

ALLOCUTIO, LEGION OF MARY, MELBOURNE SENATUS, 4 JUNE 2017

Last month we rejoiced at Pope Francis' visit to Fatima for its centenary and the canonisation of St Jacinta and St Francisco. Today we reflect on Our Lady's appearance at Fatima on 13th June 1917, focused on devotion to her Immaculate Heart.

Our Lady first says to Lucia: **'I wish you to come here on the 13th of next month, to pray the Rosary each day, and to learn how to read. Later, I will tell you what I want.'** Lucia asks for the cure of a sick person, and Our Lady replies, **'If he is converted, he will be healed during the year.'**

Then Lucia says, 'I would like to ask you to take us to heaven.' **'Yes, I will take Jacinta and Francisco soon. But you are to stay here some time longer.'** Within three years, Jacinta and Francisco had both gone to heaven. 'Some time longer' for Lucia meant another 88 years, fulfilling Our Lady's mission until her death in 2005 at the age of 97.

Then Our Lady explains what Lucia's mission will be: **'Jesus wishes to make use of you to make me known and loved. He wants to establish in the world devotion to my Immaculate Heart. To whoever embraces this devotion I promise salvation; these souls shall be dear to God, as flowers placed by me to adorn his throne.'**

Lucia replies sadly, 'Am I to stay here alone?' **'No, my daughter. Do you suffer a great deal? Don't lose heart. I will never forsake you. My Immaculate Heart will be your refuge and the way that will lead you to God.'**

Then, in Lucia's words: 'As Our Lady spoke these last words, she opened her hands, and for the second time, she communicated to us the rays of that 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 on 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.'

So what is it to have this devotion to the Immaculate Heart, for which Our Lady promises salvation? Certainly, our faithfulness to the whole Fatima message should be an aspect of that devotion. But we think particularly of Mary's complete 'yes' to God. From the Annunciation to the foot of the Cross, we see her heart totally pure from sin, totally pure from anything foreign to its one and only centre, the will of God. And so *our* devotion to the Immaculate Heart means that we take Mary as our special model in our own commitment to doing and accepting God's will in all things (which is central to what it means to truly love God).

St John Paul II further described the consecration to the Immaculate Heart: 'The act of entrusting ourselves to the Heart of Our Lady establishes a relationship of love with her in which we dedicate to her all that we have and are. This consecration is practised essentially by a life of grace, of purity, of prayer, of penance that is joined to the fulfilment of all the duties of a Christian, and of reparation for our sins and the sins of the world.' (*Address to the International Symposium on the Alliance of the Hearts of Jesus and Mary*, 22nd September 1986)

Devotion to the Immaculate Heart didn't begin with Fatima. In the gradual flowering of Marian doctrine and devotion down the centuries, growing out of the Scriptures and the Apostolic Tradition, we find St Bernard in the 12th century speaking of the Immaculate Heart, and then several other saints through the Middle Ages. But it's especially St John

Eudes in 17th century France who gave great teaching about both the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

Then we have the revelation of the Miraculous Medal to St Catherine Labouré in 1830, which showed the two hearts – and in particular the Heart of Mary pierced by a sword. The Green Scapular revealed to Sister Justine Bisqueyburu in 1840 and approved by Blessed Pius IX in 1870 had inscribed on it: ‘Immaculate Heart of Mary, pray for us now and the hour of our death.’

Early last century there were the experiences of Belgian visionary Berthe Petit specifically about devotion to the *Sorrowful* and Immaculate Heart of Mary, reminding us that the Immaculate Heart of Mary – the Heart totally dedicated to the will of God – can’t be understood without remembering the sorrows of Mary, faithfully standing at the foot of the cross.

And ever since the events of Fatima, the Popes have especially promoted devotion to Mary’s Immaculate Heart. In 1944, Pius XII established the Feast of the Immaculate Heart on 22nd August (moved in 1969 to its present location in the calendar, alongside the Feast of the Sacred Heart).

There have been the consecrations of the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary: by Pius XII in 1942, by Blessed Paul VI in 1964, by St John Paul II in 1982 and 1984, and by Pope Francis in 2013; the specific consecration of Russia by Pius XII in 1952; and the consecration by Pope Benedict XVI of all the priests of the world in 2010.

On Fatima’s 50th anniversary in 1967 Paul VI called on all Catholics to consecrate themselves to the Immaculate Heart. (Apostolic Exhortation *Signum Magnum* (‘The Great Sign’) 13th May 1967) So make this consecration if you haven’t already, then truly live it out by a life of devotion to Mary’s Immaculate Heart.

In that way, we inherit Our Lady’s promise of 13th June 1917: **‘To whoever embraces this devotion I promise salvation; these souls shall be dear to God, as flowers placed by me to adorn his throne.’** And Our Lady’s words to Lucia will be our experience also: **‘My Immaculate Heart will be your refuge and the way that will lead you to God.’**