God by individuals and societies, but also the in-breaking of the Spirit of Truth in hearts and communities to the point of sacrifice and martyrdom to save "God's image and likeness in man" (cf. Gn 1:27), to save man from himself. Among these and other signs of the times, as I said, Fátima stands out and helps us see the hand of God, our providential Guide and patient and compassionate Father also in the 20th century.

In analyzing the human separation from God in the light of Fátima, we should recall that it is not the first time that, feeling rejected and despised by man but respecting his freedom, God allows man to feel distant from him, with the consequent obscuring of life which causes darkness to fall on history, but afterwards provides a refuge. This already happened on Calvary, when God Incarnate was crucified and died at the hands of men. And what did Christ do? After invoking the mercy of heaven with the words: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Lk 23:34), he entrusted humanity to Mary, his Mother: "Woman, behold, your son" (Jn 19:26). A symbolic interpretation of this Gospel event enables us to see reflected in him the final scene of the well-known and common experience of the son who, feeling misunderstood, confused and rebellious, leaves his father's house to wander into the night... And his mother's mantle protects him from the cold during his sleep, helping him to overcome his despair and loneliness. Beneath the maternal mantle, which extends from Fátima over the whole world, humanity senses anew its longing for the Father's house and for his Bread (cf. Lk 15:17). Dear pilgrims, as if it were possible to embrace all humanity, I ask you to say in her name and for her sake, "We fly to thy patronage, O holy Mother of God. Despise not our petitions in our necessities, but deliver us from all dangers, O glorious and blessed Virgin". "Woman, behold, your son". Thus Jesus spoke to his Mother, while thinking of John, his beloved disciple who also stood at the foot of the Cross. Who has no cross? To carry it day after day, following in the footsteps of the Master, is the condition the Gospel imposes on us (cf. Lk 9:23), certainly as a blessing of salvation (cf. 1 Cor 1: 23-24). The secret lies in not losing sight of the first Crucified One, to whom the Father responded with the glory of the Resurrection, and who began this pilgrimage of the blessed. That contemplation took the simple and effective form of meditation on the mysteries of the Rosary, popularly venerated and recommended with great insistence by the Church's Magisterium. Dear brothers and sisters, recite the Rosary every day. I earnestly urge Pastors to pray the Rosary and to teach people in their Christian communities how to pray it. For the faithful and courageous fulfilment of the human and Christian duties proper to each one's state, help the people of God to return to the daily recitation of the Rosary, this sweet conversation of children with the Mother whom "they took into their house" (cf. Jn 19:27).

Joining in this conversation and making my own the joys and hopes, the sorrows and anxieties of everyone, I fraternally greet all who are physically or spiritually taking part in the October pilgrimage, invoking for everyone, but in a special way for those who suffer, God's comfort and strength, so that they may be willing to "complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the Church" (cf. Col 1:24), recalling the "truly tremendous mystery on which one can never sufficiently meditate", i.e., that "the salvation of many depends on the prayers and voluntary mortification of the members of the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ, directed to this end, and on the co-operation that Pastors and faithful, particularly the parents of families, have to offer to our divine Saviour" (Pius XII, *Mystici Corporis*, n. 19). May my Apostolic Blessing be an encouragement to everyone, Pastors and faithful.

From the Vatican, 1 October 1997.

IOANNES PAULUS PP. II

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