

The meaning of Fatima: 100 years later

The year 2017 marks the 100th anniversary of the apparitions of Our Lady to the three shepherd children at Fatima, Portugal, where the Blessed Mother appeared once each month from May 13 until Oct. 13, 1917.

The message of Fatima highlights many central truths and devotions of the Catholic faith: the Trinity, the Eucharist, penance, the Rosary and sacrifices for the conversion of sinners. There is special emphasis on the Immaculate Heart of Mary, which is a refuge of maternal love for us all and a sure path that leads us to God. In the end, Mary's Immaculate Heart will triumph because Mary is full of God's grace and is all pure. She has the heart of a mother who cares for her children and wishes them to be saved by her divine Son, Jesus.

Although 2017 marks the centenary year, the Fatima apparitions began with the three apparitions of the Angel of Peace (also called the Angel of Portugal) in 1916 and extended beyond 1917 with subsequent apparitions given to Sister Lucia dos Santos in Pontevedra, Spain (1925-1927) and Tuy, Spain (1929).

Fatima is one of the most significant of all Marian apparitions. Along with Guadalupe (Dec. 12) and Lourdes (Feb. 11), it is one of three Marian apparitions honored with a feast day. In 2002, Pope St. John Paul II added the May 13 feast of Our Lady of Fatima to the general Roman calendar. May 13 was the day of the first Fatima apparition of 1917, and May 13, 1981, was the day when St. John Paul II survived an attempt on his life in St. Peter's Square. John Paul II credited his survival to the intervention of Our Lady of Fatima. The assassin's bullet that narrowly missed killing the pope now is inserted in a crown of Our Lady housed at the Fatima shrine. Fatima is also linked with the collapse of

Russian communism more than 25 years ago.

It is estimated that some 4-5 million people visit Fatima each year, and more are expected for the centennial year, including a visit by Pope Francis, who plans to travel to Portugal to celebrate the 100-year anniversary.

Our Lady of Fatima, pray for us!

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The 6 apparitions of 1917

There were six Marian apparitions to the shepherd children from May 13 to Oct. 13, 1917. All of these apparitions took place on the 13th of the month except for the August apparition.

May 13, 1917

The children were tending their sheep near the Cova da Iria in Fatima, a few miles from their home. A beautiful young woman dressed in white appeared to them over the holm oak. The Lady said she was from heaven and wanted the children to return to the same place at the same hour on the 13th of each month for six months. She asked the children to pray the Rosary every day.

Angelic Apparitions of 1916

The six apparitions of Our Lady to the children at Fatima were preceded by three apparitions of the Angel of Peace in 1916 at or near their home in the hamlet of Aljustrel. The Angel of Peace prepared the children for the Marian apparitions that would follow. He taught them several prayers, and, in his final apparition in autumn 1916, he gave the children holy Communion.

June 13, 1917

Our Lady again asked the children to pray the Rosary every day, and she asked Lucia to learn to read and write. She revealed that Jacinta and Francisco would die soon, but Lucia would live longer. She then revealed that God wished to establish in the world devotion to her Immaculate Heart, and her heart would be a refuge and a way to lead people to God.

July 13, 1917

The Lady disclosed a three-part secret to the children. (See "The secrets of Fatima" on Page 12.)

Aug. 19, 1917

The children missed their scheduled meeting with the Lady at the Cova da Iria on Aug. 13 because they were detained by the anti-clerical civil authorities. The children resisted efforts to have them deny the apparitions. They were put in prison and released on Aug. 15, the feast of the Assumption. The Lady then appeared to the children a few days later, on Aug. 19 at Valinhos near their home in Aljustrel. The Lady asked the children to continue to come to the Cova da Iria on the 13th of each month and to pray the Rosary every day. She told them that she would perform a miracle the last month (October).

Sept. 13, 1917

The Lady asked the children to continue to pray the Rosary for the end of the war. She told them that Jesus as well as St. Joseph would appear in October.

