

A Novena to Our Lady of Fatima

To run from 4th to 13th May or 4th to 13th October

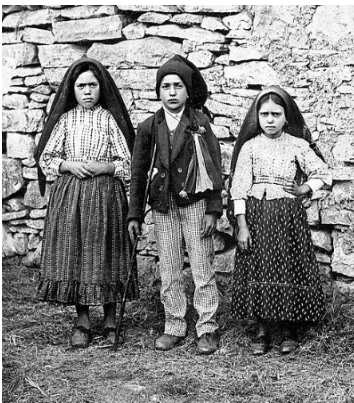
4 May/4 October - Introductory Day

“Seeing his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing near her, Jesus said to his mother, “Woman, this is your son.” Then to the disciple he said, “This is your mother.” And from that hour the disciple took her into his home.” *John 19: 26-27*

In John’s Gospel this is almost Jesus’ final act before his death on the cross. He entrusts his mother to John’s care and then, in turn, he commits John, and through him all of humanity, to Mary’s care. At his moment of greatest test and suffering, Jesus gives us the most precious gift of Mary as a mother to us in our times of trial and need.



Over the last 2000 years Our Lady has shown her motherly care for us time and time again at pivotal moments of crisis for humanity. One such moment occurred just over 100 years ago. Amidst the carnage of World War One, Pope Benedict XV in early May 1917 appealed to Christians to pray a novena in honour of Our Lady, Queen of Peace, asking her intercession to help end the terrible conflict. On day eight of the novena, Sunday 13 May, Our Lady appeared with her response to three shepherd children, Lucia dos Santos and her younger cousins Jacinta and Francisco Marto, while they were tending their sheep in the fields outside their village near Fatima, Portugal.



It might seem like a charming picture – a pastoral idyll with innocent children and a radiant Madonna... But there is nothing sentimental about Fatima – from the very first of the six apparitions we enter a world of gritty and graphic realism. Our Lady and Lucia (who we need to keep on reminding ourselves was only 10 years old at the time!) immediately enter into a conversation concerning the reality of heaven, purgatory and Satan, the salvific power of the rosary, how offended God is by human sinfulness and the urgent need for us to make reparation through penance and prayer. War is shown to be the tragic result of human sinfulness and peace the fruit of human contrition and conversion.

In the apparitions which follow, the children will be transcended into heaven and shown the horrors of hell; they will be given specific details about the fate of Russia, about how Communism and Nazism will spread their poison across the globe and how this will lead to the brutal persecution of the Church. This most ‘political’ of Our Lady’s messages will directly predict the coming of the Second World War and give exact details about the signs signalling its beginning. The world is blindly heading for the abyss and Our Lady, with her maternal care, urgently gives us the remedy for our sickness.

This remedy calls each one of us firstly to reject sin and live good, holy lives; secondly, do sincere penance so that sin may lose its power over us; and thirdly, offer acts of reparation and intercession for those who have forgotten God or who deliberately offend him. Our Lady also repeatedly speaks of God’s desire that humanity should establish devotion to her Immaculate Heart as a way of answering its deepest needs and contributing to the salvation of souls.

Our Lady appeared in Fatima at a time of unprecedented human suffering through the horrors of war, the seismic tremors of the atheistic Bolshevik Revolution in Russia and the outbreak of the Spanish flu pandemic which within just two years would infect one third of the world's population. Over a century on, the degree of indifference even hostility to God is surely much deeper across the globe than it was 100 years ago and the carnage of conflict and war still scars our world. But Our Lady's message at Fatima continues to offer a powerful antidote to the evil and trials of our times.

Therefore, just as Pope Benedict XV sought light in the darkness of May 1917 through a novena of prayer to Our Lady, so may we gather together so as to offer a novena in honour of Our Lady of Fatima. From 5 May up until her feast Day on 13 May, we are invited to be united in daily reflection and prayer before Our Lady of Fatima. Each day we will recall one of the apparitions – both of Our Lady to Lucia, Jacinta and Francisco between May and October 1917, and also the apparitions of the Angel of Peace to the children in 1916 which prepared their souls for the great graces they were to receive at Our Lady's hands. We will see how the revelations of each apparition continue to speak to the tests and trials of today.

In the spirit of Our Lady of Fatima's message and mission, we will be invited to pray urgently for our own deeper personal conversion, for the healing of our society and human family from the evils of our day, and for true peace and renewal of faith in God in our world today.

5 May/5 October - Day 1

In Fatima... Just as Mary herself was prepared for her great mission to be the Mother of God's own Son by the appearance of an angel, so the three shepherd children at Fatima were first awoken to the great graces which awaited them by the coming of an angel. In spring 1916 Lucia, Jacinta and Francisco were grazing their sheep on a favourite hillside near their homes. They had eaten their simple lunch and prayed the rosary, and were just starting to play together when suddenly a strong wind shook the tree tops around them. Looking up, they saw floating in the air above the trees, in Lucia's words, *"a young man, about 14 or 15 years old, whiter than snow, transparent as crystal when the sun shines through it and of great beauty."* He came closer to the children and said:



"Do not be afraid, I am the Angel of Peace. Pray with me."

And, kneeling down until his forehead touched the ground, he taught them to pray:

"My God, I believe, I adore, I hope and I love you. I ask pardon for those who do not believe, do not adore, do not hope and do not love you."

He repeated the prayer three times, and then said:

"Pray thus. The Hearts of Jesus and Mary are attentive to the voice of your supplications."

Then the angel disappeared.

