

Memorial of Our Lady of Fatima – May 13, 2017 – Very Rev. Bryan W. Jerabek, J.C.L.
Cathedral of St. Paul, Birmingham, Alabama – Extraordinary Form Mass, 8:30am – 1,500 words

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

My dear brothers and sisters: today we have the great privilege of celebrating not only the feast of Our Lady of Fatima, but also the one hundredth anniversary of Our Lady's first apparition in that blessed place. On this very day in 1917, three shepherd children from a small and insignificant village in Portugal saw the beautiful lady for the first of six times; they did not yet know who she was, but they knew she was someone important and they obeyed her call to pray the rosary and come back to see her on the thirteenth day of each month. In October of that year she would appear a final time and reveal her identity to them: she was the Lady of the Rosary, the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Queen of heaven and earth.

The six apparitions that she granted to the shepherd children began on this day with the words "Do not be afraid". Her last words to them on October 13 were, "Do not offend the Lord our God any more, because He is already so much offended". In-between, she spoke to them of prayer, reparation, heaven, hell, war, and peace. The message of Fatima is as relevant today as it was then: the Blessed Mother's words are for us also. We are living in times of war, and such has been the general state of affairs for most of our lives. But beyond the wars between men and between nations, there is the general war against God. Each one of us is in it because of our own sins – but there are more notable battles being fought against God in some sectors of the world today, and the fight against him has become very intense, indeed.

Thus it falls to us also to respond to the message that the beautiful lady gave to the three simple shepherd children: we must pray – particularly the Holy Rosary; we must do penance; and we must make reparation for sins – our sins and the sins of others. The Fatima rosary prayer, taught by the Blessed Mother to the children, is a good one that we could say throughout each day, even apart from our prayer of the rosary: "O my Jesus, forgive us our sins, save us from the fires of hell: lead all souls to heaven, especially those in most need of Thy mercy". Yes, Our Lady's words echo down to us: "Do not offend the Lord our God any more, because He is already so much offended"!

Today in Fatima our Holy Father, Pope Francis, canonized two of the three shepherd children – Francisco and Jacinta Marto, now saints of the altar. They were taken by God to heaven not long after the events of 1917. Their companion, the third child, Lucia dos Santos, would have a long life yet to live, and her cause for canonization is now in progress. She was tasked with promoting devotion to Our Lady's Immaculate Heart and spreading the Fatima message. Many of you have learned about her and read her writings. There are also, of course, controversies regarding the secrets that the Blessed Mother entrusted to the shepherd children – specifically the third secret. We need not enter into the controversy, for close to it are the division and strife that come from the devil. No, we must be simple and humble, like the three shepherd children, and respond to Our Lady's call: prayer – especially of the Rosary, penance, and reparation. How are you responding? What will you do differently from this day forward?

In the readings for this Mass Our Lady is revealed to us as a mother. In the gospel, St. John, one of the first priests of the Church, is entrusted with Mary as his mother by Christ from the Cross: "Behold, your mother"! Priests represent all of the people to God – this fact is especially highlighted in the form of the Mass that we are celebrating now – and so St. John stood in our place in receiving the Blessed Virgin Mary as mother; she is the mother of us all. When she looks upon us she seeks out the image of her Son, always present in us because of our baptism and confirmation, but always in need of growth in us as well. And as a good mother, she then strives to bring her Son's image and presence to greater prominence in us: she helps us to

become more Christ-like and, indeed, grow closer to Christ. Let us ask her this day to obtain for us many graces of holiness and virtue.

In the Old Testament Lesson, then, from the book of Sirach or Ecclesiasticus (as it is also called) – a passage which has always been understood in the Church as referring to the Blessed Virgin Mary – she is described to us as the “Mother of Fair Love”. What a beautiful title! Look at our image of Our Lady of Fatima; look at our beautiful image of Our Lady of Sorrows; look at every Marian image and say to yourself: there is my Mother, the Mother of Fair Love. Her love is indeed beautiful and fair, tender, peaceful, and secure. She is also the mother “of fear, and of knowledge, and of holy hope”. May she help us to have a proper fear of the Lord, fearing to displease him by sin and instead choosing to do what is right, virtuous, and pleasing to him. May she help us to have knowledge of all that is good and holy, and especially of God’s will at each moment of our lives. And may she obtain for us that holy hope which keeps us firmly on the path to everlasting life in heaven.

A final word, then, about the saint whom we also commemorate at this Mass, St. Robert Bellarmine. It is a name day for our Bishop, Robert, and so we should offer a special prayer for him in this Holy Mass. St. Robert was one of the most important figures of the counter-reformation because of his teaching, preaching, and example of holiness as a priest, bishop, and cardinal. At a time when there was instability and confusion in the Church because of the aftermath of the Protestant revolution, St. Robert was sent by God to help heal, restore, and strengthen. We need his help today, also, in the times of confusion and division in which we live. As a saint living much of his life in Rome – a city filled with beautiful images of Mary, practically on every street corner and certainly in each of its hundreds of churches – he would have had a beautiful and deep devotion to the Blessed Mother also. May he help us to honor her as we should and to respond to her urgent message with greater intensity from this day forward.

Ahora, quisiera dirigir una palabra especial a los hermanos de habla española aquí presentes en esta Santa Misa. ¡Gracias por haber venido a festejar y alabar a la Santísima Madre de Dios, la Virgen de Fátima! Son los bienvenidos, como siempre, en esta Iglesia Catedral. El día de hoy, durante su viaje apostólico a Fátima, el pequeño pueblo en Portugal donde la Virgen se apareció hace 100 años, el papa Francisco ha canonizado a dos de los tres pastorcitos – los hermanos Francisco y Jacinta Marto. Ellos fueron al cielo poco tiempo después de las apariciones, mientras la tercera, Lucía dos Santos, vivió muchos años más hasta el 2005, cuando falleció en concepto de santidad. Para ella hay una causa de canonización también, pero le faltan varios años hasta que se vuelva santa. De todos modos le damos gracias a Dios por el don de los nuevos santos Francisco y Jacinta, y hoy, les pedimos su intercesión ante el trono glorioso de Dios en el cielo.

El mensaje de Fátima es sencillo y sigue siendo urgente cien años más tarde; la Virgen pidió tres cosas a los pastorcitos y a nosotros: la oración, la penitencia y la reparación. Hoy, en este aniversario tan importante, queremos renovar nuestro compromiso a responder a su llamado: de hoy en adelante, deberíamos de esforzarnos aún más en vivir en constante oración; en hacer penitencia por nuestros numerosísimos pecados y a recibir bien los sacramentos de la Iglesia; y en hacer reparación por nuestros pecados y los de todo el mundo. Pidamos a la Virgen la gracia de corresponder a su llamado y a hacernos santos también. En la primera lectura de esta Misa ella se nos reveló como “la madre del amor hermoso”. ¡Qué título tan bello! Su amor sí es hermoso; es pacífico, lleno de ternura y seguro. Qué ese amor nos impulse hoy a ser hijos más amorosos de Dios y de ella y a ser más fervientes en la vida cristiana. Amén.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.