



THE TWELVE-STEP REVIEW

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Recovery and the Message of Fatima: 100 Years

Preaching in Fatima, Cardinal Ferdinand Cento reminded pilgrims:

We come to Fatima to be purified. We come to be changed from listless, lukewarm Catholics into fervent apostles. From Fatima we should depart by another way, renewed and transformed.

This year marks the 100th anniversary of Our Lady's appearances at Fatima. And I would argue that the change required of us by the message of Fatima is the same message that comes from the spirituality of the 12 steps.

The message of Fatima is about true renewal and transformation that comes by way of living Gospel principles. These are the principles that changed the world for the better, but when they are lost, Christian cultures return to pagan cultures of death. And these principles are given concrete expression in the 12 steps, derived from 2,000 years of lived Christian experience.

It is important for all of us Christians who are in recovery from the effects of sin in our lives to take seriously the message given from Heaven by our Blessed Mother and thereby renew the face of the earth.

The first Step is about that pow-



erlessness about which St. Paul speaks in Romans 7 (we get caught up in an unmanageable lifestyle, as Step One expresses it). All of us are powerless against the assaults of sin. We have a wounded nature. We're born with it. It needs care, grace, and guidance. The Steps offer us that guidance and enable us to build up the moral and spiritual antibodies needed to resist the assaults of sin successfully and overcome addiction and codependency.

Our Lady at Fatima foretold the horrors of World War II, a war that God allowed in order "to reform the corrupt lives of men" (to quote St. Augustine). Viktor Frankl, as a Jewish psy-

chiatrist in a Nazi concentration camp, noted that it was those prisoners who lost their hold over moral and spiritual values who fell victim to the dehumanizing influences of the camps. It is the same reason we see the modern horrors perpetrated by sinful man. Our Lady's call at Fatima was for us to return to Gospel values, to build up moral and spiritual antibodies.

There is a narrow view of recovery as, for example, when an alcoholic simply stops drinking (referred to as a "dry drunk"—someone who still has all the anger, resentment, and self-pity, etc., but simply doesn't abuse alcohol any longer); or the codependent who divorces the alcoholic spouse, without ever taking a look at the role she played in the dysfunction, and then proceeds to marry another addict!

What Our Lady of Fatima called for was a return to authentic Christian values which alone can save us and save the world. It is a call to prayer, penance, and sacrifice.

The Message of Fatima

My purpose is not to debate issues of Fatima: for example, whether or not the consecration of Russia asked for by Our Lady was in fact carried out, or whether or not the whole of the

Third Secret was revealed. In obsessing about these things the Devil wants to distract us from *living the message*. It is the Holy Father's and the Church's role to explicate the message of Fatima. Lucia herself noted this when she said (in speaking with Cardinal Bertone, who was sent by Pope John Paul to speak with her), "I wrote down what I saw; however, it was not for me to interpret it, but for the Pope." To access the Church's understanding of the message of Fatima, you can read the Church's position on the Vatican website. All the documents are there. You can also find those same documents on EWTN's website. My interest is to take to heart what Our Lady requested of her children.

At Fatima Our Lady continued the mission that was hers from the start and which St. John the Evangelist expresses in the passage about the Wedding Feast of Cana where Mary intercedes with her Son on behalf of the wedding guests. This is her perennial role, and it mirrors that of God the Father. Both Father and Mother have the same concern: "This is my beloved Son; listen to Him," says God the Father (Matthew 3:16). "Do whatever he tells you," says the Mother (John 2:5). And another parallel between God the Father and Mary the Mother is in regard to creation and the new creation. In the creation it was by God's *fiat* that the world was created by His Word; it was through Mary's *fiat* that the new creation in Christ would occur in and through the Word, as she said, "Let it be done unto me according to Thy word." As God's *fiat* created the world, Mary's *fiat* changed the history of the world.

It is interesting to note that Lucia pointed out that there was always a star on Our Lady's dress. You'll notice it is a six-pointed Jewish star. Lucia did not know why Our Lady had a star on her dress, nor why she chose to appear to them on the 13th of the month for six months. However, if we look to Sacred Scripture we find that the number 13 appears six times in the Book of Esther. As you know, Esther was chosen Queen, and as Queen interceded with the King for the salvation of her Jewish people, who were headed for destruction. And it was on the 13th of the month that the deliverance occurred, through the intercession of the Queen. *Esther* was the name given her in Persia (her Hebrew name being *Hadassah*). *Esther* is a Syro-Arabian modification of the Persian word *satarah*, which means *star*. (It is also interesting to note that Lucia died on the 13th.) Our Lady as Queen of Heaven came at Fatima to call her children back to authentic Gospel values. Devotion to her Immaculate Heart would be a means of keeping us from destruction and on the path to heaven.