After this visitation, the children were held in such a state of awe and wonder that they could hardly speak about it. As Lucia wrote years later: *"The supernatural atmosphere which enveloped us was so intense, that we were for a long time scarcely aware of our own existence, remaining in the same posture in which he had left us, and continually repeating the same prayer. The presence of God made itself felt so intimately and so intensely that we did not even venture to speak to one another. Next day, we were still immersed in this spiritual atmosphere, which only gradually began to disappear."*

Reflection... It is very striking that Our Lady's response to Pope Benedict XV's plea for peace came far

away from the trenches and blood-soaked battlefields of the Western Front, or from the boardrooms and Parliament chambers of the world's great capital cities. Just as the Angel Gabriel appeared to Mary in the seemingly insignificant backwater town of Nazareth, so the Angel of Peace is sent to a remote, unknown village on the edge of Europe, far away from the heat of battle. For God, there is nowhere which is beyond his loving, merciful gaze - no place and no person are 'out of sight and out of mind' for Him. Indeed, it is often away from the bright lights and thundering noise of power and prestige that God's voice can be most clearly heard. The place where we are now is holy ground. God is with us.



Like World War One, the present situation of humanity is a consequence of human selfishness and greed, of our human pride fooling ourselves that we can be in control of the world around us. God does not cause suffering, and yet he can bring healing and light out of suffering. We need to simplify our lives, and rediscover the gift of a deeper silence around us. We need to be re-awoken, like the three children, to the sudden swaying of the trees heralding the Angels appearance, to the movements and breath of nature around

us, to the problems and needs of people around us. And this involves a struggle in which we are all involved — the front line of this conflict is not in the trenches of a distant land but in our neighbourhood, place of work, local hospital, care home, food bank, bus-queue... anywhere where people need help.

God is calling us all, just as the Angel of Peace invited the three children, to let go of our fear (**Do not be afraid**), open our hearts to Him (**Pray with me**), enter into a deeper relationship with Him (**I believe, I adore, I hope and I love you**) and also to recognise the urgent need to pray for the conversion and healing of our broken human family (**I ask pardon for those who do not believe, do not adore, do not hope and do not love you**).

Christ prepared the Church to proclaim his saving love to the ends of the world. In her role as Mother of the Church, Our Lady has appeared time and time again at critical moments in human history to ask for prayer and repentance so that the most terrible disasters could be avoided. As the spiritual Mother of the human family, she cannot stand idly by and watch humanity destroy itself through sin and rejection of God. So, in these difficult times in which we live, let us join our prayers with those of Jesus and Mary for the healing of our world (**The Hearts of Jesus and Mary are attentive to the voice of your supplications**). May we find the time to immerse ourselves in this vital act of prayer.

6 May/6 October - Day 2

In Fatima... We saw yesterday how on a spring day in 1916 the Angel first appeared to Lucia, Jacinta and Francisco, sent to prepare them for the apparitions of Our Lady the following year. Several months later, the children were sheltering from the hot midday sun in the shade of some trees near the well of the Santos' farm, playing some of their favourite games, when the Angel appeared before them for the second time. He began with a gentle rebuke:

"What are you doing? Pray! Pray very much! The Hearts of Jesus and Mary have designs of mercy on you. Offer prayers and sacrifices constantly to the Most High."

Lucia spoke up, and asked how they were to make sacrifices. The Angel replied:

“Make of everything you can a sacrifice, and offer it to God as an act of reparation for the sins by which He is offended, and in supplication for the conversion of sinners. You will thus draw down peace upon our country. I am its Angel Guardian, the Angel of Portugal. Above all, accept and bear with submission, the suffering which the Lord will send you.”



It is clear that the urgency of the Angel's words really struck the three children and inspired in them a much deeper and more disciplined prayer life as well as an understanding of the importance of making sacrifices for others. As Lucia wrote:

“[The Angel's] words were indelibly pressed upon our minds. They were like a light which made us understand who God is, how he loves and desires to be loved, the value of sacrifice, how pleasing it is to Him and how, on account of it, He grants the grace of conversion to sinners. It was for this reason that we began, from then on, to offer to the Lord all that mortified us, without, however, seeking out other forms of mortification and penance, except that we remained for hours on end with our foreheads touching the ground, repeating the prayer the Angel had taught us.”

Reflection... Try to imagine the heavy, perhaps oppressive heat of that summer's day in Fatima. The three children had taken their sheep out to graze early in the morning, and had now brought them back to the cool of the Santos family farm where they could shelter in the shade of the barn. It is siesta time, and the children are perhaps lazily filling the time with simple games as they too escape the blaze of the sun under the trees around the well...

What a contrast to all of this is the intensity and urgency of the Angel. The children are being entrusted with a mission which is to bring hope and healing to the broken world outside their village retreat, and it is time for them to wake up out of their torpor and commit themselves to this mission. Everything begins with prayer (**Pray! Pray very much!**).

As with the Pardon prayer at the first apparition (*My God, I believe, I adore...*), their prayer is firstly to lead them into a deeper relationship with God, but they are also to pray for the conversion of those who do not believe and hope in God. In this second apparition the Angel expands this to reveal to them that they are also to express this concern for those who reject or who are indifferent to God through deliberate acts of personal sacrifice (**Make of everything you can a sacrifice... in supplication for the conversion of sinners**). This is to be a golden thread running through their daily lives in their actions and attitudes.

Just like the Angel to the children, God is calling us out of our torpor and challenging us to a new urgency and focus. Firstly for a deeper living of our own faith, but also, as with the three children, we are to focus on the conversion of others, offering daily acts of sacrifice in reparation for the sins of our world. What kind of sacrifice? A surrendering of something we hold dear or desire, a surrendering of our will or personal comfort, and giving it to God as an act of love for the good of others. At the epicentre of our faith stands the cross - Jesus' act of total self-giving and obedience to overcome human selfishness and disobedience. “Love one another as I have loved you” as Jesus teaches us.