Oct. 13, 1917

The most dramatic of the apparitions. Some 55,000 people gathered on a rainy day near Cova da Iria in Fatima and witnessed the "miracle of the sun." Some 20,000 other people witnessed the miracle from as far away as 25 miles. The sun started spinning and grew larger. It looked like it was going to fall on the earth. People fell to their knees in fear. The people then noticed that their clothes were completely dry even though they had been standing in the rain for some time. Even unbelievers and skeptics witnessed the phenomenon. The

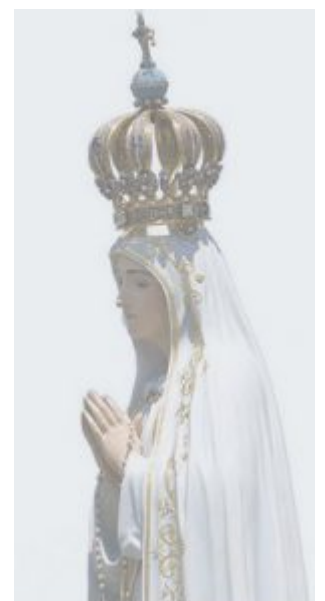
secular newspaper, O Século, had a front page story on “How the sun danced at midday in Fatima.”

While the people were looking at the miracle of the sun, the three children saw a sequence of apparitions. St. Joseph was seen with the Christ Child, and they appeared to bless the world. The Blessed Mother was seen robed in white with a blue mantel; then she appeared as Our Lady of Sorrows and then as Our Lady of Mt. Carmel. The Lady revealed her identity to the children as “Our Lady of the Rosary.” She asked them to pray the Rosary every day and to have a chapel built at Cova da Iria, the site of the apparitions.

THE CONSECRATION OF RUSSIA

On June 13, 1929, when Sister Lucia was in residence at the Dorothean convent in Tuy, Spain, she had a remarkable vision of the Most Holy Trinity with Jesus on the cross and the Blessed Virgin at his side. After this vision, Our Lady spoke to Sister Lucia, telling her: “The moment has come in which God asks the Holy Father, in union with all the bishops of the world, to make the consecration of Russia to my Immaculate Heart, promising to save it by this means.”

For a variety of reasons, the consecration of Russia as requested by Our Lady did not occur until March 25, 1984. Pope Pius XII consecrated the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary on Oct. 31, 1942, following the requests of Sister Lucia, the bishops of Portugal and Blessed Alexandrina da Costa (1904-1955). On July 7, 1952, he also consecrated the Russian people to the Immaculate Heart of Mary.



These consecrations, however, were not done in communion with

all the bishops of the world. After the assassination attempt of 1981, Pope St. John Paul II decided to carry out the consecration as Our Lady of Fatima had requested. On Dec. 8, 1983, he sent out letters inviting all Catholic and Orthodox bishops to join him in prayer for the act of consecration, which took place at St. Peter's Square on the feast of the Annunciation, March 25, 1984, before a statue of Our Lady of Fatima. In this act, St. John Paul II said: "In a special way we entrust and consecrate to you those individuals and nations which particularly need to be thus entrusted and consecrated."

Although some have argued that St. John Paul II did not consecrate Russia properly, Sister Lucia herself confirmed that the 1984 consecration corresponded to what Our Lady requested. In a letter of Nov. 8, 1989, she wrote: "Yes it has been done just as Our Lady asked, on 25 March, 1984." She confirmed this again in 2001.

The Visionaries

Lucia dos Santos

Born: March 28, 1907

Died: Feb. 13, 2005



Bio: The oldest of the three visionaries of Fatima, Lucia was the youngest of seven brothers and sisters. She received harsh criticism after telling family and friends about the visitations, so much so that she was reluctant to return to the Cova da Iria on July 13, 1917. The other seers convinced her to go back. Following the deaths of her cousins, at 14 years old, she was sent to the Dorothean Sisters of Villar and

in 1928 became a sister of St. Dorothy. In 1946, she entered the convent of the Carmelite Sisters of Coimbra and was known as Sister Maria Lucia of the Immaculate Heart. She was visited by Mary on several more occasions. Following her death in 2005 at the age of 97, Pope Benedict XVI in 2008 waived the normal five-year waiting period before the start of a canonization cause.

