



July 13

Once a month from May to October of 1917, Our Lady appeared to 3 shepherd children in Fatima Portugal, and the cutest of these children was Jacinta! Of the apparitions, July was the one with the most dramatic message, the message that made the biggest and most permanent impression on the children. They were horrified to see poor sinners burning in hell. After seeing the horrors of hell, Lucia recounted, "Our Lady said to us, so kindly and so sadly: "You have seen hell where the souls of poor sinners go. To save them, God wishes to establish in the world devotion to my Immaculate Heart..."

She also warned the children that Russia "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." She concludes with, "In the end, my Immaculate Heart will triumph."

Our Lady shows us the dire need for prayer and sacrifice. Souls are on the line. Evil is spreading. She tells us the solution – prayer and sacrifice – and the outcome – triumph.

What does all of this mean, though? What does it look like, the triumph of her heart? Many stories come to mind that illustrate what Our Lady is talking about. A timely one, however, involves our current and past Holy Fathers.

John Paul II shot

A month ago, May 13, 2026, during the weekly Wednesday papal audience, Pope Leo did something rather unexpected. As the popemobile was traveling through the crowd in St. Peter's Square, our Holy Father ordered the driver to stop. Pope Leo got out and knelt on the cement at the slab that marks the spot where St. John Paul II was shot on that date 45 years ago.

Pope John Paul II was riding through the crowd in the popemobile on May 13, 1981 and stooped to bless a 2-year-old girl when shots rang out and he was rushed to the hospital. One bullet went through the pope's body and embedded in the popemobile. The other grazed his left index finger, fracturing two bones, and a third bullet grazed his right arm and injured two women in the crowd.



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The shooter, Ali Acga, was a professional assassin. He had written a note, "I have killed the Pope." When John Paul II visited Acga in prison, Acga asked, "I know I was aiming right. I know that the bullet was a killer. So why aren't you dead?" He was right. The doctors who operated on the pope confirmed that the bullet indeed took a circuitous route through his body, missing major organs and passing millimeters from his aorta which certainly would have killed him. The soft tissue in his body could not have deflected the bullet and caused it to change its course like that. John Paul's response, "One hand shot the gun, and another hand guided the bullet." Another time, when he was speaking about that day, he remarked that he felt a strong Marian presence immediately after he was shot. The aides in the popemobile with him confirmed that he prayed over and over again to our Blessed Mother until he lost consciousness upon arrival at the hospital.

John Paul II made a pilgrimage to Fatima one year after being shot. During the visit he said, "As soon as I regained consciousness after the attack in St. Peter's Square, my thoughts turned to this shrine and I wanted to express here my gratitude to our Heavenly Mother for having saved my life... there are no coincidences in the designs of Divine Providence." He took one of the bullets that struck him and had it placed in the crown of Our Lady of Fatima. Later, the pope installed a mosaic of Our Lady with the Christ Child in the Vatican in remembrance of the event. Every year on the anniversary of the shooting, he celebrated a Mass of thanksgiving that his life was spared.

Ali Acga succeeded in shooting the pope. While not fatal, one of the bullets did a fair amount of damage and put the pope in critical condition, needing a 5-hour surgery and a blood transfusion plus a several week hospital stay. But who really triumphed? To answer the question, we must look with eyes of faith.

"EYES OF FAITH"

When I taught second grade, a favorite activity of mine was "Eyes of Faith." I would ask the students to close their eyes, then rub their eyes with their fists to put on their eyes of faith. Then I would ask them about one of the Sacraments, "We're at Mass. Look with your eyes of faith. What do you see?" The responses were precious and true: I see Jesus Himself offering the Mass... The Church is filled with angels and saints... We're at the Last Supper... We're at the Crucifixion and Jesus is dying for our sins...

