

Holiness and Our Daily Duty

On May 13, 1982, a year after he was shot, John Paul II took a pilgrimage to Fatima. During that trip he said, “If the Church accepted the message of Fatima, it is above all because it contains a truth and a summons which are in essence the truth and the summons of the Gospel itself” (Sister Lucia, 4). As noted by John Paul II, Fatima serves as a manifestation of the Gospel and it is at the service of the Word of God. One of the most fundamental teachings of Jesus in the Gospel is the call to holiness and this too forms the core of the message of Fatima.

Throughout the apparitions at Fatima, Mary made many requests. Among them, she asked for prayer, penance, the daily rosary, prayers and sacrifices for the Holy Father and the conversion of sinners, the First Saturdays of Reparation, for a chapel to be built, and consecration to Her Immaculate Heart. Mary presented each of these aspects of the message of Fatima throughout the first five apparitions that took place from May 13 to September 13. When considered as a whole, each petition ultimately points to the call to holiness.

The sixth and last apparition, which took place on October 13th, also strongly emphasized the call to holiness. Before Mary fulfilled her promise to perform a miracle, she made a final plea to the children and through them to the world. Mary said, “Do not offend the Lord our God anymore because he is already so much offended” (Sister Lucia, 3). You can hear the sincerity and immense love with which Mary makes this petition. It flows from the depths of her most pure and motherly heart. Upon reflection of Mary’s appeal, the question arises, “What is it that offends God?” The answer to that question immediately follows: sin offends God. Any disobedience to God’s Law, his Commandments, and even refusing to follow the path God has mapped out for each soul to attain eternal life constitutes an offense against the Lord.

This element of the call to holiness, “to stop offending God, because he is already so much offended” holds great importance. Man recognizes exactly what he should not do. He should not sin. However, this enjoinder only forms part of the call to holiness. Man also needs to consider the positive

element. What should he do? How should he think? What should he say? This aspect of the call to holiness in the message of Fatima presents itself in the four apparitions that occurred after Mary made her plea for man to “not offend the Lord anymore because he is already so much offended.”

“Mary rose slowly towards the East. She turned the palms of her hands to the dark sky over them and the rain stopped. The dark clouds burst apart and scattered. The sun appeared to the children to be a strangely spinning disc of silver. From Mary’s up turned hands rose rays of light, which made the light of the sun dim. Lucia cried out, ‘Look at the sun!’ Mary stood in glory to the right of the sun, which appeared to be pallid and weak when compared with her. She was wearing white but then her mantle changed to blue and St. Joseph appeared with the child Jesus in his arms. Joseph wore white and Jesus wore red. St. Joseph made the sign of the cross above the people then Jesus appeared at the base of the sun. Mary stood next to him. She was not clothed in white or blue but appeared as Our Lady of Sorrows gazing on the earth. Jesus gave his blessing to the people. Then Lucia alone saw Our Lady of Mount Carmel” (De Marchi, 141)

Those who have read the accounts of the apparitions may have found themselves intrigued by these four apparitions, and wondered why they occurred. Lucia, Francisco, and Jacinta did not give an explanation for these apparitions immediately after they took place. Yet, after many years and countless inquiries from people who were desirous for an authentic interpretation of the message of Fatima, Lucia compiled a book expounding upon the message, and it was published in 1997. In her book, *“Calls” From the Message of Fatima*, Lucia explained the Message of Fatima in greater detail. In addition, she explained the four apparitions that occurred before the miracle of the sun, and interestingly enough, each of the four apparitions specifically point to the call to holiness.

Regarding the first apparition of the Holy Family, Lucia disclosed that this was a pressing invitation to the sanctification of the family. In 1917, and still in modern times, ideas and trends contrary to the original purpose of the family constantly assail the family. Some modern examples include individualism (seeking self over others and God), materialism (seeking things over others and God), broken homes, abuse, contraception, and abortion. All of these issues strike at the heart of the family. Why would the Holy Family appear at the last apparition of Fatima: in order to remind families of the purpose for which God established the family in the world.

When expounding upon the apparition of the Holy Family, Lucia eloquently stated the sacred mission of the family and the means by which God ordained for a family to become holy. First, the

couple enters into an indissoluble union, a bond of love and commitment. From their union, God calls the couple to co-operate with Him in the work of creation and bringing forth new life, more souls destined for heaven. Lucia described the family as a garden and children as fresh rosebuds starting to open their petals and bloom. The indissolubility of marriage and openness to life stand as inherent qualities of family life that sadly are not accepted and promoted in modern society. God established these qualities to help a family grow in holiness; thus, they must be esteemed, upheld, and safeguarded.

