

The Third Secret of Fatima

Last month we reflected on Mary's appearance at Fatima on 13th July 1917, and the first two of the three secrets revealed to the children that day. Today we'll look at the famous 'Third Secret'. Because it was hidden for so long, with so much speculation, it still has an aura of the sensational. Yet, it's just as legitimate a part of Mary's message as any other.

Heaven permitted Sr Lucia to write the Secret in 1944; in 1957 it was delivered to the Vatican, read by St John XXIII in 1959, Bl. Paul VI in 1965, and St John Paul II in 1981. There was great anticipation it would be made public in 1960, but the Holy See decided against this – understandably, when we now read the section of the vision about a pope being shot. Doubtless the Holy See didn't want to tempt anyone to fulfil the prophecy. It wasn't until 2000 when Jacinta and Francisco were beatified that St John Paul had it made public. (This was after he had come so close to death in the assassination attempt of 13th May 1981 – interpreted by the Pope, with Lucia's endorsement, as already fulfilling this part of the mystical vision.)

Then-Cardinal Ratzinger (Benedict XVI), as Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, wrote the Theological Commentary on the Secret, which can be found on the Vatican website in the document *The Message of Fatima* (26th June 2000).

He wrote: 'A careful reading of the text of the so-called third "secret" of Fatima, published here in its entirety long after the fact and by decision of the Holy Father, will probably prove disappointing or surprising after all the speculation it has stirred. No great mystery is revealed; nor is the future unveiled. We see the Church of the martyrs of the century which has just passed represented in a scene described in a language which is symbolic and not easy to decipher.' (His entire 'Commentary' should be read.)

One still finds speculation that the Holy See didn't reveal the full Secret. But Sr Lucia herself stated: 'Everything has been published. There are no more secrets.' (11th November 2001) And when some people persisted, she said this: 'Well, if they know what the Third Secret is, then let them tell us.' 'If they would just devote their energy to living out the real essence of the message, which has already been revealed...All they care about is what hasn't been said, rather than the fulfilment of Our Lady's request for prayer and penance.'

The conspiracy theorists don't usually spell out the implications of their ideas – that Sr Lucia went along with the supposed deception; that Cardinal Ratzinger, by clearly writing that the Secret had been fully published, lied outright in a very grave matter and has persevered in this ever since; and that St John Paul, by gratuitously deciding to order all this, endorsed the lie, again persevering in this till death. This isn't some impersonal intellectual exercise: those who come up with these speculations are playing round with the reputations of three holy people. We have the Third Secret in full.

So turning to its content, we read Sr Lucia's words: 'After the two parts which I have already explained, at the left of Our Lady and a little above, 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!"'

This dramatically portrays Mary as Queen, powerfully saving us from evils – the 'flaming sword'. One interpretation is that the Pope's 1984 Consecration of Russia to Mary's Immaculate Heart spiritually prevented a nuclear war, that according to Sr Lucia would otherwise have taken place in 1985 – causing nations to be 'annihilated' [2nd Secret]. Our stern call is now to penance.

The Secret continues: 'And we saw in an immense light that is God: "something similar to how people appear in a mirror when they pass in front of it" a Bishop dressed in White "we had the impression that it was the Holy Father". Other Bishops, Priests, men and women Religious going up a steep mountain, at the top of which there was a big Cross of rough-hewn trunks as of a cork-tree with the bark; before reaching there the Holy Father passed through a big city half in ruins and half trembling with halting step, afflicted with pain and sorrow, he prayed for the souls of the corpses he met on his way.'

Here we recall the ruined cities of wars of the 20th century. Also, the Church is imaged as a City (e.g. *Mt* 5:14; *Heb* 12:22; *Rev* 21-22; Vatican II *LG* 6) so the half-ruined city may be a symbol of spiritual devastation in the Church.

The Secret concludes: 'Having reached the top of the mountain, on his knees at the foot of the big Cross [the Holy Father] was killed by a group of soldiers who fired bullets and arrows at him, and in the same way there died one after another the other Bishops, Priests, men and women Religious, and various lay people of different ranks and positions. Beneath the two arms of the Cross there were two Angels each with a crystal aspersorium in his hand, in which they gathered up the blood of the Martyrs and

with it sprinkled the souls that were making their way to God.'

To the children, the Pope appears to die. But that 'a mother's hand had deflected the fateful bullet only shows once more that there is no immutable destiny, 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.' (Cardinal Ratzinger, *Commentary*) And evil defeats itself, since it was the attack of 13th May 1981 that led St John Paul to read the Third Secret and carry out the Consecration.

And last, the vision shows the countless martyrs of the 20th century, victims of communism and other ideologies, ascending Mt Calvary. But the consoling knowledge is given us that their suffering was not in vain: their blood is a divine instrument bringing Calvary's grace to humanity on its journey to heaven. In the Third Secret God pronounces a healing benediction over the last century with all its wars and sorrows.

Facing the evils of our own time, we are reassured that God's providence, and Our Lady's prayers, indeed guide all things. '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.' (Cardinal Ratzinger, *Commentary*)

Allocutio by Fr Justin Ford, Sēnatus Spiritual Dirēctor, to the Lēgion Of Mary, Mēlbourne Sēnatus, 6 August 2017.