

Fatima and the Holy Father

In this evening's talk on Fatima and the Holy Father, I am going to cover both the Pope in the message of Fatima and the history of the Popes' response to the Fatima message from 1917 to the present, ending with insights from Pope Benedict XVI's recent visit to Fatima.

Reference to the Holy Father occurs at least four times in the "secret" revealed to the seers on July 13, 1917

...We then looked up at Our Lady, who 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. 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 illumined by an unknown light, 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 of 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 shall be converted, and a period of peace will be granted to the world. ... (The "Fourth Memoir" of Sister Lucia)

"... at the left of Our Lady and a little above, we saw an Angel with a flaming sword in his left hand; flashing, it gave out flames that looked as though they would set the world on fire; but they died out in contact with the splendour that Our Lady radiated towards him from her right hand: pointing to the earth with his right hand, the Angel cried out in a loud voice: 'Penance, Penance, Penance!'. And we saw in an immense light that is God: 'something similar to how people appear in a mirror when they pass in front of it' a Bishop dressed in White 'we had the impression that it was the Holy Father'. Other Bishops, Priests, men and women Religious going up a steep mountain, at the top of which there was a big Cross of rough-hewn trunks as of a cork-tree with the bark; before reaching there the Holy Father passed through a big city half in ruins and half trembling with halting step, afflicted with pain and sorrow, he prayed for the souls of the corpses he met on his way; having reached the top of the mountain, on his knees at the foot of the big Cross he was killed by a group of soldiers who fired bullets and arrows at him..." (Manuscript of the third secret written by Lucia, Tuy January 3, 1944)

To summarize, IF Mary's summons to prayer, penance and conversion are not heeded: World War II will break out during the pontificate of Pius XI; the Holy Father as well as many

members of the Church will suffer much because of the spread of atheistic communism by Russia; the Holy Father will be shot and killed. Also as a remedy, the Holy Father should and eventually will consecrate Russia to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. These prophecies are contingent upon whether and to what extent the faithful respond to Mary's plea. Cardinal Ratzinger explains in his theological commentary on the Fatima secret:

“In the vision we can recognize the last century as a century of martyrs, a century of suffering and persecution for the Church, a century of World Wars and the many local wars which filled the last fifty years and have inflicted unprecedented forms of cruelty. In the “mirror” of this vision we see passing before us the witnesses of the faith decade by decade. ...

In the *Via Crucis* of an entire century, the figure of the Pope has a special role. In his arduous ascent of the mountain we can undoubtedly see a convergence of different Popes. Beginning from Pius X up to the present Pope, they all shared the sufferings of the century and strove to go forward through all the anguish along the path which leads to the Cross. In the vision, the Pope too is killed along with the martyrs. When, after the attempted assassination on 13 May 1981, the Holy Father had the text of the third part of the “secret” brought to him, was it not inevitable that he should see in it his own fate? He had been very close to death, and he himself explained his survival in the following words: “... it was a mother's hand that guided the bullet's path and in his throes the Pope halted at the threshold of death” (13 May 1994). That here “a mother's hand” had deflected the fateful bullet 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.” (*Theological Commentary* by Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger May 13, 2000)

Lúcia also records in the third memoir that Jacinta had two visions of the Holy Father that she and Francisco did not experience. Lúcia does not date these two occurrences, which had to have occurred somewhere between late 1917 and early 1920. However, Jacinta's account of the first vision, according to Walter Peters (*Life of Benedict XV*, p. 217), describes how Benedict XV habitually prayed in his chambers:

“... I saw the Holy Father in a very big house, kneeling by a table, with his head buried in his hands and he was weeping. Outside the house, there were many people. Some of them were throwing stones, others were cursing him and using bad language. Poor Holy Father, we must pray much for him.... (p. 114 of *Fatima in Lucia's Own Words*)

The second vision seems to describe the situation at the time of the pontificate of Pius XII, and the circumstances of World War II:

Is he the one I saw weeping, the one Our Lady told us about in the secret? “Yes, he is,” I answered... “Can’t you see all those highways and roads and fields full of people, who are crying with hunger and have nothing to eat? And the Holy Father in a church praying before the Immaculate Heart of Mary? And so many people praying with him?” (p. 115 of *Fatima in Lucia’s Own Words*)

We see then that the Fatima message besides urging us to prayer, conversion and penance for the salvation of sinners and world peace, also emphasizes prayer for the Pope who as head of the Church bears the Cross for the universal Church. This explains, at least in part, why the Popes have responded with gratitude and appreciation for the message of Fatima. The more important reason, of course, is that it echoes the Gospel’s own call to repentance and conversion.

The Holy Father’s special role in God’s plan is also revealed: he together with the bishops of the world (a collegiality that anticipates Vatican II) is to consecrate the world (Russia in particular) to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. I will now turn to sketching a timeline of Fatima and the Popes’ response to the call of Our Lady to consecrate Russia to her Immaculate Heart (garnered from the *Message of Fatima*, Vatican Web site and Father Hardon’s *History of Consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary*, Inter Mirifica, 1998, web).