The call to holiness in the family encompasses more than its divinely established purpose and the sacredness of its overall mission, which is the union of the couple and the procreation of children. Growth in holiness in the family includes the most ordinary circumstances of everyday life. As Lucia wrote, a family is holy and gives glory to God when each member strives to be mutually understanding, forgiving and loving towards one another.

No one in a family is perfect. Sometimes differences among members can cause friction or lead to arguments and disagreements. If disputes occur, there should be an effort made to seek pardon and to amend any wrongs that occurred. To be mutually understanding, forgiving, and loving and to put others first before oneself; this is the call to holiness. In a family the opportunities to die to self and make sacrifices for the good of another are limitless. Both parents and children are called to give of themselves in order to help the family grow, prosper, and become holy.

Lucia went on to address the specific role of parents and children in the family. One of the primary duties of parents is to educate their children in the faith and teaching them how to pray and to observe the commandments. As some parents can attest, this task may prove increasingly more difficult especially as their children mature and are faced with difficult decisions in life.

Lucia also commented on the children's role in a family. Their call to holiness closely ties in to the ordinary events of daily life. Children find their path to sanctity by obeying their parents and assisting them in love. Children are called to listen to the wise advice of their parents who have much more life

experience. Furthermore, pitching in when there is work to be accomplished, and doing chores all with joy and serenity, serve as stepping stones for children on the path to holiness in the family.

After the apparition of the Holy Family, Jesus appeared as the perfect man beneath the sun. How does the call to holiness connect with this apparition of Christ? Lucia wrote that Jesus appeared to invite all to practice the Christian life as He did and to follow Him. Therefore, the greatest model of holiness resides in Christ, the perfect man, who did the Father's will in all things from his youth unto his death on the Cross.

For thirty years, Jesus lived an ordinary life in Nazareth with Mary and Joseph. He was subject to his parents. They worked together, prayed together, loved and respected one another. Why was their home in Nazareth full of joy, peace, well-being and unity: because of God's presence. We can see how vitally important it is to invite God into the family, and to make the home a place where God's presence can dwell.

In addition to Jesus' formation in the family, Jesus serves as our model in work. He earned his living by the sweat of his brow and was known as the son of a carpenter. The work that Jesus undertook shows that despite the fatigue or time needed to engage in a particular occupation, that time and effort is not wasted or without value. Work sanctifies man, and Jesus confirms this through his example.

Moving on to the third apparition, after Jesus appeared, Mary appeared beside him as Our Lady of Sorrows. Why did Mary present herself in an image of suffering and how does this apply to the call to holiness especially in our daily lives? At the foot of the Cross, Mary suffered the martyrdom of Christ in her heart. Many people are familiar with the image of the Sacred Heart surrounded by thorns. Yet, at Fatima, Mary showed the children her heart which was similarly encircled by a crown of thorns. As Our Lady of Sorrows, Mary shows us the value of suffering, sacrifice, and immolation for the sake of love.

Suffering is a part of our human condition and no one in the world can claim to be entirely free from difficulties in some capacity. Yet, when observing the state of modern man, it becomes evident that

many people try to avoid suffering by excessively seeking pleasure, worldly happiness, and exaggerated comfort. They are deaf to the truths of the Gospel and fail to bear suffering in love.

Lucia stated that “Life brings with it the martyrdom of the Cross” (Sister Lucia, 78). Christ chose to redeem man by suffering. Through Jesus’ merits all suffering has value and can purify man from sin and make him holy. Our Lady of Sorrows teaches us to accept our sufferings each day, whether they are small or great.

The lives of three children of Fatima, Lucia, Jacinta, and Francisco, provide countless examples of sacrifices and sufferings both small and great, that were offered for love of Christ. One endearing illustration occurred when the children were trying to think of a sacrifice they could offer up for sinners. They finally decided to feed their lunch to the sheep. This voluntarily sacrifice brought with it some suffering because later on they were very hungry. Eventually, when both Francisco and Jacinta became ill and were unable to perform their voluntary penitential practices, they offered up their physical sufferings in love to the Lord. A great suffering for Lucia was the death of both Francisco and Jacinta, her closest and dearest companions. Yet, Lucia trusted in the God’s will and offered the Lord the suffering she experienced because of her separation from them. By appearing as Our Lady of Sorrows, Mary encouraged all to offer up their sufferings lovingly in union with Christ, and in this way fulfilling the call to holiness.

After the appearance of Our Lady of Sorrows, the last of the four apparitions was Our Lady of Mount Carmel. Only Lucia saw Mary in this form. When explaining why Mary appeared in this way, Lucia noted two reasons: one was the invitation to consecrated life involving total dedication to God and the second was the call to holiness for all Christians.