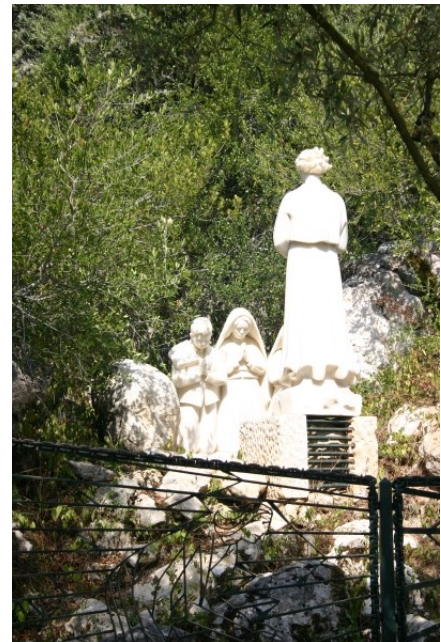
The problem is that we have put profit before people, weapons before health care, and short-term pleasure and gain before the long-term health of our planet. We need to wake up! We need a new urgency in our prayer that real, healing change will come upon our world. And, yes, we need to make sacrifices in our own daily lives - not something which is spiritually very fashionable these days but which our whole Christian

tradition teaches us is absolutely central to God's plan of salvation. We are to pray for those who do not pray, love for those who struggle to love.

7 May/7 October - Day 3

In Fatima... The third and final appearance of the Angel of Peace took place one autumn day in 1916, when the children were at prayer in the Lapa do Cabeco - the place where the Angel had first appeared to them. Suddenly an intense light covered them and, looking up, they saw the angel. This time, as Lucia later wrote, *"he was holding a chalice in his hands, with a host above it from which some drops of blood were falling into the sacred vessel. Leaving the chalice and the host suspended in the air, the Angel prostrated on the ground and repeated this prayer three times:*

"Most Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, I adore You profoundly, and I offer You the most precious Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ, present in all the tabernacles of the world, in reparation for the outrages, sacrileges and indifference with which He Himself is offended. And, through the infinite merits of His most Sacred Heart, and the Immaculate Heart of Mary, I beg of You the conversion of poor sinners."



Lucia continued, *"Then, rising, he once more took the chalice and the host in his hands. He gave the host to me, and to Jacinta and Francisco he gave the contents of the chalice to drink, saying as he did so: "Take and drink the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, horribly outraged by ungrateful men. Repair their crimes and console your God." Once again, he prostrated on the ground and repeated with us three times more the same prayer "Most Holy Trinity..." and then disappeared."*

The children were profoundly affected by these three encounters with the Angel. This is how Lucia later described their experience: *"The force of the presence of God was so intense that it absorbed us and almost completely annihilated us. It seemed to deprive us even of the use of our bodily senses for a considerable length of time... The peace and happiness which we felt were great, but wholly interior, for our souls were completely immersed in God. The physical exhaustion that came over us was also great."* The Angel has now completed his mission of preparing the children for the encounters with Our Lady.

Reflection... We naturally think of the apparitions at Fatima as focusing on Our Lady's message for the children, but a closer look reveals that this message has at its heart a profound emphasis on the Eucharist. Indeed, it could be said that out of all the apparitions, this experience of receiving and adoring Christ in the Eucharist was the one which had the deepest effect on Francisco, who would develop a particular love for Christ in the Eucharist and for adoration. We need also to remember that neither Francisco nor Jacinta had yet celebrated their First Holy Communion when the Angel gave them the Precious Blood of Jesus and so this would have been a particularly extraordinary moment for them.

Following their supernatural experiences, both with the Angel and Our Lady, the children's inner life reached great depths of spiritual awakening. Each child developed their own particular set of charisms. Francisco preferred to pray alone *"to console Jesus for the sins of the world."* He experienced very deeply in

himself the life-giving power of the Eucharist, while also understanding that this great outpouring of God's love was often met with human indifference and ingratitude. He therefore felt a special calling to adore the "Hidden Jesus" in the Blessed Sacrament, and so to comfort Him for this rejection.

The Eucharist is at the heart of our Catholic faith. Since the very beginnings of the Church it is the Eucharist which, as Christ Himself desired, has brought us together as a community, so as to be nourished by God's living Word, fed by the Real Presence of Christ in His Body and Blood, and renewed and strengthened by the Holy Spirit in the gifts of our baptism as a people gathered together to be a living cell in the Body of Christ.

The Mass, whether it be celebrated in a magnificent Cathedral or a simple chapel, is an awesome celebration of communion between the angels and saints of the Church in heavenly glory, the pilgrim Church here on earth and the Holy Souls in Purgatory. It is indeed "the source and summit" of our worship. In the Mass Christ hungers and thirsts to feed the deepest hunger and thirst of His people.

The Angel of Peace reveals to the children the great suffering of Christ at the "**outrages, sacrileges and indifference**" shown towards him in the Eucharist. Does this include me? Have I in some ways allowed the Eucharist to become a "post-it note" in my life rather than its deepest moment? On this third day of our novena, let us bring to the Lord our gratitude and our longing for the Eucharist as well as our sincere contrition for our own indifference and ingratitude towards Christ in the Eucharist.

