

**Homily for the Memorial of Our Lady of Fatima,
Wednesday of the 5th Week of the Easter Season
Bishop John O. Barres
St. Agnes Cathedral
May 13, 2020**

On April 2, 2020 we commemorated the 15th Anniversary of St. John Paul II's death and this Monday, May 18, 2020, we will celebrate the Centenary of his birth.

On this Memorial of Our Lady of Fatima, we remember how deeply St. John Paul II's life and devotion to Mary was connected to this great Marian Apparition. And so we go to Our Lady of Fatima for her intercession during these days of COVID-19.

Many of us have special personal memories of the impact of St. John Paul II's ecclesial missionary mysticism which was forged in the constant crises he faced throughout his life.

He planted the Cross of Jesus Christ at the heart of every personal and world crisis he faced. During these days of COVID-19, we call on his powerful intercession as well.

As a Successor of Peter and as a Servant of the Servants of God, St. John Paul II lived John 15 powerfully and understood from his unique vantage point of World and Church history the logic and the power of Our Lord's image of the Vine and the Branches.

We vividly recall his visits to Poland, visits during which millions of Poles joined in chants of "we want God," visits that set in motion the 1989 collapse of the Berlin Wall and a fundamental change in the world.

We remember too, his canonization of Saint Faustina, the spreading of global devotion to the Divine Mercy and the establishment of Divine Mercy Sunday.

We remember the personalism that connected spiritual theology and moral theology in *Veritatis Splendor* (1993), his emphasis on Love and Responsibility in Marriage and the Theology of the Body in *Familiaris Consortio* (1981) and his great encyclical on the Gospel of Human Life *Evangelium Vitae* (1995). On March 25, 2020, we celebrated the 25th Anniversary of *Evangelium Vitae*. How powerful the teaching of *Evangelium Vitae* is in these COVID-19 times.

We remember his enormous appeal to Youth and the World Youth Day dynamic, the promulgation of the Universal *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1992) and its impact on the world of catechesis along with his Apostolic Exhortation *Catechesi tradendae* (1979), his championing of the New Evangelization in *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (2000), his emphasis on contemplating the Face of Christ in the Eucharist in *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (2003) and in the Rosary in *Rosarium Virginis Mariae* (2002), the global missiology expressed in *Redemptoris Missio* (1990) and the union of holiness and mission in the life of every canonized saint and holy person.

We remember his social justice encyclicals *Laborem exercens* (1981), *Sollicitudo rei socialis* (1987) and *Centesimus annus* (1991) that explored the rich history and contemporary relevance of Catholic social justice teaching.

We remember his emphasis on the relationship between objective truth and history. He saw first hand in Nazism and Stalinism the bitter and tragic consequences in history of warped culture of death philosophies.

In contrast, he asked us to be witnesses to the liberating Splendor of Truth, a Truth that, if followed and lived courageously, could lead the world to bright new horizons of charity, holiness and mission. In his encyclical *Fides et Ratio* (1998), he saw so clearly that faith and reason are joined with, not opposed to, each other.

We remember his global ecumenical outreach in *Ut Unum Sint* (1995), and his championing the Sacrament of Penance to a world that had lost the sense of sin in *Reconciliatio et paenitentia* (1984).

We remember his forward looking theology and spirituality of the Catholic priesthood contained in his 1992 Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis*.

As we celebrate the May 18, 2020 Centenary of the birth of St. John Paul II, we remember so many different dimensions of his philosophical, theological, spiritual, human rights and missionary legacy.

The month of May is a special time for us to renew and deepen our Marian devotion. A critical dimension of St. John Paul II's legacy is his vibrant Marian Devotion.

Losing his own mother at a young age, the young Karol Wotyla went right to Mary. St. Louis Grignion de Montfort's *True Devotion to Mary* had a profound impact on his life and prayer.

He introduced the luminous mysteries of the rosary and emphasized that the rosary is a contemplative and biblical prayer, and a powerful spiritual weapon.

And of course on this Memorial of Our Lady of Fatima, we reflect on St. John Paul II's love for Our Lady of Fatima.