A Review of the Events

Before Our Lady appeared to the children, an angel appeared to them in the spring of 1916 at a spot close to the children's home. He said to them, "Do not be afraid, I am the Angel of Peace. Pray with me." Kneeling on the ground, he bowed down until his forehead touched the earth. Led by a supernatural impulse, the children did the same, and repeated the words which they heard him say:

My God, I believe in You, I adore You, I hope in You, and I love You. I ask Your pardon for those who do not believe in You, do not adore You, do not hope in You and do not love You.

Having repeated these words three times, he rose and said, "Pray like that. The hearts of Jesus and Mary are attentive to the voice of your prayers." Then he disappeared.

In the second apparition of the Angel, he told them, "Pray! Pray very much. The Hearts of Jesus and Mary have designs of mercy upon you. Offer prayers and sacrifices constantly to the Most High." Lucia asked, "How are we to make sacrifices?" The angel replied, "Make of everything you can a sacrifice and offer it to God as an act of reparation for the sins by which He is offended and in supplication for the conversion of sinners. This is the way you will bring peace to your country. I am its guardian angel, the Angel of Portugal. Above all, accept and bear with submission all the sufferings the Lord will send you." The angel then disappeared.

About three months later when the children had gone to graze their sheep, Lucia tells us, "While we were there, the Angel appeared to us for the third time, holding the chalice in his hands, with a host above it from which some drops of blood were falling into the sacred vessel." Leaving the chalice and the host suspended in the air, the Angel prostrated on the ground and repeated this prayer three times:

Most Holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, I adore Thee profoundly. I offer Thee the Most Precious Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, really and truly present in all the tabernacles of the world in reparation for the countless outrages, sacrileges and indifferences by which He is offended. And through the infinite merits of His Most Sacred Heart and of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, I beg of You the conversion of poor sinners.

Then, rising, he once more took the chalice and the host in his hands. He gave the host to Lucia, and to Jacinta and Francisco he gave the contents of the chalice to drink, saying as he did so:

Take and drink the Body and the Blood of Jesus Christ, horribly outraged by ungrateful men. Repair their crimes and console your God.

Once again, he prostrated on the ground and repeated the same prayer three times more... And then disappeared.

When Our Lady appeared, she asked the children:

Are you willing to offer yourselves to God, to accept all the sufferings He may send you in reparation for the countless sins by which He is offended and in supplication for the conversion of poor sinners?

Lucia consented for all of them. Our Blessed Lady then said, "You will have much to suffer, but the grace of God will be your comfort."

During the second apparition of Our Lady, Lucia asked, "What do you want of me?" Our Blessed Lady replied, "I want you to come here on the 13th of next month, to say the rosary every day, and I want you to learn to read." Lucia then asked for the cure of a sick person. Our Blessed Lady told Lucia that if the sick person was converted, she would be cured within a year. Lucia then said, "I would like to ask you to take us to heaven." Our Blessed Lady replied, "Yes, I will take Jacinta and Francisco soon, but you are to stay here some time longer. Jesus wishes to make use of you to make me known and loved. He wishes to establish in the world devotion to my Immaculate Heart." In sadness Lucia asked, "Am I to stay here alone?" Our Blessed Lady responded, "No, my daughter. Are you suffering a great deal? Do not lose heart. I will never forsake you. My Immaculate Heart will be your refuge and the way that will lead you to God."

Lucia then recounts, "As Our Lady spoke these last words, she opened her hands and communicated to us the rays of that same immense light. We saw ourselves in this light, as it were, immersed in God. Jacinta and Francisco seemed to be in that part of the light which rose towards Heaven, and I in that which was poured out upon the earth. In front of the palm of our Lady's right hand was a heart encircled by thorns which pierced it. We understood that this was the Immaculate Heart of Mary, outraged by the sins of humanity, and seeking reparation."

During the third apparition of Our Lady, Lucia once again asked, "What do you want of me?" Our Blessed Lady: "I want you to come here on the 13th of next month. Pray the Rosary every day in honor of Our Lady of the Rosary in order to obtain peace in the world and an end to the war..." Lucia then presented some petitions. She noted that "Our Lady said it was necessary for such people to pray the rosary in order to obtain these graces during the year." The following are some of Lucia's petitions:

- The cure of a handicapped person. Our Lady said she would not cure the person but would give him a livelihood if he recited the Rosary every day. (He later became sacristan at the shrine for many years.)
- The conversion of a family: That family would be converted after a year if those pleading for them said the Rosary every day.
- Take a sick person to Heaven. The Lady answered, "The sick person should not be impatient to die, since I know when I shall come to take her there."