8 May/8 October - Day 4

In Fatima... On Sunday May 13th 1917, the feast of Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament, Our Lady appeared to Lucia, Jacinta and Francisco for the first time. The children had been to Mass early and were looking after their sheep at the Cova da Iria, (which means "the Valley of Peace") when suddenly, at noon, they saw what seemed to be a flash of lightning. Thinking that a storm was on its way, they quickly gathered the sheep together but then there was another flash and they saw before them on a small holm-oak tree a lady dressed in white. This is how Lucia described her:



"She was more brilliant than the sun, and radiated light more clear and intense than a crystal glass filled with sparkling water, when the rays of the burning sun shine through it."

The children were amazed, standing only a few feet from the lady, bathed in the light which radiated from her. The lady said to them, "**Do not be afraid, I will do you no harm.**"

Lucia was the first of the children to speak (indeed, she would be the only one to speak), simply asking the lady, "Where are you from?" The lady replied, "**From heaven.**" Lucia then asked, "What do you want of me?"

The lady replied: "**I want you to return here on the thirteenth of each month for the next six months, and at the very same hour. Later I shall tell you who I am, and what it is that I most desire. And I shall return here yet a seventh time.**"

Lucia then asked another question: *"Shall I go to heaven?"* The lady replied, ***"Yes, you will."***
"And Jacinta?" ***"She will go also."*** *"And Francisco?"* ***"He will go there too, but he must say many Rosaries."***

Then Lucia asked about two of her friends who had recently died - Maria, aged 16, and Amélia, who was a little older:

"Is Maria das Neves in heaven?" ***"Yes, she is."*** *"And Amélia?"* ***"She will be in purgatory until the end of the world."***

Then the lady announced to them the mission which God willed for them: ***"Are you willing to offer yourselves to God and bear all the sufferings He wills to send you, as an act of reparation for the sins by which he is offended, and of supplication for the conversion of sinners?"***

"Yes, we are willing!" the children replied. With these words the children began their "working relationship" with Our Lady, giving their "yes" to the plans of God. But the lady immediately warned them of the consequences of this "yes":

"Then you will have much to suffer but the grace of God will be with you and strengthen you."

Then as the lady was speaking to them, she opened her hands and an intense light came from those hands which seemed to penetrate right into their souls. Lucia later described what the children experienced: *"We were bathed in a heavenly light that appeared to come directly from her hands. The light's reality cut into our hearts and our souls, and we knew somehow that this light was God, and we could see ourselves embraced in it. By an interior impulse of grace we fell to our knees, repeating in our hearts: "Oh, Holy Trinity, we adore You. My God, my God, I love You in the Blessed Sacrament."*



The children remained kneeling in the flood of this wondrous light, until the lady spoke again, with these final words:

"Say the Rosary every day, to bring peace to the world and an end to the war."

The lady then began to rise gently towards the east, until she disappeared into the sky. The children were left in a state of awe - although once again, as with the apparition of the Angel of Peace the previous year, it turned out that Francisco had been able to see the lady but not hear her words. So Lucia had to explain to him everything that the lady had said.

Reflection... We see how Our Lady in her first encounter with the children deepens the graces which they had received through the Angel of Peace. For example, the light which came from her hands touched the hearts of the children so deeply that it brought them to their knees in adoration of the Holy Trinity and

the Eucharist. Illuminated with the light of heaven, they spontaneously fell to their knees and prayed: ***"Oh, Holy Trinity, we adore You. My God, my God, I love You in the Blessed Sacrament."***

Our Lady also led the children into a deeper appreciation of the power of prayer, in particular revealing to them the importance and fruits of the Rosary. They had already been praying the Rosary but their own shortened form of it, so now Our Lady urges them to pray the full Rosary devoutly every day.

Finally, in answering Lucia's question about her two recently deceased friends, Our Lady helps the children to understand the reality of heaven and purgatory. And that to reach heaven we need to live good lives with hearts freed from sin. Thus the children are given the foundations of a life of holiness - faithful obedience to God, a disciplined prayer life, love of Christ, especially in the Eucharist, a sense of awe and wonder before the Holy Trinity and a readiness to suffer for the salvation of others. They are given a 'peephole' into heaven - but at the same time taught that the path to this place of perfect union with God is perilous and demanding.



What steps do I need to take to truly walk this path of holiness? What do I need to be liberated from in my life? What do I need to surrender? How can I love God and others more?

9 May/9 October - Day 5

In Fatima... On Wednesday June 13th 1917 Our Lady appeared, as she had promised, to Lucia, Jacinta and Francisco for the second time. It was the feast day of St Anthony of Padua, who was actually born in Lisbon and is the patron saint of Portugal. It was, and is, THE children's feast in Portugal, so Lucia's parents naturally thought that the festivities at the parish church in Fatima would distract her from the appointment at the Cova, especially as this parish church is dedicated to St Anthony.



It had been a tough time for the children since the first apparition of Our Lady a month earlier - their families, especially Lucia's, had reacted very negatively to the children's "stories" of a beautiful lady appearing to them. However, Lucia, together with Francisco and Jacinta, had only one focus that day and ran to the apparition site to keep their noon day rendezvous. They waited beneath the shade of the holm oak tree praying the Rosary with about 50 local people who had joined them. Promptly at midday they saw the familiar flashes of lightning and suddenly there was the lady standing on the holm oak tree just as she had a month before.

Lucia spoke first, asking as she had in May: *"What do you want of us?"*

The lady replied: ***"I want you to come here on the thirteenth of next month. I want you to continue saying the Rosary every day and I want you to learn to read. Later I will tell you what else I want of you."***

Lucia then asked for the cure of a sick person. The lady replied: ***"He will be cured later this year if he amends his life."*** Then Lucia made a request: *"I would like to ask you to take us to heaven."*

"Yes, I will take Jacinta and Francisco soon. But you are to stay here some time longer. Jesus wishes to make use of you to make me known and loved. He wants to establish in the world devotion to my Immaculate Heart."

