

**Fatima – The Angel of Peace**

A month ago I had the great joy of being on pilgrimage in the Holy Land, happily with some legionaries included in our pilgrim group. I was glad to be able to pray there for the Legion, which I did in a special way at Calvary, within the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem.

Special Marian sites included the traditional birthplace of Our Lady at the Church of St Anne in Jerusalem; the Basilica of the Annunciation in Nazareth, where we had Mass; the Church of the Visitation at Ein Karem; the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, where we also had Mass; the Wedding Church at Cana; and finally, the claimed location of the Assumption at the Church of the Dormition, also in Jerusalem. On Mount Carmel, we had Mass at the Carmelite Church of Stella Maris, where I also enrolled pilgrims in the Scapular.

One thing much impressed on us was the plight of Christians in the Holy Land, continuously present there from the time of Christ, but now ever-diminishing and even facing the prospect of disappearing from there, as they emigrate due to the burdens of injustice and oppression. I ask you to keep them in your prayers, both for their own sake, and in hope that the witness of their presence in the land of Jesus will not vanish.

Our pilgrimage was indeed an enriching experience of various Christian communities, Catholic and non-Catholic, but also, naturally, of Jews and Muslims, who constitute the great majority in Israel and Jordan. Here our thoughts turn naturally to the importance of prayers for peace in the homeland of the Prince of Peace.

Over several months in this centenary year, we've been reflecting on Our Lady of Fatima. In the present context, I'll mention two interesting connections of Fatima with the Muslims and the Jews. The town of Fatima itself is named after a local Muslim princess from the 1100s (when Muslims and Christians battled for Portugal); she married a Christian nobleman and became a Christian. The princess herself was named after Fatima, the prophet Muhammad's daughter, very much respected in Islam. So God's providence, for which there are no accidents, has ordained that the very title 'Our Lady of Fatima' attracts Muslim attention. Quite a number of Muslims do go to Fatima, no doubt prompted by this connection, as well as by the great veneration that Muslims in general have for Mary as Virgin Mother of Jesus (following the Qur'an [Koran], which refers to her seventy times).

And in connection with the Jews, it's interesting to learn that Sr Lucia, instructing a sculptor on the appearance of Our Lady in the vision, insisted that Mary's tunic had a yellow star, not a gold star. Again, such details are no accidents in God's plan, so it has been said this plausibly reflects the yellow star that Jews have sometimes been made to wear, for example by the Nazis. Thus Mary, of the Jewish nation, shows solidarity with her own persecuted people. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Secret of July 1917, we recall, warned of a worse war than World War I if people did not stop offending God. Sr Lucia wrote that World War II was 'worse' in particular because 'it would be an atheistic war that attempted to exterminate Judaism, which gave the world Jesus Christ, Our Lady, the Apostles... The Jews are God's elect people, whom he chose from the beginning'.

We'll conclude our reflections on the apparitions at Fatima with some words about the Angel of Peace. In 1916, the year before the appearances of Our Lady, her way was prepared by three visions of an angel, which at the time the children kept secret. Indeed, the visions of the Angel were not made known until 1937 when Sr Lucia was commanded by her bishop to write down everything she could remember of the apparitions. However, as she wrote, she had already confided these matters much earlier to the bishop himself, who told her to keep silence about it; and we have further testimony from a priest in whom she had also confided. So in explanation of her silence she was able simply to say, 'I always obeyed'.

The angel appeared to the children in the form of 'a young man, quite transparent and as brilliant as crystal in the rays of the sun'. He said to them, 'Do not be afraid. I am the Angel of Peace. Pray with me: *"My God, I believe, I adore, I hope, and I love you. I ask forgiveness for those who do not believe, nor adore, nor hope, nor love you."* Pray in this way. The Hearts of Jesus and Mary are ready to listen to you.'

On his second appearance the Angel came across them playing, and said to them, 'What are you doing? Pray! Pray! The hearts of Jesus and Mary have merciful designs for you. Offer your prayers and sacrifices to the Most High. In every way you can, offer a sacrifice to the Lord, in reparation for the sins by which he is offended and in supplication for sinners. Thus you will bring peace to our country. I am its guardian angel, the Angel of Portugal. Above all, accept and bear with patience the sufferings which the Lord will send you.'

And in his final appearance, the Angel came with the Eucharist – a Host and Chalice before which he prostrated himself, praying: *"Most Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, I adore you profoundly and I offer you the most precious Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ present in all the tabernacles of the world, in reparation for the outrages, sacrileges and indifference by which he is offended. And by the infinite merits of his Most Sacred Heart and the Immaculate Heart of Mary, I beg the conversion of poor sinners."* He then gave the children Holy Communion: 'Take...the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, horribly outraged by ungrateful men. Repair their crimes and console your God.'

So the three visions bring an added Trinitarian and Eucharistic emphasis to the whole message of Fatima, and these two beautiful prayers of the Angel can become part of our own regular prayers. Cardinal Ratzinger wrote that Sr Lucia had told him, 'it appeared ever more clearly to her that the purpose of all the apparitions was to help people to grow more and more in faith, hope and love.' (*Theological Commentary*) This purpose is perfectly expressed in the simple prayer that opens the whole cycle of apparitions. *"My God, I believe, I adore, I hope, and I love you. I ask forgiveness for those who do not believe, nor adore, nor hope, nor love you."* Pray in this way. The Hearts of Jesus and Mary are ready to listen to you.'