Looking at the assassination attempt on John Paul II with eyes of faith, who triumphed? Let's return to St. John Paul II's summary of the event: "One hand shot the gun; another hand guided the bullet." In this statement we hear both realities expressed:

- There WAS a gun that was fired with an evil, destructive motive:
natural vision

- Our Lady miraculously intervened to save Our Holy Father's life: (supernatural vision, eyes of faith)

The second reality, the spiritual triumph, is MORE powerful and shapes the way we see the physical, or natural, reality. John Paul II never asked, "Why me? Why did that happen to me? Why was he trying to kill me? Why wasn't he prevented?" Instead, seeing with spiritual eyes, his heart is instead full of gratitude, and there is no need to have all his questions answered. He was even disinterested in finding out who ordered the killing, saying, "It doesn't interest me; because it was the devil who did this thing. And the devil can conspire in a thousand ways, none of which interest me."

Dark News

Now let's combine the motherly instructions of Our Lady with the lived example of John Paul II in order to apply the message to the here and now, in each of our lives.

We tend to be inundated by all kinds of very dark news: international news which includes large scale violence, oppression, evil conspiracy, hostility towards the faith, and suffering; national news which includes violence, oppression, evil conspiracy, hostility towards the faith, and suffering; and local news which includes – you guessed it – violence, oppression, evil conspiracy, hostility towards the faith, and suffering. There seems to be no end to tragedy, victims and darkness. As King Theoden aptly put it, "So much death! What can man do against such reckless hate?" It can seem as if darkness is winning and we are being defeated.

How do we look at the triumph of the Immaculate Heart of Mary today? She assured us, "In the end, my Immaculate Heart will triumph." There was no condition in her words. Our Lord simply will not let evil have the final say. So what are we to do? Hunker down in a compound and wait to come out until the triumph comes about? Is the goal simply to survive? Is there any hope?

What is Triumph?

Well, that's not the way Christians have ever lived, even in the worst of persecutions, so that can't be the answer. I believe the answer lies in what we expect triumph to look like. A common way of seeing triumph is to expect a time when we will have great peace and prosperity, international Christian-based harmony, when all our worries and concerns will be over, massive conversion of sinners so that unbelievers are a very small minority, where it will be obvious to everyone that Our Lord is the One who rules the world. If we look at it that way, it can seem as if triumph is a long way in the future.

We can get distracted by all the evil that's in the world. The enemy has always shown talent at putting on a great show of the glory of darkness, but even in the midst of evil, there is a deeper reality. Let's not get fooled by the trickster and prince of lies. Triumph is not majority rules. That has never been the case. Israel never triumphed through numbers. In fact, quite the opposite, and the one time

that King David sought to number the people so as to receive confidence in their size, Our Lord showed him how displeased He was. Triumph is not the absence of suffering. It is not being adored or recognized by others. Triumph is not found in prideful satisfaction or feeling victorious. It's not an absence of opposition, but I think we get caught up in thinking that this is what triumph should feel like, in our personal lives as well as collectively in the Church and in the world. When we set worldly standards as our goal, we end up disheartened time and again, and that can steal our ability to hope!

Triumph IS growth in faith, hope, and love, and union with Our Lord, one soul at a time beginning with mine, and the result is lasting inner peace that doesn't depend on our outward environment. We need spiritual vision to see and experience it. Our Lady, as in all things, will show us the way to this authentic way of life.

History of Christian Triumph

Let's look at her heart and ask her, "Dearest Mother, show us what triumph looks like." The Protestant revolt happened in in the 1500s. Hundreds of thousands of people left the faith. If you were living anywhere in Europe, it would have looked like the end of the world and it would've looked like the church was in its final dying days.

Yet what was happening at the same time? At the same time, our lady appeared in the New World and 9 million people were converted to the Catholic faith and they were converted in such a strong and permanent way that they passed it on for generations, for centuries. That area of the world has been so devotedly Catholic, such a deep, heartfelt faith. During that time in Europe, when it looked as if those who opposed the church were winning, who was actually triumphing? We have to have the eyes of faith to see the whole picture. So how do we share in this triumph of her immaculate heart? I would posit that the triumph of her immaculate heart is not something that we need to wait for. It is not something that we need to hope for in the distant future, that we're living in tribulation now, but in the future there will be this triumph, maybe during our lifetime. I would propose that rather the triumph is here. It's one soul at a time. Starting with each of us. How do we usher in this triumph? Our lady models for us: start with your own heart.

