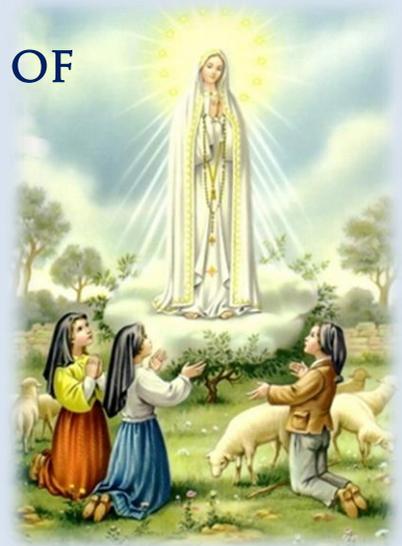


CELEBRATING THE 100TH ANNIVERSARY OF *Our Lady of Fatima*



June 18, 2017

The First Secret and Praying for the Conversion of Sinners

I'd like to let you in on a little known secret about me. I can relate to most of the men in the audience, especially when you're out with your wife – as a little girl, a teenager and even as a college student, believe it or not, I HATED shopping. I knew it was going to be a long day when my mom told us we were going to the Mall. At the Mall there's not just one store, but many! It was going to be especially bad if we were going shopping for clothes. I remember one incident when my mom got mad at me because I needed new clothes and I thought my old ones were just fine. I also recall her throwing away a worn out pair of blue pants when I was at school because I refused to get rid of them myself.

While my mom and sister were busy shopping I would wait outside the store and watch the people. I often wondered why did all of us keep to ourselves and remain strangers to each other when someday we'd all be united together in heaven. I asked myself why we had to wait until eternity before we talk and relate to one another. I knew every person there was carrying some burden or cross and that we were more alike than different in our humanity.

In light of eternity, this evening we will explore the first part of the Secret of Fatima. On July 13, 1917, the children were not granted a vision of heaven but of hell. On this occasion our Blessed Mother began her visit by saying:

“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 the sins committed against the Immaculate Heart of Mary.’”

Describing what happened next, Lucia said, “Upon saying these last words, once again she opened her hands as in the previous months. The rays of light seemed to penetrate the ground and we saw what looked like a sea of fire. Immersed in this fire were devils and souls with human forms, as if they were burning transparent coals, black or bronze, that floated in the conflagration. Carried by the flames that emerged from their very selves as clouds of smoke, [they were] falling on every side, falling into the big fire like chaff falling from wheat. [They were] falling on every side amidst shrieks and groans of pain and despair that horrified us and made us tremble with fear. The devils were distinguished by their horrible and loathsome likeness to unknown animals, but transparent like black live coals.

“Frightened and as if to ask for help, we got up and looked to Our Lady who said to us with kindness and sadness: “You have seen hell, where the souls of poor sinners go; to save them, God wants to establish devotion to my Immaculate Heart in the world. If people do what I tell you, many souls will be saved and there will be peace. The war is going to end. But if people do not cease to offend God, another worse war will break out during the reign of Pius XI. When you see a night illuminated by an unknown light, know that this is the great sign that God gives you, and He is going to punish the world for its crimes by means of war, hunger and persecutions of the Church and of the Holy Father.”ⁱ

Just as my thoughts of eternal blessedness while shopping were real, so was the children’s vision of eternal punishment. In paragraph 1035 of the Catechism we read, “The teaching of the Church affirms the existence of hell and its eternity. The chief punishment of hell is eternal separation from God, in whom alone man can possess the life of happiness for which he was created and for which he longs.”

Though we are weakened by concupiscence, God has given us a powerful gift called free will. About this, the Catechism 1037 states, “God predestines no one to go to hell; for this a willful turning away from God (a mortal sin) is necessary and persistence in it until the end.”

Jesus Himself warns us many times in Sacred Scripture about hell. In the Gospel of Matthew we read: “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you accursed into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels’ (25:41). “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather, be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body in Gehenna” (10:28). In Mark, “If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed than with two hands to go into Gehenna, into the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life crippled than with two feet to be thrown into Gehenna. And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. Better for you to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into Gehenna, where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched” (9:43-48).

The devil has fooled many into believing that neither he nor hell exists; that man can persist in his sin without consequence. This is just one of his many lies. Hell does indeed exist and we don’t have to look very far in today’s world to see the devil’s works and how people have sadly bought into his empty promises.

Before she died, St. Jacinta revealed several statements from our Lady of which I will share just two. Our Blessed Mother revealed to her:

- *“More souls go to hell because of sins of the flesh than for any other reason.”*
- *“Certain fashions will be introduced that will be introduced that will offend Our Lord very much.”ⁱⁱ*

What words can I use to describe the vast number of sins of the flesh that are prevalent in our world today?

On our drive to school this past year, upon crossing Ridge Road to reach the school parking lot, there was added to the electronic billboard an astonishing sign which read: “Human trafficking is not a victimless crime.” I felt three things when I originally saw it. At first, I was shocked! I was appalled that we even have to have such a sign so people know where they can turn to for help. Secondly, I was angry that there are people who use others in such a frightful way to get what they want. Lastly, I was distressed. I was saddened not only at what I saw, but that my students would see it and probably ask their parents the meaning of the words *human trafficking*.

