

# 105<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Our Lady's Apparitions at Fatima

## Homily of Bishop John Barres

### Corpus Christi Church, Mineola

**Friday, May 13, 2022**

As we celebrate the 105<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Our Lady's appearances in Fatima (1917-2022), together we express our solidarity with the people of Ukraine and refugees in Poland, Romania, Hungary and other parts of the world.<sup>1</sup>

We expressed our solidarity with them on March 25<sup>th</sup> when we prayed with them these words from the *Act of Consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary*: "Mother of God and our Mother, in your Immaculate Heart, we solemnly entrust and consecrate ourselves, the Church and all humanity, especially Russia and Ukraine. Accept this act that we carry out with confidence and love. Grant that war may end and peace spread throughout the world. The 'Fiat' that arose from your heart opened the doors of history to the Prince of Peace. We trust that, through your heart, peace will dawn once more. To you we consecrate the future of the whole human family, the needs and expectations of every people, the anxieties and hopes of the world."

I ask every Catholic of every age in the Church of Rockville Centre to pray the rosary daily during this month of May 2022 and beyond in honor of Our Lady of Fatima and for the promotion of peace and the end of war in Ukraine and throughout the world.

The prophetic teachings of Our Lady of Fatima touch us through every decade and century and especially as we pray in this historical moment for peace in Ukraine.

The prophetic teachings of Our Lady of Fatima are as relevant today in 2022 as they were in 1917.

Here are some of the key themes of Our Lady of Fatima for us to reflect on together:

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<sup>1</sup> This homily draws extensively on Bishop Barres' May 2017 Pastoral Letter, "Miracle of the Sun, *Fatima: 100 years!*"

**1)The Story of Our Lady of Fatima is an inspirational story of faith and trust in God that needs to be told and retold to every generation.**

From May 13 to October 13 of 1917, the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared in Fatima (Portugal) to three poor shepherd children, Lucia, Francisco and Jacinta. The apparitions were preceded by three apparitions of an angel in the spring of 1916. On each occasion Our Lady asked them to say the rosary and to offer reparation for the offenses made to her Immaculate Heart. On October 13, 1917, an event that was foretold by Our Lady to the shepherd children occurred before thousands of people so that the world would believe the message of the apparitions. For about ten minutes, the sun spun in the sky like a wheel of fire.

This moment witnessed by thousands is often referred to as “the Miracle of the Sun.” Our Lady of Fatima asked for the world to be consecrated to her Immaculate Heart. At the request of the Portuguese hierarchy, this consecration was solemnly performed by Pope Pius XII on October 31, 1942. At the end of the Second Vatican Council, Pope St. Paul VI renewed the consecration of Pius XII to the Immaculate Heart of Mary and on May 13, 1967, the fiftieth anniversary of the first apparition, he prayed at Fatima with Sr. Lucia. 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 in St. Peter’s Square in Rome.

Sr. Lucia was a Carmelite nun and died at the age of 97 in 2005. On May 12-13, 2010, Pope Benedict XVI visited the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Fatima and placed a Golden Rose when he prayed at the Chapel of Apparitions. On February 13, 2017, Sr. Lucia was given the title Servant of God as the first step toward her canonization. On May, 13, 2017, Pope Francis canonized Jacinta and Francisco at Fatima. (Cf. *In Conversation with God*, V. 6, 221 and *Our Lady of Fatima – Wikipedia*) And as we know, Pope Francis asked the Universal Church to pray an *Act of Consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary* for all humanity and especially for Russia and Ukraine this past March 25<sup>th</sup> on the Solemnity of the Annunciation.

**2)Our Lady’s appearances in Fatima came at a time of world crisis. She is ever with the Church and interceding for the World. In times of crisis, she calls us to consecrate our lives and the World to her Immaculate Heart. Our Lady of Fatima asks us to pray for Peace in the World and Peace in our Families.**

When she appeared at Fatima in 1917, World War I and the Russian Revolution were raging. As Our Lady prayed at the foot of the Cross, so she prays for the Church and for the world at moments of crisis and upheaval. She is intimately present to the people of Ukraine, to us and to the world. She prays for our families and for us at the moments of crisis we experience in life.

Our Holy Father Pope Francis prayed these words in his *Act of Consecration*: “O Mary, Mother of God and our Mother...you never cease to guide us to Jesus, the Prince of Peace. Yet we have strayed from that path of peace. We have forgotten the lesson learned from the tragedies of the last century, the sacrifice of the millions who fell in two world wars.”