- May 13, 1917 Pope Benedict XV ordains Eugenio Pacelli (Pius XII) bishop at the same time that the visions are occurring in Fatima. (*Life of Benedict XV*, p. 217)
- July 13, 1917 the “secret” is revealed to the seers.
- October 13, 1917 Miracle of the Sun, witnessed in the Cova da Iria and over 600 square miles around the site (that is, from 20 to 32 miles away) by people who were not aware or interested in the event.
- 1917 – 1920 Jacinta’s visions of the Holy Father.
- March 19, 1930 Pius XI orders the Leonine prayers after Mass (established by Leo XIII in 1884) for the conversion of Russia.

- October 13, 1942 Pius XII in his radio message to the faithful gathered in Fatima, Portugal for the 25th anniversary of the apparitions consecrates the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary.
- December 8, 1942 Pius XII at St. Peter's Basilica, repeats this consecration including an allusion to Russia.
- May 4, 1944 Pius XII extends feast of the Immaculate Heart of Mary to the universal Church, moving its celebration to August 22.
- January 3, 1944 Lucia writes down the third part of the "secret." giving it the Bishop of Leiria. The sealed envelope is placed in the Secret Archives of the Holy Office April 14, 1957.
- July 7 1952 Pius XII consecrated Russia to the Immaculate Heart of Mary in his Apostolic Letter *Sacro Vergente Anno*.

"So that our fervent prayers and yours should more easily be answered, and to give you a special sign of our particular benevolence, just as some years ago we consecrated the whole human race to the Immaculate Heart of the Virgin Mary, Mother of God, so today we consecrate and we dedicate in a very special manner all the peoples of Russia to this Immaculate Heart...and we implore this most clement Mother to obtain from her Divine Son heavenly light for your minds, and for your souls the supernatural strength and courage by which you will be able to avert and surmount all errors and godlessness."

- August 17, 1959 John XXIII reads the secret with his spiritual director and chooses to send it back to the Secret Archives unpublished, saying "this does not have to do with Our pontificate."
- November 21, 1964 Paul VI, with the bishops assembled at Vatican II, repeats the consecration of the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary composed by Pius XII and sends a golden rose to Fatima.
- March 27, 1965 Paul VI reads the content of the envelope and returns it the archive without publishing it.
- May 13, 1967 Paul VI visits Fatima as a pilgrim, his two intentions peace in the Church and peace in the world. He emphasizes that even though peace is the gift of God, it is also the work of men, that is, after praying for peace there is need for conversion and striving for reconciliation and selfless service especially to the poor and marginalized.
- May 13, 1981 John Paul II is shot at point blank range in St. Peter's Square by Ahmet Ali Agca, a Turkish assassin and survives. He asks for the secret to be brought to him.
- June 7, 1981 (Pentecost) John Paul II's prayer of entrustment of the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary is read by a cardinal at the Basilica of St. Mary Major, because the Pope is still in the hospital.
- July 18, 1981 two envelopes are delivered to the Pope: one white with the original message and one orange with an Italian translation of the secret.
- May 13, 1982 Pope John Paul II makes a pilgrimage of thanksgiving to Fatima, renewing the consecration of the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, putting one of the bullets that struck him in the crown of the statue of Our Lady of Fatima in the Capelinha.
- March 24-25, 1984 the collegial consecration of the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Pope John Paul II reciting the formula in St. Peter's Basilica on March 25 before the image of Our Lady brought from the shrine of Fatima.
- May 13, 1991 John Paul II makes his second pilgrimage to Fatima. In his homily, he explains what consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary means. "She not only calls us

to be converted: she calls us to accept her motherly help to return to the source of Redemption.”

- May 13, 2000 John Paul II returns a third time to Fatima, to beatify Francisco and Jacinta. Sr. Lucia is in attendance. The text of the third secret is read by Angelo Cardinal Sodano, Secretary of State. The Vatican publishes the transcript of the secret, attaching three other texts, including the theological commentary by Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger.
- May 13, 2010 Pope Benedict comes to Fatima and gives a golden rose to the Shrine. In his homily he speaks of the continuing importance of Fatima in the 3rd millennium.

I would like to close with a few of Pope Benedict XVI's words from his pilgrimage to Fatima last month, which show that the message of Fatima continues to be relevant in the beginning of this third millennium. The Church will continue on it via Crucis until Christ's second coming. Even as Pope Benedict XVI traveled to Fatima, he was being vilified and attacked in the media for the priest scandals erupting in various countries. An interviewer during his flight to Fatima asked about the scandal and received this reply:

“... there is seen, the need for a passion of the Church, which naturally is reflected in the person of the Pope, yet the Pope stands for the Church and thus it is sufferings of the Church that are announced. The Lord told us that the Church would constantly be suffering, in different ways, until the end of the world. The important thing is that the message, the response of Fatima, in substance is not directed to particular devotions, but precisely to the fundamental response, that is, to on going conversion, penance, prayer and the three theological virtues: faith, hope and charity. ...

This is our response, we are realists in expecting that evil always attacks, attacks from within and without, yet that the forces of good are also ever present and that, in the end, the Lord is more powerful than evil and Our Lady is for us the visible, motherly guarantee of God's goodness, which is always the last word in history. (*Interview of Pope Benedict XVI with the Journalists during the flight to Portugal Tuesday, 11 May 2010*)

Our Lady of Fatima, Mother of the Church, pray for us.