Blessed Francisco Marto

Born: June 11, 1908

Died: April 4, 1919



Bio: Francisco was 9 years old at the time of the apparitions, during which he saw the Blessed Mother but could not hear what she was saying. Described in Lucia's memoirs as a musically gifted boy, pensive and easygoing, Francisco chose to "console Jesus for the sins of the world" in private prayer following the apparitions. He fell ill during an influenza outbreak just one year after the apparitions at Fatima, and he embraced his suffering, reciting the Rosary daily as instructed by Our Lady. He received his first holy Communion on his deathbed. In her memoirs, Sister Lucia wrote, "He flew away to heaven in the arms of our Heavenly Mother." He was beatified by Pope St. John Paul II in Fatima on May 13, 2000.

Blessed Jacinta Marto

Born: March 11, 1910

Died: Feb. 20, 1920



Bio: Jacinta was just 7 at the time of the apparitions. After seeing the vision of hell, the young girl dedicated herself to praying for the salvation of souls. She refused water during the hot summer. Like her brother, Francisco, Jacinta fell ill with influenza, but her suffering was even greater than his. She underwent surgery and several other minor procedures in order to try to save her life. Her pain was offered for the conversion of sinners. She suffered from pneumonia and tuberculosis, which forced her hospitalization, during which she was visited by the Blessed Mother three more times. The hospital chaplain refused to give her Communion, saying he would return the following day, but she died shortly after. She was beatified on the same day as her brother, May 13, 2000, by Pope St. John Paul II.

The Location of Fatima

The apparitions of the Blessed Mother of 1917 took place at the Cova da Iria (Cove of Peace) over a holm oak tree in the small village of Fatima, Portugal, a few miles from the children's home in Aljustrel. The village was named Fatima after a young Muslim woman captured by the Portuguese following a military victory over the Muslims in 1158. Fatima became a Catholic and married one of the Portuguese knights named Gonçalo Hermingues. Unfortunately, she died soon after her wedding. Heartbroken, Gonçalo eventually entered a monastery. He did, though, have a small chapel built over the

site where his young bride's body was buried. This site came to be known as Fatima.

Today, there is not only the Chapel of the Apparitions at Fatima, but also the Basilica of Our Lady of the Rosary (completed in 1953), where the tombs of Blessed Francisco, Blessed Jacinta and Sister Lucia are located. There is also the larger and more modern Basilica of the Most Holy Trinity, which was completed in 2007.

The Historical Context

The Fatima apparitions occurred during World War I, which was also a time when secular movements such as Freemasonry and communism were manifesting open hostility to the Christian faith.

In 1911, the Freemasons in Portugal passed a law separating Church and State. One of their leaders, Alfonso Costa, even predicted that in two generations Catholicism would be completely eliminated in Portugal. The apparitions of Fatima, therefore, occurred during a critical time in the life of Portugal and the world.

THE SECRETS OF FATIMA

During the apparition on July 13, 1917, Our Lady revealed to the shepherd children a three-part secret. There is concern by some that the third part of the secret has yet to be fully revealed, but Sister Lucia before her death testified that "no secret remains."

The first secret

The first part of the secret shared by Our Lady was a vision of hell, after which she taught the children a prayer to be recited after each decade of the Rosary: "O my Jesus, forgive us our sins, save us from the fires of hell. Lead all souls to heaven, especially those most in need of thy mercy."

The second secret

The second part of the secret concerned the end of World War I and the warning of a worse war during the pontificate of Pope Pius XI if people did not cease offending God. (Pius XI was not elected until 1922). There was also the warning that if people did not convert, Russia would "spread her errors throughout the world, causing wars and persecution of the Church." Moreover, "the good will be martyred; the Holy Father will have much to suffer; various nations will be annihilated." The Lady, though, told the shepherd children: "In the end, my Immaculate Heart will triumph."

The third secret

The third part of the secret was kept hidden by Sister Lucia until she was ordered by the bishop of Leiria, Spain, on Jan. 3, 1944, to write it down. This letter was placed in the secret archives of the Holy Office in 1957.

Pope St. John XXIII in 1959 and Blessed Pope Paul VI in 1965 read the letter but declined to publish it. After the May 13, 1981, attempt on his life, Pope St. John Paul II asked for the letter. He later authorized the disclosure of the secret in conjunction with the May 13, 2000, beatification ceremony for Francisco and Jacinta Marto.