Then the Lady's face grew very grave and she said: "Sacrifice yourselves for sinners and say often, especially when you make some sacrifice,

O my Jesus, it is for love of you, for the conversion of sinners and in reparation for the sins committed against the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

It was then that the children were given a vision of Hell. To save sinners from the horror of Hell, God would use devotion to the Heart of Mary.

Our Lady then said, "When you say the rosary, say after each decade, 'O my Jesus, forgive us, save us from the fire of hell. Lead all souls to heaven, especially those who are in most need.' Then the Lady left.

The last apparition occurred on October 13th. Again Our Lady urged the praying of the Rosary. She told them the war would end soon and the soldiers would return home. Portugal was spared being involved in

World War II. In appreciation, a crown for Our Lady was fabricated from the gold and jewels donated by the women of Portugal. A huge statue of Christ the King, similar to the one in Rio, was made by the bishops and placed on a high mountain overlooking Lisbon in thanksgiving for the same reason.

Looking very sad, Our Lady said, “People must amend their lives and ask pardon for their sins. They must stop offending God, who is already offended too much.”

Why the Praying of the Rosary?

Every apparition of Our Lady stressed the praying of the Rosary. Why? The Rosary contains the central mysteries of our Catholic faith, the mysteries of that redemption won for us by her Son. But praying the rosary is not Catholic voodoo, as some people make it out to be by simply rattling off a bunch of words. Rather, the concluding prayer gives the significance: “O God, whose only-begotten Son by His life, death, and resurrection has purchased for us the rewards of eternal life, grant we beseech Thee, that by meditating upon the sacred mysteries of the most holy rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary, we may imitate what they contain and obtain what they promise.” One obtains the graces by living these mysteries of redemption. Prayer isn’t simply words. This is a living out of the principles of faith. This is the focus of Step Eleven:

O Most Blessed Mother, heart of love and mercy, hear our prayers. We are comforted in knowing your heart is ever open to those who ask for your intercession. We trust to your gentle heart those in recovery whom we love and who are sick or lonely or hurting. Help us all, Holy Mother, in recovery from the burden of our sins until we may share eternal life with you in the Kingdom of your Son, who lives and reigns forever and ever. Amen.

Sought through prayer and meditation to increase our conscious contact with God, praying only for the knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry it out.

Meditating on the mysteries of our faith brings us the grace to live those mysteries. With heartfelt devotion we entrust our recovery from our sinfulness to the Heart of a Mother.

Prayer, Penance, and Sacrifice

As Cardinal Cento reminded us in our opening quote, and put in 12-step language, the message of Fatima entails an embrace of Step Twelve, for Christians are called to be missionaries, to be sent out with the tools of recovery to witness to those who still suffer.

The Immaculate Heart calls to our heart, inviting us to step forth out of the futile attempt of self-preservation and, by joining in the task of love, by handing ourselves over to her Son and with Him, to discover the fullness of love which alone is eternity and which alone sustains the world. Our wounded nature requires authen-

tic prayer (Step 11), which is conscious of God’s undeserved love for us as sinners, and penance, whereby we offer in and through the Immaculate Heart whatever good we do or hardships we have to endure in reparation for the damage we’ve done by our sinful behavior. This sacrifice of ours, united with that of Christ on the Cross, washes guilt away, restores lost innocence, brings mourners joy, drives out hatred, and humbles earthly pride. It reconciles man to God. This is our 12-step mission, our Eucharistic mission to which we were called by Christ Himself: “As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”

Pope Benedict noted that the message of Fatima tells us “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.” He asks what it means when Our Lady says “My Immaculate Heart will triumph.” He responds, “The Heart open to God, purified by contemplation of God, is stronger than guns and weapons of every kind. **The fiat of Mary**, the word of her heart, has changed the history of the world, because it brought the Savior into the world—because, thanks to her ‘Yes,’ God could become man in our world and remains so for all time. The Evil One has power in this world, as we

see and experience continually; he has power because our freedom continually lets itself be led away from God. But since God Himself took a human heart and has thus steered human freedom towards what is good, the freedom to choose evil no longer has the last word. From that time forth, the word that prevails is this: ‘In the world you will have tribulation, but take heart; I have overcome the world’ (Jn 16:33). The message of Fatima invites us to trust in this promise.”

We do well to put into practice the words the Angel spoke to the children: “Make of everything you can a sacrifice and offer it to God as an act of reparation for the sins by which He is offended and in supplication for the conversion of sinners.”

With devotion to the Heart of Mary we will not fall prey to the devil’s snares. With the love of a Mother’s heart she guides us homeward to Heaven. ❁

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