While flying to graduate school a number of years ago, my Sister companion and I were silently reading the *Imitation of Christ*. Right across the aisle were young men looking at pornography magazines. How much more opposite could we be?

Numerous times I have thanked the Lord for calling me to Religious Life when He did for I don't know how I would've survived growing up in the society to which are youth are subject in our times. Being a grade school teacher, I am ignorant (and happily so) of many of the things High School and College age students face in our modern culture. I am very much aware, however, that even very young children are innocently subject to various images, phrases, and types of behavior that have surprised me. What they repeat, pictures they think are funny and the way they speak at times, indicate the gravity of immorality in society, especially in the media. If my memory serves me correctly, children at the age of nine have already come across indecent images (without looking for them) on the internet.

As much as I disliked shopping for clothes over twenty-five years ago, today I would not like even stepping foot into many clothing shops today! In my research for this talk, I've learned that satan has been “in the mall” for a very long time.

In an International Review on Freemasonry in 1928 we read, *“Let us not grow tired of corruption: we may use a pretext such as sport, hygiene, health resorts. It is necessary to corrupt, that our boys and girls practice nudism in dress. To avoid too much reaction, one would have to progress in a methodical manner: first, undress up to the elbow; then up to the knees; then arms and legs completely uncovered; later, the upper part of the chest, the shoulders, etc. etc.”*

This propaganda was written eighty-nine years ago and fashions have since traveled up the knees and elbows!

My students often ask me, “Aren’t you hot wearing that?” Sure, I get hot, but I wouldn’t trade my habit for the world! It reminds me all the time of my dignity as a bride of Christ. I feel blessed and honored to wear it. When I do get hot, it can become a perfect opportunity for me to offer the discomfort for my brothers and sisters in the pornography industry: for those forced to work in it, who promote it, and those who are sadly addicted to it.

What can I, what can you do to change this slippery slope many people are on? How can we protect others from a problem that is so infinitely vast and beyond us? Well, to use a line from the movie *The Bells of St. Mary*: “More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of.”

What prayer can we pray? Our Blessed Lady gave us a specific one at Fatima. “O my Jesus, forgive us our sins, save us from the fires of hell lead all souls to heaven, especially those who have most need of Thy mercy.”

A warning to myself is that I cannot pray: “O my Jesus, forgive them their sin...” As the saying goes, ‘but for the grace of God, go I’. I need to keep my childhood “shopping mall wonderings of all of us living as strangers” in mind, for knowingly or unknowingly, we are all God’s creatures and beloved by God.

Our primary duty in life is to save our soul, but if I truly love my neighbor, my brother and sister, then I want to do what I can to help save theirs as well. No matter what the grave offense my neighbor or enemy should commit, in imitation of our Heavenly Father, I need to be merciful. God does not will that anyone go to hell and neither should I.

The second thing we can do for others is to give a good example by practicing modesty. Laxity in clothing is just one aspect of modesty. The backbone, if you will, of this virtue is the dignity of the human person.

The Catechism (2521-2523) teaches us that “modesty protects the intimate center of the person. It means refusing to unveil what should remain hidden...it guides how one looks at others and behaves toward them in conformity with the dignity of persons and their solidarity.

“Modesty is decency. It inspires one’s choice of clothing. It keeps silence or reserve where there is evident risk of unhealthy curiosity. It is discreet.

“There is modesty of the feelings as well as of the body. It protests, for example, against the voyeuristic explorations of the human body in certain advertisements, or against the solicitations of certain media that go too far in the exhibition of intimate things. Modesty implies a way of life which makes it possible to resist the allurements of fashion and the pressures of prevailing ideologies.”

The perfect model of modesty is our Heavenly Mother. She is humble, pure, reserved, courteous, respectful, and dignified. She is the perfect Lady. We, her children, can and should imitate her. Mary humbly understood her dignity as a daughter of the Father and she desires to teach us how to live as His honorable children.

St. Paul, in his letter to the Galatians, can also serve as a guide. He said, “For you were called for freedom, brothers. But do not use this freedom as an opportunity for the flesh; rather, serve one

another through love. For the whole law is fulfilled in one statement, namely, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'

[T]he fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. Now those who belong to Christ [Jesus] have crucified their flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also follow the Spirit" (Gal. 5:16, 22-23, 25).

Over two thousand year ago, God sent the angel Gabriel to Mary with a special message. One hundred years ago He sent Mary to us.

She came as a loving Mother who wants all her children to live in peace, experience the mercy of God, and to live lives of holiness. She really asked nothing more than an increase and intense love – love for her Son, our neighbor, and even our own selves. Mary asked us to pray for sinners and this means I must start with myself. I must actively, while offering my daily duties, purify my soul with acts of love and reparation. I must look at who I am now and who I am called to be.

Where do we start? Perhaps the following story can point us in the right direction.

While praying on day a woman asked, "Who are you, God?" He answered, "I AM." "But who is, I AM?" she asked. He replied, "I Am Love, I Am Peace, I Am Grace, I Am Joy, I Am Strength, I Am Safety, I Am Shelter, I Am Power, I Am the Creator, I Am the Comforter, I Am the Beginning and the End, I Am the Way, Truth, and the Light." With tears in her eyes she looked toward Heaven and said, "Now I understand. But, who am I?" God tenderly wiped the tears from her eyes and whispered, "You are Mine."

Works Consulted

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