The secret describes an angel with a flaming sword in his left hand crying out: "Penance, penance, penance." Then a bishop dressed in white (thought to be the Holy Father) joins other bishops, priests and men and women religious in ascending a steep mountain with a big cross on top. On the way to the mountain, the Holy Father goes through a city half in ruins, and "he prays for the souls of the corpses" he sees. At the top of the mountain, he kneels before the cross and is killed by a group of soldiers who fire bullets and arrows at him. Other bishops, priests, men and women religious and laypeople are also killed. Then two angels gather up the blood of these martyrs into a crystal aspersion and sprinkle the souls on

their way to God.

First Saturdays

On Dec. 10, 1925, the Holy Virgin, together with the Christ Child, appeared to Sister Lucia in the convent of the Dorothean Sisters in Pontevedra, Spain. The Christ Child asked Sister Lucia to “have compassion on the heart of your most holy Mother, covered with thorns, with which ungrateful men pierce at every moment, and there is no one to make an act of reparation to remove them.”

Then the Blessed Mother spoke to Lucia, and she promised “to assist at the hour of death, with the graces necessary for salvation, all those who, on the first Saturday of five consecutive months, shall confess [their sins], receive holy Communion, recite five decades of the Rosary, and keep me company for 15 minutes while meditating on the 15 mysteries of the Rosary, with the intention of making reparation to me.”

Some have claimed that the full third secret of Fatima has not been revealed. Sister Lucia, however, has confirmed the full text of the secret in two meetings with the secretary of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and the bishop of Leiria-Fatima. In the second meeting, Sister Lucia made it clear that “everything has been published; no secret remains.”

The Popes and Fatima

The bishop of Leiria, Portugal, gave official approval to apparitions of Fatima on Oct. 13, 1930, and since the pontificate of Pius XII (1939-1958), the Roman pontiffs have shown great devotion to Our Lady of Fatima.

Pope Pius XII

- Was ordained a bishop on May 13, 1917, the very day of the first Fatima apparition.
- Consecrated the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary in

1942 and stressed devotion to Mary's Heart throughout his pontificate.

- Explained how devotion to the Immaculate Heart of the Mother of God is closely joined to devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus in his 1956 encyclical *Haurietis Aquas*.

Blessed Pope Paul VI

- Renewed Pius XII's 1942 consecration of the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary on Nov. 21, 1964, and sent a golden rose to Fatima as a sign of his devotion.
- Became the first pope to visit the Fatima shrine on May 13, 1967, in celebration of the 50th anniversary of the apparitions. On that date, he also issued an apostolic exhortation, *Signum Magnum* ("The Great Sign") urging all the members of the Church "to renew personally their consecration to the Immaculate Heart of the Mother of the Church."

Pope St. John Paul II

- Credited Our Lady of Fatima with saving his life from the assassin's bullet on May 13, 1981. A year later, he made a pilgrimage to Fatima in thanksgiving for Our Lady's intervention.
- Carried out on March 25, 1984, Our Lady's request in the Fatima apparitions to consecrate Russia to the Immaculate Heart of Mary in union with the bishops of the world. It is widely believed that the collapse of Soviet communism five years later was linked to this consecration.
- Returned to Fatima on May 12-13, 1991, on the 10th anniversary of the assassination attempt. He returned again for the beatification of Francisco and Jacinta Marto on May 13, 2000, and the public disclosure of the third part of the secret of Fatima.

Pope Benedict XVI

- As Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, he published on June 26, 2000, a commentary on the third part of the secret of Fatima.
- Made a papal pilgrimage to Fatima in celebration of the 10th anniversary of the beatifications of Francisco and Jacinta.
- In 2008, reduced the five-year waiting period to start a canonization cause following the 2005 death of Lucia dos Santos.

Pope Francis

- Led a formal “act of entrustment” to Mary, the Blessed Virgin of Fatima, on Oct. 13, 2013, at the conclusion of a special Marian day.
- Has confirmed he plans to go to Fatima for the May 13, 2017, celebration of the 100th anniversary of the apparitions.