

Our Lady of Fatima: Does she have anything to say today?



The Bishop Speaks

I have fond childhood memories of my mother telling me and my siblings stories. She is a born story-teller. She made the lives of the saints, events from her own childhood, and great historical events all come alive. My favourite story, which I never tire of hearing, was of the apparitions of Our Lady to the three children at Fatima. Perhaps it was because the seers were children my own age. Perhaps it was because the date of the first apparition (13 May) coincided with my own birthday many years later.

This year we have marked the centenary year of the apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary to the three shepherd children at Fatima in Portugal. From the 13th May to the 13th October 1917 the Mother of God appeared six times to Jacinta Marto (aged 7) and her brother Francisco (aged 9) who both died of illness a few years later and have since been canonised Saints, and their cousin Lucia Santos (aged 10) who later became a Carmelite nun and died in 2005 at the age of 97.

They were typical children: good but not perfect; playful and with a tendency to rush their prayers. Yet they were chosen by God to be at the centre of one of the most extraordinary occurrences of the last century. Mary warned the children that humankind was losing its way, and she urged them to pray and do penance so that men and women would turn back to God.

In 1917 The First World War which people called “The war to end all wars” was at its height. Yet our Lady warned that if men and women did not turn back to God and change their ways an even worse war would come, that from Russia would spread the errors of atheism and materialism across the earth, and that the Church, including the Pope and the Catholic faithful, would suffer persecution. And on the 13th October, the day of the final apparition, tens of thousands of people witnessed the extraordinary miracle of the sun as it danced in the sky.

Many people, myself included, believe that the

Let us pray
FOR PEACE
in the **WORLD**

*Front Cover: Sharing God's Love via 'Operation Christmas Child',
Jack Rees, Molly Rees, Scarlett Whelan & Chantelle Burge from
Sacred Heart School Boggabri*



Virgin Mary truly did appear to and give messages to these three children for the sake of the world. The fulfilment of our Lady's predictions and prophecies, the miracle of the sun witnessed by so many and reported in the local newspapers, and the very good and holy lives of the three children following the apparitions, all point to the truthfulness of the events.

Whilst private apparitions and revelations such as occurred at Fatima do not belong to the Church's *Deposit of Faith* (what Catholics believe as Divinely revealed by God) the Fatima apparitions were extensively investigated and formally approved by the Church as *worthy of belief*. So, while the events and messages from Fatima in 1917 are not formal teachings of the Church they are encouraged because of the credible historicity of the events and because they are in harmony with the Gospel message and assist us in living the Gospel as followers of Jesus Christ.

Pope Saint John Paul II visited Fatima on the 13th May 1979, twelve months to the day after the attempt on his life, and placed in the crown of Our Lady's statue the bullet that almost killed him, convinced that it was Our Lady of Fatima who saved him. In his homily at Fatima that day he explained: "If the Church has accepted the Message of Fatima, it is above all because that message contains a truth and a call whose basic content is the truth and the call of the Gospel itself."

He said "Repent, and believe in the gospel" (Mk 1:15) are the first words that Jesus addressed to humanity. The Message of Fatima is, in its basic nucleus, a call to conversion and repentance, as in the Gospel. ... at the beginning of the Twentieth Century Our Lady's call to repentance is a motherly one, and at the same time it is strong and decisive. It sounds like John the Baptist speaking on the banks of the Jordan.



It invites to repentance. It gives a warning. It calls to prayer."

Our parishes and schools all around the Diocese have celebrated the Fatima anniversary in many and varied ways: Masses, rosaries, processions, blessings, consecrations, school lessons, exhibitions, and the visit of the Fatima pilgrim statue. These have been moments of grace for all those who have participated and for our Diocese whose patroness is Our Lady of the Rosary.

But the best way for us to mark the Fatima centenary is by opening our hearts to hear again Our Lady's simple message to pray for peace and to do penance for sinners to come back to God. For our world is still torn by wars, atheism and materialism continue to spread, and the Church continues to be persecuted in many countries. And in 1981 Sister Lucia, the lone surviving visionary at that time, said that Our Lady had told her *the final battle between the Lord and the reign of Satan will be about marriage and the family*.

Our Lady's message at Fatima was fundamentally one of peace, but she warned of serious consequences if people did not turn more wholeheartedly to her Son, repent of their sins, and pray for peace.

The message of Fatima is just as relevant in 2017 as it was in 1917: We do indeed live in troubled and turbulent times. Our Mother Mary came to us from God one hundred years ago to prepare us for these times and to call humanity back to her Son and to place our trust in him.

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