Lucia's final question was: *"Am I to stay here alone?"*

"No, my daughter. Don't be afraid. Are you suffering a great deal? Don't lose heart. I will never leave you - I will always be at your side. My Immaculate Heart will be your refuge and the way that will lead you to God."

As in May the lady then opened her hands from which poured forth rays of brilliant light which penetrated their hearts, immersing them in God's love. As Lucia later wrote: *"The moment she said the last words, opening her hands, she transmitted to us, for the second time, the reflection of that intense light. In it we felt we were submerged in God. Jacinta and Francisco seemed to be in that part of the light which was rising to Heaven, and I in the part spreading over the earth. In front of the palm of Our Lady's right hand was a heart encircled with thorns which appeared to pierce it. We understood it was the Immaculate Heart of Mary offended by the sins of humanity in need of reparation."*

Just like in May, the Lady then rose upwards toward the east and disappeared into the "immensity of heaven."



Reflection... The main focus of the second apparition is the devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, which Our Lady explains is desired by Jesus himself. But why, some might say, do we need to honour the heart of Our Lady?

Everything Mary does is perfectly united to her Son, so our devotion to her brings us closer to Jesus. So God intends our consecration to Mary's heart to open us more fully to the heart of Jesus, which is love and mercy itself. We see this beautiful tenderness of heart in Our Lady's words to Lucia in this June apparition - notice how she is slowly leading the

children into the deepest of mysteries through very simple, direct commands which they can understand: **"Pray the Rosary every day"; "Learn to Read".**

And Our Lady answers all of Lucia's very honest questions with as much clarity as possible. Imagine also Lucia's mixed emotions when she learns that her two great companions will soon be taken to heaven, leaving her alone for an unspecified length of time to fulfil this mission on her own. Our Lady immediately comforts and encourages her with tender words spoken from her heart: **"Don't be afraid... Don't lose heart... I will never leave you..."** This is love in action!

Mary's heart is totally pure, filled with God's love and never stained by sin because of the great privilege of her Immaculate Conception. So Jesus could find a place of unconditional welcome in her heart. We too need to open our hearts fully to Jesus and what greater model can we find for this than Our Lady's heart. Her heart is filled with love for you and me. She was given to us by Jesus himself as our mother from the cross. So her heart embraces the heart of every single one of us, her children.

So we should naturally have a special love and devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Our Lady, which is a refuge for us. We can also learn from her how best to serve God. Her heart was filled with humility - in response to the Angel Gabriel's invitation at the Annunciation that she become the mother of God's own Son, she described herself as "the handmaid of the Lord." In other words she was a servant, ready to do whatever God wanted, reflecting perfectly Jesus' own servant heart.

Her heart was filled with faith - as her cousin Elizabeth said to her, "Blessed is she who believed the word that was spoken to her." We too need to learn this total faith in God from Mary. Mary also had a deeply prayerful heart. As we read, "Mary pondered these things in her heart." When things weren't clear she tried to understand through prayer and reflection. We should ask the Holy Spirit to give us such a heart so that

we too can be more deeply rooted in God and seek to do his will in everything.

We can ask Mary's intercession that our own hearts may be like hers. We need to bring our wounded hearts and the broken hearts of those we love to Christ through Mary's Immaculate Heart.

10 May/10 October - Day 6

In Fatima... On Friday July 13th 1917 Our Lady appeared to Lucia, Jacinta and Francisco for the third time. News of the children's experiences had travelled far beyond Fatima and so a crowd of three or four thousand people were waiting for the children at the Cova da Iria, many of them on their knees praying the rosary. As soon as the children arrived and knelt before the holm oak tree they saw flashes of light and a moment later the beautiful Lady was standing on the little tree.



Again Lucia asked, *"What do you want of me?"* The Lady replied: ***"I want you to come here on the 13th of next month, to continue to pray the rosary every day, in honour of Our Lady of the Rosary, in order to obtain peace for the world and the end of war, because only she can help you."***

Lucia then said, *"I would like to ask you to tell us who you are, and to work a miracle so that everybody will believe that you are appearing to us."*

The Lady replied, ***"Continue to come here every month. In October I will tell you who I am and what I want, and I will perform a miracle for all to see and believe. Sacrifice yourself for sinners, and say many times, especially when you make some sacrifice: O Jesus, it is for love of You, for the conversion of sinners, and in reparation for sins committed against the Immaculate Heart of Mary."***

Now, for the third time, the Lady opened her hands to emit the light of God. But this time the vision the children were shown was not the rapturous sight of themselves immersed in God's heavenly presence, but a vision of hell.