Obedience and Union of Wills

How do we allow the Lord to triumph in our heart? We can tell them, Lord, whatever you are doing in my soul for my good, I consent. And this can be said in the midst of the greatest trials, the greatest losses. I don't have to enjoy the loss. I don't have to consent to the loss itself. But I can say, Lord, whatever you are doing in my soul, the good that you are working in my soul, I consent to that. What about when the trial is not being inflicted on us? What if the trial is our own making? What if the darkness that we're in is due to our own sin? Our lady shows us this as well. Mary, show us how to let our Lord love us in our sin. Show us how to allow him to find us, to pick us up and to take us back to the father that is triumph over

sin. My favorite part of our constitutions is on obedience: There is no other way to eternal life than union of wills to the father Union of wills with the Father. That is triumph! My friends, let's listen to Our Lady who says, "Do whatever He tells you." Let's imitate her who said FIAT at every moment of her life, in all circumstances.

Mary's Life

Mary's life didn't look like triumph of any kind. Her victory was union of wills at all times. She was a poor girl from an obscure village. She was the only child of older parents, born during the time of the Roman occupation of Israel. She was poor her entire life. She was asked to give birth to a son the Messiah. She consented and while she was in her last months of pregnancy, she had to go with Joseph to Bethlehem to make this long journey and they were poor. And this was because the Romans declared a sense of sin, didn't care how inconvenienced the people all her life. She was subject to authority who didn't care about her. There was no place for them to stay. Her son was born in a stable and very soon after he was born, they get the message from the angel to flee because someone is seeking to take the child's life. So she and Joseph in the middle of the night are refugees. They flee to Egypt.

They're in a pagan land without their family. They have to figure out how to make it work. None of this would look like triumph. After years, they go back. They continue to live in poverty. Joseph dies. People don't accept her son. He's accused many times of being insane. She sees the mounting hostility against her son and eventually she watches him die on the cross. This does not look like triumph, and yet she's the most exalted of all creatures. Why is she exalted? Not because of any success that she brought about in her lifetime. External success. Her victory is in union of wills with the Father. This is how the world is saved. And she shows us this. If we allow her, we pray this every day. We say, thy kingdom come, thy will be done. That phrase goes together. We don't in the cadence as we pray this in English, we don't usually take a breath between those two phrases. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done. How does his kingdom come to be? His kingdom, the triumph of our Lord. It comes to be by doing his will. Do we desire this?

Working for Triumph

Do we want the triumph of our Lord? How hard are we working for his kingdom to come? We have to have a supernatural eyesight. The devil tries to distract us. He tries to get us to believe that evil is winning, that it's hopeless. One hand shot the gun, another hand guided the bullet. Notice that John Paul II did not deny that the evil had happened. He was shot and the man who shot him had evil intentions. It was not an accident. So he has one eye on the physical reality, but yet he has one eye on the spiritual reality. Another hand guided the bullet, This spiritual vision showed him how to handle the evil, how to forgive, how to find peace when there is no peace. How to feel protected by our Lord when we live in an unsafe world. As we do this, we spread the triumph of the immaculate heart. She shows us how to live this way. That's all Mary does. She says, do whatever he tells you. And as we really

seek to do that with all our heart and soul, we usher in his kingdom, the triumph of her immaculate heart. We are called not only to usher in a spiritual triumph, but to do in IN A MARIAN WAY.

Me first, then my circle

And as we do that, we are like Israel. Though we are in the minority, we provide a witness. Could anything else be expected of us? The world is dark. I don't deny it. But the more I give myself over to this reality of union of wills, of seeking to bring about the triumph of Our Lady's immaculate heart in my own heart first, and then not to worry about the entire world and about numbers and stats and percentages. Instead, I just concern myself with the people Our Lord has placed within my care, again beginning with my own heart. This is the secret of all the Saints.

Saints as examples

St. Teresa of Calcutta didn't set out to end world hunger. She felt the call of Our Lord to care for the poor person in front of her, to share Our Lord's love and joy with the person speaking to her or needing her. The same is true for all the great Saints: Francis of Assisi, Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, John Bosco, and we could go on endlessly. The Saints who are credited with the biggest spiritual movements in history didn't have that vision at all.