Out of the four apparitions that occurred, Lucia devoted the most explanation to Our Lady of Mount Carmel and consecrated life. Quoting the Scriptures, Lucia stated that some have been specially chosen by God to live a life of total consecration and to renounce all for love of Christ and to live in

imitation of Him. Two aspects that Lucia highlighted include humility, and the vow of obedience, both of which are beautifully illustrated throughout her own life as a consecrated religious.

Lucia emphasized the importance of humility as an aid to growth in holiness. Humility helps us avoid deceiving ourselves or our neighbor and keeps us from pretending to be or to be worth something we are not. In addition, it allows us to recognize our nothingness, faults, failings, weaknesses, inexperience, and incapacities, which lead us to have an attitude of absolute confidence in the love and mercy of God.

When Lucia was a young newly professed Sister, there was a novice who met her walking down the stairs. Lucia was carrying a mattress on her shoulders. The novice asked Lucia if she needed help. Lucia replied, “If you do not have anything to do, ask the Mistress of Novices for work” (Fox, 131). This response dissatisfied the novice and she went to complain to the Mistress of Novices. The Mistress of Novices replied, “Sister, don’t consider Sr. Dores (Lucia) a saint just because Our Lady appeared to her. She has to work to be one” (Fox, 131).

A few years later, before making her final vows, Lucia made a list of her defects. This list was later kept in the archives of the convent. Among the defects that Lucia was striving to correct, she included: curt replies to Sisters. The number of defects on the list totaled 38. This story illustrates Lucia’s humility. She was aware of her faults, and she continued to endeavor throughout her life to overcome them. As the Mistress of novices noted, Lucia, like all her other sisters in religion, had to work to become holy.

A second element of consecrated life that forms one along the path to sanctity is the vow of obedience. Lucia stated that “If obedience were not costly, what merit should we have in obeying? It is when it demands a sacrifice of us that we prove our love for God” (Sister Lucia, 189). There are numerous examples of how Lucia faithfully lived her vow of obedience during her religious life. Lucia had many duties in the convent including sacristan, black-linen keeper, cook, doorkeeper, awakener, refectory caretaker, white-linen keeper assistant, and nurse’s assistant. One of her superiors commented in

a letter to the bishop, “I have set her the meanest and humblest duties, but no matter what duty I have set her, it is always accomplished. At present she is a kitchen assistant – she’s been there for a good three weeks – and she couldn’t be more happy. She has got a way of obtaining the worst for herself no matter what it costs” (Fox, 130).

Lucia’s explanation of the apparition of Our Lady of Mount Carmel additionally included the broader call to holiness of all Christians. In this portion of the explanation, Lucia quoted St. Paul’s letter to the Ephesians to explain why we must answer the call to holiness. “For this we were chosen, and for this we must become saints: to be the praise of the glory of God and to share in this same glory which we receive from him as a grace” (Sister Lucia, 200).

By our baptism, we have received the gift of faith and the obligation to become holy, to impart a supernatural character to all of our actions, to follow the path God has mapped out for us, to please the Lord, and to become holy like He is holy. Since we have been chosen by God for holiness, we must strive to respond to the call with the best of ourselves for our own personal growth and for the benefit of all. Lucia stated, “Our holiness develops in the love that we owe God and our neighbor by the good use that we make of the gifts God has given to us.

Lucia further noted that holiness leads the soul to a deeper intimacy with the Lord. The soul communicates to the Lord its desires, aspirations, ideals, and difficulties. It becomes profoundly aware of God’s indwelling presence and offers itself to God who sustains and intensifies this intimate union.

No one provides a better model of the call to holiness than Mary. As a faithful and devoted wife, as a loving mother of the Son of God, as a soul entirely consecrated to God, Mary exemplifies the call to holiness and enjoins all followers of Christ to answer God’s call becoming holy and blameless before Him and united to Him in love.

The call to holiness is one of the most basic and fundamental teachings of the Gospel and it forms the core of the message of Fatima. Our Lady reminds us of the need “to stop offending God, because he is already so much offended”. Furthermore, through the apparitions of the Holy Family, Jesus as the

Perfect Man, Our Lady of Sorrows, and Our Lady of Mount Carmel, we recognize the path to holiness. Looking to the Holy Family we see the invitation to the sanctification of the family, which is called to live in mutual understanding, forgiveness, and love. Next, we should strive to imitate Christ who always sought to do the will of the Father. Third, in union with Our Lady of Sorrows, we are called to offer up the sufferings of each day whether great or small to Christ who redeemed us through suffering. And last, in Our Lady of Mount Carmel we see the call to holiness and fidelity in two ways: by those consecrated to God in total dedication and by all Christians who through their baptism have been chosen by God to become holy because He is holy. May Our Lady of Fatima pray for us that we may respond to God's call to holiness generously and joyfully!

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