



The Holy See

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GENERAL AUDIENCE

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*Dear Brothers and Sisters!*¹ Today I would like to reflect with you on my pilgrimage to Fátima, which the Lord enabled me to make on Friday and Saturday of last week. I still feel the emotions I experienced then. I can see the immense crowd gathered in front of the shrine on Friday evening when I arrived, and especially on Saturday morning for the beatification of the two little shepherds Francisco and Jacinta. A crowd exuberant with joy and, at the same time, capable of spending moments in absolute silence and intense recollection. My heart is filled with gratitude: for the third time, on 13 May, the anniversary of the first apparition of Our Lady in the Cova da Iria, Providence enabled me to go on pilgrimage to the feet of the Blessed Virgin, to the place where she appeared to the three little shepherds, Lucia, Francisco and Jacinta, from May to October 1917. Lucia is still alive and once again I had the joy of meeting her. I extend my heartfelt thanks to the Bishop of Fátima and to all the Bishops of Portugal for preparing this visit and for their warm welcome. I also renew my greetings and gratitude to the President, the Prime Minister and the other Portuguese authorities for the attention they showed me and for all they did to ensure the success of this apostolic pilgrimage.

2. In Fátima, as in Lourdes, the Blessed Virgin chose to give her message to children: Francisco, Jacinta and Lucia. They received it so faithfully that they deserved not only to be recognized as credible witnesses of the apparitions, but also to become themselves an example of evangelical life. Lucia, their cousin who was slightly older and is still alive, has given significant descriptions of the two new blessed. Francisco was a good, thoughtful child with a contemplative soul, whereas Jacinta was lively, somewhat sensitive but very sweet and loving. Their parents taught them to pray, and the Lord himself drew them more closely to himself through the appearance of an angel who, holding a chalice and a host in his hands, taught them to unite themselves with the Eucharistic sacrifice in reparation for sins. This experience prepared them for the subsequent meetings with Our Lady, who invited them to pray fervently and to offer sacrifices for the conversion of sinners. With the two shepherd children of Fátima, the Church has beatified two very young people because, although they were not martyrs, they showed that they lived the Christian virtues to a heroic degree despite their young age. The heroism of children, but true heroism. Their holiness does not depend on the apparitions but on their fidelity and commitment in responding to the extraordinary gift they received from the Lord and from Mary most holy.

After their encounter with the angel and with the beautiful Lady, they recited the Rosary many times a day, offering frequent penances for the end of the war and for the souls most in need of divine mercy, and they felt an intense desire to "console" the Hearts of Jesus and Mary. The little shepherds also had to endure the great pressures of those who with force and terrible threats tried to make them deny everything and reveal the secrets they had received. But they encouraged one another, trusting in the Lord and in the help of "that Lady", of whom Francisco said: "She is our friend". Because of their fidelity to God, they are a shining example to children and adults of how to comply in a simple and generous way with the transforming action of divine grace.³ My pilgrimage to Fátima was also an opportunity to *thank Mary* for what she wished to communicate to the Church through these children and for the protection she has given me throughout my Pontificate: a thanks which I wanted to renew to her symbolically with the gift of the precious episcopal ring that Cardinal Wyszynski gave me a few days after my election to the See of Peter. Since the time seemed right to me, I thought it appropriate to make public the content of the so-called third part of the secret. I am happy to have been able to pray in the Chapel of the Apparitions, built on the spot where the "Lady shining with light" appeared several times to the three children and spoke to them. I gave thanks for all that God's mercy has wrought in the 20th century through the motherly intercession of Mary. In the light of the apparitions of Fátima, the events of this tormented historical period become remarkably eloquent. It is not difficult, then, to have a better understanding of all the mercy God has shown to the Church and to humanity through Mary. We can only thank him for the courageous witness of the many heralds of Christ who remained faithful to him, even to the sacrifice of their lives. Here I would also like to recall the children and adults, the men and women who, following the instructions of the Blessed Virgin at Fátima, have offered prayers and sacrifices everyday, especially through penance and the recitation of the Holy Rosary. I would like to remember them all and give thanks to God.

4. *A message of conversion and hope* has spread from Fátima throughout the world, a message which, in conformity with Christian revelation, is deeply *rooted in history*. It invites believers, on the basis of their lived experiences, to pray fervently for peace in the world and to do penance so that hearts may be opened to conversion. This is the true Gospel of Christ, which is presented anew *to our generation particularly tried* by events of the past. God's appeal to us through the Blessed Virgin still retains all its timeliness today. Dear brothers and sisters, let us receive the light that comes from Fátima: let us be guided by Mary. May her Immaculate Heart be our refuge and the way that leads us to Christ. May the blessed shepherd children intercede for the Church, so that she can continue courageously on her earthly pilgrimage and proclaim the Gospel of salvation with constant fidelity to all mankind! * * * I greet the members of the *NATO Defense College*, and encourage you always to see your professional commitment as a service of peace in the world. Upon all the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors, especially those from England, Ireland, Sweden, Malta, Uganda, Indonesia, Hong Kong, Japan, Canada and the United States, I invoke the joy and peace of the Risen Saviour.

Peace appeal for Africa:

In recent days fighting has resumed between Ethiopia and Eritrea, while violence has continued to afflict the peoples of Sierra Leone. As always, it is civilians and defenceless persons who pay the price of such unprecedented cruelty. I invite you to pray to the Lord of peace that he would hear the cry of the suffering and touch the hearts and minds of the various persons responsible for these senseless conflicts.

I offer special encouragement and fervent prayers for the people of good will who devote their own lives to solidarity with the suffering, as well as for the organizations which are doing all they can to increase any chance of peace. © Copyright

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