In praying these words, the Holy Father reminds us of what the philosopher George Santayana (1863-1952) once said: “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”

As we look at the horrendous evil that is occurring in Ukraine today, we see before our own eyes how evil repeats itself in history and how humanity so often seems not to learn from the lessons of history and thus is condemned to repeat it.

The consequences of original sin play out each day, each decade and each century in history. And always the poor, the defenseless and the destitute bear much of the brunt of the resulting savagery.

And, without the Cross, history does so often seem hopeless. The Culture of Death so often seems to reign. Not only does it reign in the mass graves near Kyiv – so reminiscent of the mass graves of Jews next to Kyiv at Babi Yar in 1941 – but it reigns in our cities and even in many of our hospitals where unborn babies are euphemistically called the “products of conception” and killed because they are deemed inconvenient. And the Culture of Death and the Dictatorship of Relativism not only eliminate the weak and the helpless, but create a sense of despair that affects us all.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Bishop Barres is in solidarity with our Holy Father Pope Francis’ April 17, 2022 Easter Sunday *Urbi et Orbi (To the City and the World) Message*: “I hold in my heart all the many Ukrainian victims, the millions of refugees and internally displaced persons, the divided families, the elderly left to themselves, the lives broken and the cities razed to the ground. I see the faces of the orphaned children fleeing from the war. As we look at them, we cannot help but hear their cry of pain, along with that of all those other children who suffer throughout our world: those

Humanity experiences this ache of a seemingly constant and meaningless despair as it repeats the tragic mistakes of eras and epochs gone by.

In his poem *God's Grandeur*, Fr. Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889) says, "Generations have trod, have trod, have trod..."

"Generations have trod, have trod, have trod" through the deadly trenches of World War I and through the starvation genocide in Ukraine in the early 1930's to the death camps and execution pits of World War II and every 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century human tragedy.

So many of those tragedies were founded upon philosophies and ideas that rejected the idea that humans have a higher purpose and treat with contempt the spiritual nature of humanity.

And yet, it remains the case that a light shines in this vast field of darkness. As Gerard Manley Hopkins states, "the world is charged with the grandeur of God." How can that be? How can the poet say "Generations have trod, have trod, have trod..." and say at the same time and in the same poem that "the world is charged with the grandeur of God" as we see horrific images of war, devastation and inhuman massacres in Ukraine?

The answer to this question is simple and yet deep. We can say this because the Resurrection of Jesus Christ is the "fulcrum"<sup>3</sup> of salvation and world history. Christ is the Way, the Truth and the Life and his Resurrection brings hope to the world.<sup>4</sup>

Pope Benedict XVI states: "The resurrection of Jesus is an eruption of light. Death is conquered, the tomb is thrown open. The Risen One himself is Light, the Light of the world. With the resurrection, the Lord's day enters the nights of history. Beginning with the resurrection, God's light spreads throughout the world and throughout history."<sup>5</sup>

In this fallen world, violence, war, and persecution often dominate the global stage and our hope can easily erode. But Our Lady of Fatima asks us to understand and

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dying of hunger or lack of medical care, those who are victims of abuse and violence, and those denied the right to be born."

<sup>3</sup> Pope St. John Paul II's 1998 Apostolic Letter *Dies Domini*, 2.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Bishop Barres' Easter Sunday homily, April 17, 2022.

<sup>5</sup> Pope Benedict's *Easter Vigil Homily*, April 11, 2009

believe that the world can be better and that her intercession and our prayers and the power of the Rosary can help turn historical tides of turmoil to peace. She asks us to pray for peace in Ukraine and the world and for those who are persecuted for their faith. She asks us to pray for peace in our hearts and peace in our families knowing that peace within families is critical to the architecture of global peace.

The plight of refugee families in the world so often results from that war, violence, persecution and injustice which we strive to overcome by prayer and action. We remember that the Holy Family was a refugee family as they fled from Herod's slaughter of the newborn and found refuge in Egypt. We ask Our Lady of Fatima to intercede for all refugee families in the world who are suffering and uncertain about their future.

We pray that Our Lady of Fatima strengthen us in our witness to the sanctity of human life and marriage, in our witness in the world to the truths of our Catholic Social Justice teaching, and in our call to serve the poor and the suffering and to recognize in them the face of Jesus.

**3)Our Lady of Fatima asks us to pray for Russia.** The soul of Russia has always been deeply Christian. The great Russian literary luminaries of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Feodor Dostoevsky (1821-1881) and Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910) are just two examples of the Russian soul being deeply Christian. The warped ideologies and genocide involved in the Bolshevik Revolution and Stalinism created terrible upheavals that clearly reverberate to this day in Ukraine. They involved the massacre of much of the Russian Orthodox clergy, along with priests, nuns, ministers and rabbis of many other faiths and denominations. They also resulted in the sustained campaign to eliminate the Eastern-rite Ukrainian Catholic Church and the members of its clergy. Our Lady of Fatima has a heart for the conversion of Russia to this day and asks us to have a heart for Russia as well.

