

Our Lady of Fátima

Feast Day May 13

Our Lady of Fátima is one of the more recent and well-known devotions to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Our Lady appeared six times to three shepherd children, Lucia, Francisco and Jacinta, between May 13 and October 13, 1917, in the little village of Fátima.

She asked the children to devote themselves to the Holy Trinity and to pray the rosary every day to bring peace to the world and an end to war—World War I, a long and tragic war, had just entered into its fourth year. She also asked the children to help increase devotion to her Immaculate Heart.

In her last apparition, it has been reported, Mary gave a great sign—the sun dancing—as a way of proving that she was truly there. There were 70,000 witnesses on October 13, 1917, in Fátima who saw this sign. It is said all could stare at the sun without blinking, or even hurting their eyes. It is said the sun rotated, got larger and smaller and “danced” in the sky.

Two of the children, Francisco and Jacinta, died in 1919 and 1920, respectively, as part of the great, worldwide flu epidemic. The third, Lucia, became a Carmelite nun and died in 2005 at the age of 97.

The children said that Mary gave them three secrets to reveal to the world. Lucia told all of this in a series of memoirs that she was asked to write. In 1941, she said the first secret was shown in July 1913. That secret was a vision of hell that the children were allowed to see.

The second stated: “The war is about to end [World War I], but if men do not cease to offend God there will begin a worse one in the pontificate of Pius XI...the punishment of the world is at hand for its so great sins by means of war, famine and persecutions directed against the Church and the Holy Father.”

The third secret was written down by Lucia in 1944 and given to a Portuguese bishop. It was sent to the Vatican in 1957 and finally revealed in 2000 by Pope St. John Paul II.

She wrote: “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!’”

The secret also spoke of a bishop dressed in white going up a steep mountain and being killed along with many other bishops, priests and religious. Many believe that this is a reference to the assassination attempt of Pope

St. John Paul II in 1981. However, Pope Benedict XVI said the third secret did not directly refer to the assassination attempt. Pope Benedict has said that all of the third secret has been revealed and that the matter is settled.

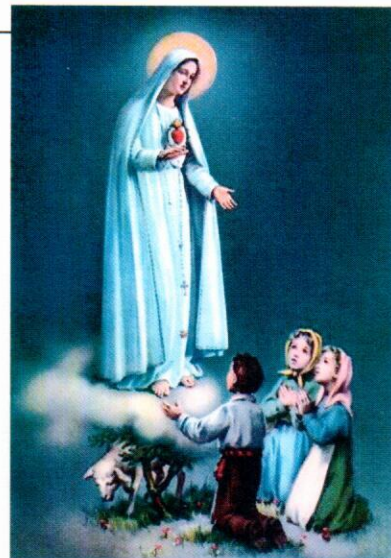
For most people, though, Fátima is not about secrets. Rather, it is about the faith of small children and the benevolence of a loving mother who cared for them.

The feast of Our Lady of Fátima was approved by the local bishop in 1930. It was added to the Church’s worldwide calendar in 2002. About four million people visit Fátima each year.

In August 2015, Pope Francis said, “Virgin of Nazareth, Mary: the first human person who believed in God by accepting the flesh of Jesus. Let us learn from her, our Mother, joy and gratitude for the gift of faith, a gift that is not private but shared. It is for the life of the world.”

Mary believed, and she continues to go out and help others to believe.

Mary, you come to us in so many different ways and in so many different parts of the world. You come, so often, to the humble and the young. Thank you for continuing to talk with us and reach out to us. You were young and humble and believed. Help us to believe!



Reflection:

- Imagine that Mary appeared to you. It would be a blessing but also imagine having to convince people that it really happened. What would you do? How do you explain your own faith? For that, too, is miraculous.
- So often we think back on the “good old days.” But Mary appeared at a time when war was raging. A worldwide flu epidemic followed. Heartache and death were commonplace. Sorrow is part of life, but the comfort of Mary also is a constant. When do you turn to Mary? How has she helped?