Teresa of Avila gathered 6 friends who shared her desires and sought permission for them to live in a little convent so they could live in solitude, interceding for the world. John of the Cross wrote each of his books for a particular individual with no intention that it would go any farther than that. Indeed, he had no reason to believe the writing would be distributed widely because his own order, led by the friars he formed as novices, was seeking to exile him to Mexico.

John Bosco kept getting kicked out of the places he rented to meet with his boys to reform their lives, and these places weren't even nice. We're talking simple tin sheds. There were also constant attacks on his life and opposition from the government as well as the local Church authorities. Francis of Assisi sought to live on his own, rebuilding a shack of a Church that no one cared about, and at the end of his life he ended up being kicked out of the Order he founded. That's actually the story of a lot of Founding Saints – being kicked out of the order by the friars or sisters they formed.

Bernard of Clairvaux received many scathing reprimands from Church leaders, one of them telling him he should be like a frog and stay in his swamp and croak there. Bernard replied that he'd be very happy to do so, that he only made the sacrifice of leaving his monastery when ordered to by the pope in order to help the Church.

We speak of these Saints today as heroes, and they are, but they didn't feel like heroes. They faced darkness without much human support. Yet they had indefatigable joy and peace.

Collective Dark Night

Don't fear the darkness! It's precisely where Our Lord bears the most fruit. Creation began in darkness. Our Lord gave us the ability to love, the gift of relationship when Adam was in a dark sleep and Eve was formed from his side. The singular most important Feast of the Jews, Passover, took place during the night. Our Lord was born in the middle of the night. He gave us the Eucharist and the priesthood in the evening. When He died on the Cross to save us from sin and open the gates of Heaven, darkness covered the earth. He works GREAT MYSTERIES of salvation in darkness.

St. John Paul II read the Dark Night of the Soul while living under the Nazi occupation of Poland. That book, along with True Devotion to Mary nourished his soul during the time when all his friends were being killed. In the Dark Night, John of the Cross shows us that life and salvation come from darkness. He opens our eyes to see how Our Lord works in darkness, which is a time of purification in a spiritual desert, a time of solitude in which Our Lord can work powerfully.

John Paul II took John of the Cross' teaching and applied it in a wholistic way to what he was experiencing in Poland. He wrote that the purifying dark night doesn't just apply to individuals, but just as the Israelites were purified as a people in the desert, our Lord can purify a family, a community or even entire countries through a trial of darkness that all experience.

Of course, not everyone cooperates, and cooperation is necessary for the purification to take place. In a collective dark night, a remnant suffices to suffer fruitfully for their people. This could be considered a holocaust within a holocaust, but the holocaust of the remnant isn't a holocaust of imposed victimhood. It's a heroic and loving surrender much like that of a mother suffering labor pangs for her child who is unaware that the mother's pain is giving it life.

How can you tell if you are the remnant, if you are cooperating?

1. Remain Faithful – faith, hope, love
2. Pray and sacrifice
3. Witness. Unafraid. Unapologetic. Without outward show. Not pompous. Quiet, Marian. Like Maximilian Kolbe in the concentration camp.

Be that ray of light in the darkness. The thinnest ray of light is an invitation for others to step out of the darkness. Our current situation is ripe for the triumph of Our Lady's Immaculate Heart! Don't get distracted and discouraged by dark stories and statistics. Instead, draw close to Our Lady. It's so simple. You don't need to SEE the big picture. Just trust. Draw near to her. Let her mother you into deeper trust in Our Lord. Keep your eyes on Him and consent to whatever He's asking of you.

Have CONFIDENCE. Our Lord is the One who will ensure that new life comes out of darkness. Our part is simply to offer and to love.

Cardinal Ratzinger, later Pope Benedict XVI, pointed out, “That here ‘a mother’s hand’ that guided the bullet’s path only shows once more that there is no immutable destiny, that faith and prayer are forces which can influence history and that in the end prayer is more powerful than bullets and faith more powerful than armies.”

References

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