Lucia later described what they saw: *"The rays of light seemed to penetrate the earth, and we saw, as it were, a sea of fire. Plunged in this fire were demons and souls in human form, like transparent burning embers, all blackened or burnished bronze, floating about in the burning sea, now raised into the air by the flames that issued from within themselves together with great clouds of smoke, now falling back on every side like sparks in huge fires, amid shrieks and groans of pain and despair, which horrified us and made us tremble with fear. The demons could be distinguished by their terrifying and repellent likeness to unknown animals, blackened and transparent like burning coals. Terrified, we looked up at the Lady, who said to us, so kindly and so sadly:*

"You have seen hell where the poor sinners go. To save them, God wishes to establish in the world devotion to my Immaculate Heart. If what I say to you is done, many souls will be saved and there will be peace. The war is going to end; but if people do not cease offending God, a worse one will break out during the pontificate of Pius XI. When you see a night illuminated by an unknown light [this occurred on

January 25, 1938], ***know that this is the great sign given you by God that he is about to punish the world for its crimes, by means of war, famine and persecutions of the Church and the Holy Father.***

To prevent this, I shall come to ask for the consecration of Russia to my Immaculate Heart, and the Communion of Reparation on the First Saturdays. If my requests are heeded, Russia will be converted, and there will be peace; if not, she will spread her errors throughout the world, causing wars and persecutions of the Church. The good will be martyred, the Holy Father will have much to suffer, various nations will be annihilated. In the end, my Immaculate Heart will triumph. The Holy Father will consecrate Russia to me, and she will be converted, and a period of peace will be granted to the world."

After this the Lady showed the children another vision known afterwards as the third secret. Then the Lady said, ***"When you pray the rosary, say after each mystery: O my Jesus, forgive us our sins, save us from the fires of hell. Lead all souls to heaven, especially those in most need of thy mercy."*** After a silence, Lucia asked: *"Is there anything more that you want of me?"*

The Lady replied, ***"No, I do not want any more of you today"***.

Then she rose towards the east and disappeared into the sky.

Reflection... After this most dramatic vision we perhaps naturally ask ourselves, "Was it right to show the children the terrifying vision of hell?" We need to remember that this harrowing vision only happened after a year of preparation, with the Angel of Peace and visions of heaven in the May/June apparitions, during which the Lady had already promised the children that they would go to heaven. The vision of hell was necessary so as to convince the children of the urgency of the mission being entrusted to them. Jacinta, in particular, was powerfully affected by the vision after which she dedicated her life to doing all she could through penance and prayer to save souls.



The vision also reminds us of something we have lost sight of in recent years - that hell is a real place and that there is a real danger that many will end up there if there is not real conversion. The messages of Jesus (Mark 1:15), John the Baptist (Mat. 3:1-2) and Peter (Acts 2:38) were all the same: "Repent!" Jesus defined the Church's mission as preaching "repentance, for the forgiveness of sins" (Luke 24:47).

Yet every pope from Pius XII to Francis has said "the sin of our times is the loss of the sense of sin." The refusal to repent - the belief that sin doesn't really matter - is at the heart of the major moral disasters of our time, from abortion to human trafficking, pornography to gang crime. Those who see no wrong can do terrible things.

The vision of hell is also a necessary corrective to the presumptuous expectation that we are all going to heaven no matter what. It is true that God wants to forgive everybody. But one thing stops him: our refusal to repent. The meaning of all of this was not lost on the three shepherd children. They learned that it was absolutely urgent that they console Jesus, do penance, convert sinners and consecrate their lives to Mary.

July 13th is only part of their story - a story that includes far more consolation than condemnation and was meant for every generation, including ours.

11 May/11 October - Day 7

In Fatima... The children did not see the Lady on the **13th August** because that morning they were kidnapped by the Administrator of Ourem, Arturo Santos - a Mason and atheist who did not want to have his authority in the area undermined by these "religious incidents". He arrived that morning in Aljustrel in his carriage. He told the children that he wanted to witness the apparitions, as he was like a doubting Thomas, who could not believe until he saw for himself. He offered to take them to the local parish priest and then to the Cova da Iria. The children agreed and got into his carriage. They headed towards the church, but then the carriage suddenly changed direction and sped to Ourem (about ten miles from Fatima).



Meanwhile back at the Cova da Iria a huge crowd had gathered. There was great concern when the children did not appear, although news arrived that the children had been kidnapped. There was uproar as people were furious. However suddenly there was a loud clap of thunder and all fell silent. Lightning flashed and then a thin white cloud floated down from the sky and settled on the holm oak tree. All were amazed to see everything around them shimmering with colours of the rainbow. Then the little cloud rose into the sky and disappeared. This led many present to believe in the authenticity of the apparitions.

Meanwhile, the alarmed children arrived at Arturo Santos' house in Ourem. He hoped to convince them to reveal the secrets entrusted to them by the Lady and to declare publicly that the apparitions were a hoax. He tried to do this firstly by winning their trust through kindness - they were welcomed warmly by his wife who had prepared a delicious meal for them and invited them to play with her own children (she was actually a pious Catholic, who had to conceal her faith from her husband). But when the Administrator questioned them they refused to give in to his demands. They spent that night at the Santos home.



The next day, Santos changed his approach. He took the children to the local police station and jail where he locked them up with some criminals. The children were scared but kept their spirits up through prayer - their courage moved their cell-mates, who joined the children in praying the rosary (Francisco even told one of them to remove his hat while he was praying!). Santos was convinced that their stay in a dark prison cell with dangerous thugs would break the children's resistance. He then interrogated them about the secret revealed to them by the Lady, and even threatened them with a horrible death by being thrown alive into boiling oil. But again they stood firm, determined that they would rather die than reveal the secret.

Santos thought that they were so steadfast because they were together so he decided to separate them, question them individually and break them one by one. He started with Jacinta, the youngest and, he hoped, the weakest link. He tried to frighten her in various ways - he even called a guard and asked if the boiling oil was ready. The guard reported that it was. Finally he pretended that the seven-year-old girl was being led out to be boiled. Yet she, shaking with fear, said that she preferred to die. Francisco and Lucia were subjected to the same ordeal and also stood firm. Realising that he would not be able to break them, Santos released them and took them back to Fatima the next day - August 15th, the Feast of the Assumption.