In May of 2017, I issued my first Pastoral Letter to the People of God of the Diocese of Rockville Centre. It is entitled, *Miracle of the Sun: Fatima – 100 Years!* That Pastoral Letter is available on our DRVC.org website today.

The consecration of the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary was renewed by St. John Paul II on May 13, 1982 a year to the day after the assassination attempt on his life in St. Peter's Square in Rome.

Here is a beautiful and inspirational excerpt from his homily on that historic day:

“If the Church has accepted [the Message of Fatima](#), it is above all because that message contains a truth and a call whose basic content is the truth and the call of the Gospel itself.

‘Repent, and believe in the gospel’ (Mk 1:15): these are the first words that the Messiah addressed to humanity. [The Message of Fatima](#) is, in its basic nucleus, a call to conversion and repentance, as in the Gospel. This call was uttered at the beginning of the Twentieth Century, and it was thus addressed particularly to this present century. The Lady of the Message seems to have read with special insight the ‘[signs of the times](#)’, the signs of our time.

The call to repentance is a motherly one, and at the same time it is strong and decisive. The love that 'rejoices in the truth' (cf. 1 Cor. 13:6) is capable of being clear-cut and firm. The call to repentance is linked, as always, with a call to prayer. In harmony with the tradition of many centuries, the Lady of the Message indicates the [Rosary](#), which can rightly be defined as 'Mary's prayer': the prayer in which She feels particularly united with us. She Herself prays with us. The [rosary](#) prayer embraces the problems of the Church, of the See of Saint Peter, the problems of the whole world. In it we also remember sinners, that they may be converted and saved, and the souls in Purgatory.

The words of the message were addressed to children aged from seven to ten. Children, like Bernadette of Lourdes, are particularly privileged in these apparitions of the Mother of God. Hence the fact that also Her language is simple, within the limits of their understanding. The children of Fatima became partners in dialogue with the Lady of the Message and collaborators with her...

And so, while the Message of [Our Lady of Fatima](#) is a motherly one, it is also strong and decisive. It sounds severe. It sounds like John the Baptist speaking on the banks of the Jordan. It invites to repentance. It gives a warning. It calls to prayer. It recommends the [Rosary](#).

The Message is addressed to every human being. The love of the Savior's Mother reaches every place touched by the work of salvation. Her care extends to every individual of our time, and to all the societies, nations and peoples...

11. Today [John Paul II](#), successor of Peter, continuer of the work of Pius, John, and Paul, and particular heir of the Second Vatican Council, presents himself before the Mother of the Son of God in Her Shrine at Fatima. In what way does he come?

He presents himself, reading again with trepidation the motherly call to penance, to conversion, the ardent appeal of the Heart of Mary that resounded at Fatima sixty-five years ago. Yes, he reads it again with trepidation in his heart, because he sees how many people and societies — how many Christians — have gone in the opposite direction to the one indicated in [the Message of Fatima](#). Sin has thus made itself firmly at home in the world, and denial of God has become widespread in the ideologies, ideas and plans of human beings.

But for this very reason the evangelical call to repentance and conversion, uttered in the Mother's Message, remains ever relevant. It is still more relevant than it was sixty-five years ago. It is still more urgent...

The successor of Peter presents himself here also as a witness to the immensity of human suffering, a witness to the almost apocalyptic menaces looming over the nations and man kind as a whole. He is trying to embrace these sufferings with his own weak [human heart](#), as he places himself before the mystery of the Heart of the Mother, the [Immaculate Heart of Mary](#).

In the name of these sufferings and with awareness of the evil that is spreading throughout the world and menacing the individual human being, the nations, and mankind as a whole, Peter's successor presents himself here with greater faith in the redemption of the world, in the saving Love that is always stronger, always more powerful than any evil.”

Knowing Our Lady of Fatima’s intimate presence in world events, we ask confidently for her powerful intercession as the world continues to carry the Cross of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Our Lady of Fatima, pray for us!

St. John Paul II, pray for us!