**4)Our Lady of Fatima asks us to pray the Rosary daily.** The Rosary is a contemplative and biblical prayer in any historical context. Imagine just how deeply Our Lady of Fatima is asking us to pray the Rosary in these days. Praying the rosary deeply has a profound impact on every dimension of our prayer life and every effort we make to share the gift of our Catholic faith. The 105<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Fatima is an opportunity for every Catholic of every age and vocation to rediscover the power

of the rosary and to pray it with deeper fervor, strength and concentration. I recommend that we read St. John Paul II's Apostolic Letter *The Rosary of the Virgin Mary* (*Rosarium Virginis Mariae* 2002 available on the Vatican website) which shows how the daily rhythm of the rosary impacts the daily rhythm of our lives. We are all called to be champions of the daily Rosary, champions of the joyful, sorrowful, glorious and luminous mysteries streaming through our lives and animating the mission of the Church.

How life-changing the Rosary can be for a home! Husbands and wives experience hurts, conflict, differences of temperament or personality, disagreements about duties and tasks, hurtful words that wound, misunderstandings, pride and self-will, and temptations to infidelity. The Rosary brings light and grace into these areas of darkness.

The contemplative rhythm of the Rosary (or just a decade prayed together daily) can gradually help couples begin to change negative and abrasive relational patterns into a new rhythm of intimacy, gentleness, humility, forgiveness and a refined fidelity. These movements of grace have a profound impact on their children and extended family and their daily parenting.

The spirit of prayer behind the Rosary points out that marriages are deepened and strengthened in unity, fidelity and indissolubility when a couple focuses on the love and will of God together. It is also a powerful prayer for harmonious relationships and healing between parents and their sons and daughters.<sup>6</sup>

**5) Our Lady of Fatima calls us to repentance and holiness. She calls us to face our own individual judgment and the reality of Death, Judgment, Heaven, Hell and Purgatory.** Our Lady of Fatima confronts each of us with the Truth that our lives on earth are short and fragile and that every one of us will meet Jesus at our death for our individual judgment. How the senseless, tragic and inhumane war in Ukraine helps us to understand the fragility of life. *Our Lady of Fatima puts before us the crucial necessity of having a burning desire for heaven and eternal life.* She speaks to us of the reality of Death, Judgment, Heaven, Hell and Purgatory.

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Bishop Barres' Letter on the Rosary to the Priests of the Diocese of Rockville Centre, October 7, 2020.

She calls us to repentance, to conversion of heart, to do penance and to trust in the Divine Mercy. She asks us to make frequent use of the Sacrament of Penance. There is an urgency to Our Lady of Fatima expressed in this prayer: “Oh my Jesus, forgive us our sins, save us from the fires of hell, lead all souls to heaven, especially those most in need of your mercy.”

She is asking us to repent from sin and follow the path of holiness and eternal life right now, in this very moment, without delay. She wants us to care about and pray for the souls around us and for the salvation of the whole world. She asks us to pour our hearts out as we pray for the people of Ukraine, the plight of global refugees and those who suffer around the world.

**6)Our Lady appeared to children in Fatima and calls children to holiness.**

Children, teens and young adults of the Church of Rockville Centre, Mary loves you and her smile illumines your lives and your destinies as it illumined the lives and destinies of the three poor shepherd children Lucia, Jacinta and Francisco. Pope Francis’ May 13, 2017 canonization of Jacinta and Francisco and his Beatification of Blessed Carlo Acutis (1991-2006) in Assisi on October 10, 2020 are a reminder to the entire Church and the world that children, teens and young adults are capable of heroic sanctity and that Christ calls them to this holiness. Our Lady of Fatima loves you and intercedes for you. Each of you is capable at a young age of great holiness and Our Lady wants that for you. Our Lady of Fatima wants you to be Catholic missionaries and apostles of the Rosary to your peers and to every generation. How often older people are inspired by the faith of the young. How often do children filled with faith bring their parents and grandparents back to the faith.

As we celebrate the 105<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Our Lady of Fatima, we ask for the grace to live the prophetic teachings and messages of Our Lady of Fatima. May the memory of the “Miracle of the Sun” lead us in this Easter season to the Heart and Glorified Wounds of Mary’s Risen Son.

Our Lady of Fatima and Queen of Peace, pray for us!

St. Jacinta and St. Francisco, pray for us!