The following Sunday, **19th August**, Lucia was grazing her flock near the hamlet of Valinhos, close to Aljustrel. Francisco was with her and his elder brother João. Around 4pm, Lucia sensed the approach of the beautiful Lady. There was a flash of light and Lucia sent João to fetch Jacinta who arrived just in time for the second flash and the appearance of the Lady on another holm-oak sapling.

Lucia asked her usual question, *"What do you want of me?"*

The Lady replied, ***"I want you to continue going to the Cova da Iria on the 13th, and to continue praying the Rosary every day. In the last month, I will perform a miracle so that all may believe. Although the miracle would have been greater if you had not been arrested."***



Lucia then asked: *"What are we to do with the offerings of money which people are leaving at the Cova da Iria?"*

The Lady replied: ***"Have two procession carriers made. One is to be carried by you and Jacinta and two other girls dressed in white; the other one is to be carried by Francisco and three other boys. The money from the carriers is for the "festa" of Our Lady of the Rosary, and what is left over will help towards the construction of a chapel which is to be built here."***

Lucia then asked, *"I would like to ask you to cure some sick persons."* ***"Yes, I will cure some of them during the year."***

Then, as Lucia noted, looking very sad, the Lady said, ***"Pray, pray very much, and make sacrifices for sinners; for many souls go to hell, because there are none to sacrifice themselves and to pray for them."***

There was no light from the Lady's hands on this unscheduled Apparition; she simply rose and disappeared towards the east.



Reflection... In 1908 the Freemasons seized power in Portugal, passing a number of anti-religious laws and boasting that within two generations Catholicism would be eliminated from Portugal. The persecution of the Church in Portugal was a foretaste of the trials set to batter the Church in the whole 20th century - in which more Christians were martyred than in all previous centuries combined. The three children have their own experience of this, each facing up to the Administrator's threats with the confidence of the martyrs who preferred to lose their lives rather than to offend God. The Lady had warned them that they would suffer much if they were faithful to their mission and we can see how quickly these words were fulfilled.

In our modern world we struggle to see the sense and value of suffering - God does not will suffering upon us but he can allow it so that a greater good can come out of it. How can we be purified by this suffering?

12 May/12 October - Day 8

In Fatima... A crowd estimated at around thirty thousand had gathered in the Cova when the children arrived for their appointment with Our Lady on **Thursday 13th September**. Lucia was shocked by the size of the crowd, which pressed in on them all the way, clutching at them, kneeling on the ground before them, begging for intercession to be made for themselves or for their loved ones.

As Lucia later wrote: *"They threw themselves on their knees before us, begging us to place their petitions before Our Lady. Others who could not get close to us shouted from a distance: "For the love of God, ask Our Lady to cure my son who is a cripple!" Yet another cried out: "And to cure mine who is blind!... To cure mine who is deaf!... To bring back my husband, my son, who has gone to war!... To convert a sinner!... To give me back my health as I have tuberculosis!" and so on. All the afflictions of poor humanity were assembled there."*



A journalist in the crowd even cut off Lucia's long plaits of hair which she wore down to her waist as she passed by. She later said of this: *"Nothing is my own, so what of it! Everything belongs to God. May he dispose of it all as best pleases him."*

When the children finally arrived at the holm oak tree, they had not long started the Rosary before a flash of light from the east announced the approach of Our Lady. Shortly she was there before them, standing on the tree. Lucia began with her usual question: *"What do you want of me?"*

"Continue to pray the Rosary in order to obtain the end of the war. In October our Lord will come, as well as Our Lady of Dolours and Our Lady of Carmel. St Joseph will appear with the Child Jesus to bless the world." Then Our Lady added: ***"God is pleased with your sacrifices. He does not want you to sleep with the rope on, but only to wear it during the day time."***

Lucia replied: *"I was told to ask you many things, the cure of some sick people, of a deaf-mute..."* ***"Yes, I will cure some, but not others. In October I will perform a miracle so that all may believe."***



Lucia offered the Lady some letters with a bottle of scented water saying, *"They gave me this if you would like them."* Our Lady replied simply, ***"This is not needed in heaven."***

As in the previous month there were no rays of light from Our Lady's hands. She simply rose and disappeared towards the east. However, as she departed white petals began to fall from the sky. As one witness described it, *"They were like round, shining snowflakes floating down to earth, in a strong beam of preternatural light."* The petals became smaller as they fell and vanished as they reached the people, leaving no trace.

For the first time, during the September apparitions there were many priests present in the crowd present at the Cova. Several of these later gave favourable testimony of their experience, which contributed to

official approval of the Fatima apparitions which would later come from the canonical commission appointed by Bishop da Silva of Leiria to study the evidence.

Reflection... When we read about the huge crowds waiting for Lucia, Jacinta and Francisco on September 13th, it is striking just how quickly their world has changed. In May 1917 Fatima was still, like Lourdes before Our Lady's apparitions to the young Bernadette almost 60 years earlier, a seemingly insignificant small community largely unnoticed by the wider world (just like Nazareth — Mary's own home town).



Now, just four months later, it had become the talk of Portugal, with newspapers on all sides of the political spectrum printing almost daily articles about it. Ironically the anti-Catholic press actually promoted the apparitions, writing at length about the foretold miracle in October, but only because they were convinced that nothing would occur and so the Church would be ridiculed.

And all the time more and more pilgrims arrived in Fatima from all corners of Portugal and beyond, all anxious to meet with the three children, many of them with prayer requests for Our Lady, as we hear in Lucia's words above. This was actually one of the main sacrifices which the children were able to offer to Our Lady as the constant interrogations by strangers were a real cross for them to bear.

Instead they longed for silence and peace in order to be able to fulfil their promises to Our Lady that they would devote themselves to prayer and simple, everyday acts of penance and sacrifice, such as giving their lunches to poor local children or beating themselves with nettles.

We too have to make sacrifices as part of our daily lives, and sometimes, these sacrifices can be demanding. When this happens we can come to understand the real meaning of making a sacrifice — that is, it is concerns something which we hold dearly but which we give up for the greater good.

This is often something which costs us dearly. It goes against our natural instincts, but we do so out of love. It might seem completely unnatural for these three young children to be doing acts of penance such as fasting or inflicting physical pain upon themselves, but they also did it out of a desire to save others, just as Christ himself had offered his own life on the cross for the salvation of humanity. It has been said that real love always costs us something, always requires that we give something of ourselves for the good of others. In just a few months, the children had taken this lesson to their hearts.

13 May/13 October - Day 9

In Fatima... Perhaps the greatest suffering for Lucia during the apparitions was that her own mother did not believe her. However on October 12th, the day before the final apparition and promised miracle, Maria Rosa dos Santos asked Lucia to go to confession with her. She was convinced that a miracle would not occur and that her daughter would be lynched by the angry crowd. There were also rumours that the government was going to explode a bomb near the children. But Maria decided to stand by Lucia and share her daughter's fate. Hence she wanted to be well prepared for death.

The eagerly awaited day, October 13th, began with torrential rain. But this did not deter the huge crowds (estimated at about 70,000 people) who had come from all over Portugal. All were freezing, and those without umbrellas were soaked to the skin. The ground underfoot had turned into a mud-bath. It was with

great difficulty that the children made their way through the huge crowd and muddy fields.

When they eventually arrived at the holm-oak tree, Lucia asked the people to close their umbrellas and pray the Rosary. Shortly afterwards the children saw the familiar flash of light signalling Our Lady's approach and then she appeared above the holm-oak tree. As before only the three visionaries saw her.

Lucia began as always by asking, *"What do you want of me?"* **"I want to tell you that a chapel is to be built here in my honour. I am the Lady of the Rosary. Continue always to pray the Rosary every day. The war is going to end, and the soldiers will soon return to their homes."**

Lucia replied: *"I have many things to ask you: the cure of some sick persons, the conversion of sinners, and other things..."*

"Some yes, but not others. They must amend their lives and ask forgiveness for their sins." Then Lucia recalls: *"Looking very sad, Our Lady said, "Do not offend the Lord our God any more, because He is already so much offended."*



Our Lady began to ascend towards the east and then opened her hands from which came forth rays of light. Lucia cried out, *"Look at the sun"*. Then an event occurred which thousands of people would remember for the rest of their lives. Suddenly the rain stopped. The clouds parted, and the sun appeared behind them shining brightly. It became increasingly larger and brighter, but amazingly it did not dazzle those who gazed at it. Then it glowed and dimmed, and then spun around, emitting multi-coloured rays in all directions. The whole landscape changed in turn into various colours - blue, yellow, red, green... People were

enchanted, speechless with delight.

But after a while their mood changed as the sun suddenly stopped spinning and started falling. The enormous, bright sphere sped towards the terrified crowd. People shouted in fear, cried, fainted, fell to their knees, calling for mercy, confessing their sins. However before it struck the earth, the sun suddenly stopped and returned to its place. All were amazed that their clothes were dry and the ground sun-cracked, as if it had not rained for ages.

At the time when the crowds were passing from rapture to terror, the children had another vision. Lucia later described it in these words: *"After Our Lady had disappeared into the immense distance of the firmament, we beheld St Joseph with the Child Jesus and Our Lady robed in white with a blue mantle, beside the sun. St Joseph and the Child Jesus appeared to bless the world, for they traced the sign of the cross with their hands. When, a little later, the apparition disappeared, I saw Our Lord and Our Lady; it seemed it was Our Lady of Dolours. Our Lord appeared to bless the world in the same manner as St Joseph had done. This apparition also vanished, and I saw Our Lady once more, this time resembling Our Lady of Carmel."*

News of the miracle spread rapidly throughout the country. Witnesses spoke of it excitedly to everyone they met. The little village of Fatima was soon on the lips of people across the world.

Reflection... And so the beautiful Lady kept her word to the children by both revealing her name and giving them the promised miracle. It is interesting that Our Lady identified herself as **"The Lady of the**

Rosary”.

We have seen how at every apparition Our Lady stressed to the children the importance and urgency of praying the rosary, as well as its power to bring peace and convert sinners. So one of our resolutions in response to the Fatima message should be a commitment to pray the rosary faithfully and expectantly, if possible every day of our lives.

We can include in our intentions our contrition for the many ways in which God continues to be offended by human sin, such as drug addiction, abortion, human trafficking and injustice of all kinds. Mary wants our prayers! Our prayers have power! We also have a window in this apparition into the sadness which our sins cause in heaven: **“Do not offend the Lord our God any more, because He is already so much offended.”** You can hear the deep sadness in Mary’s heart behind these words.

Of all God’s creatures, no one’s heart is as filled with love as the heart of Mary. So to see God offended by our sins is an enormous suffering for one so filled with his love. In addition, she knows better than any other human the price that Jesus, her Son, paid on the cross to win forgiveness for our sins. So let us take to our own hearts this sadness of God and of Our Lady, and so ask for the grace to leave behind our sinful habits and attitudes. We can sometimes feel stuck in our sins like the soldiers trapped in the muddy trenches of the First World War battlefields. But if we truly want to be freed of these burdens, then nothing is impossible for God.