

FATIMA: A NAME TO RECALL

I. Background. Fatima, Portugal is one of the most revered sights in the Roman Catholic religion. It was in this tiny village where, starting in 1916 three small Portuguese shepherd children had encounters first with an Angel and later with the Lady who has become known as Our Lady of Fatima. The town bears an Arabic name meaning “high place” after a Moorish prisoner who fell in love with one of her captures and converted to Christianity taken the name of Oureana. The town and the Virgin Mary hold a special place in the minds and hearts of many Muslims and persons of many faiths. The story of how this tiny village grew into the destination for millions of pilgrims and its place in the future of mankind is the subject of this outline. Many feel that the Message of Fatima presents an alternative to the strife which prevails in the world today. Pope John Paul II had a special fondness for Fatima and preached the Message as an alternative to the materialistic trends of today which has created such a chasm between rich and poor in the contemporary world with its resultant social upheavals and wars.

At the time of the apparitions Portugal was a socialist country which had placed severe restrictions on the Catholic Church and, indeed, had banned it over a period of time. It was in the middle of this highly charged atmosphere that three simple shepherd children found themselves.

II. The visions. In 1916 three shepherd children, Lucia dos Santos, aged ten and Jacinta, aged seven, and Francisco Marto, aged nine, saw an Angel while they were tending their families flock of sheep near their home. The Angel identified himself as the Angel of Peace and told the children to pray to Jesus and Mary. The Angel appeared again to the children with the message that prayer and sacrifice would bring peace to their country.

On May 13th, 1917 the three children were tending their sheep in a place called the Cova da Iria when a flash of lightning drew their attention to a Lady standing on the top of a small holm oak tree. The Lady told them that she would appear there on six successive months on the thirteenth day of each month at the same holm. The Lady’s message that day was for the children to pray the rosary every day during the war.

On June 13th the children were again present when the Lady, once again, appeared telling them that Lucia should learn to read in order to fulfil her mission to do Jesus work on earth. Francisco and Jacinta were to go with the Lady soon but she consoled Lucia with the thought that she would be forsaken and that the Lady’s Immaculate Heart would always be there for her. By July 13th the word of the apparitions has caused a crowd to gather and about 4000 people were present when the Lady appeared. The Lady promised to make known her identity and to perform a miracle for all to see in the future. At this time, the Lady gave the children a vision of hell which awaited unrepentant sinners. That vision was captured, much later, by the celebrated artist Salvatore Dali in his vision of hell. The Lady also revealed three secrets to the children, the last of which was published only in the year 2000.

By August 13th the news of the apparitions have reached the civil authorities and the children were under arrest by the regional administrator. This was in the context of the banishment of the Catholic Church by the civil authorities and followed an intensive effort by the Church authorities to suppress the children’s story. At one point the children were threatened by the civil authorities with being boiled in oil if they did not recant. They refused and offered to suffer the proffered punishment. The children were released after August 13th, and on August 19th, they, once again, saw the Lady. At this

time they were instructed to take the money being left there and build a chapel. They were also instructed to continue to pray for the conversion of sinners.

By September 13th, a crowd of about 30.000 people had gathered. The children were told that there could be an apparition for all to see on October 13th.

On October 13th, a crowd estimated at 70.000 gathered in a rainstorm for the promised apparition. Among the crowd were many who did not believe and the members of the secular press who were there to report on the event. After some discussion with the children, the Lady opened her hands and a brilliant light shown forth in what has been called the sun dancing. Many present fell in the mud and water, believing that the end of the world was taking place. Many later reported that despite being covered in mud, they were dry and free of mud when they arose. Rose petals fell from the sky only to dissipate upon being touched by those present.

III. The results. As predicted, Jacinta and Francisco were soon called to Mary. Both died within two years of the October apparition. Lucia entered a convent and continued in the service of God until 2005 when she died. Over the ensuing 88 years, Fatima has become a place of all faiths to come. A large Basilica was constructed and masses are conducted in numerous languages every day. Many movements have arisen claiming a relationship to the events at Fatima; none of each have received the approval of the Catholic Church. In 1999, however at the instance of Pope John Paul II, a movement called the World Apostolate of Fatima was created to organize all of the Fatima movements into one organization of the Catholic Church. Its purpose is to spread the Message of Fatima throughout the world. The mission is to venerate prayer and repentance and to raise the sanctity of human life over materialism. The message indicates an alternative to the secular materialism present in today's world. Its charisma is to secure the formation of lay people by providing the "New Evangelization" through authentic Message of Fatima.

As the Bishop of Leiria-Fatima has said, all of the smart bombs in the world have not solved the problems of hunger, strife and travail, but the Message of Fatima will. The movement has shown promise as the centre piece of the efforts of the Holy Father to foster understanding among people of all faiths and to fulfil the ultimate promise of Fatima, peace throughout the world through prayer and penance. The actual Holy Father, Benedictus XVI, was the custodian of the Message and wrote the interpretation of the third secret revealed in year 2000.

The World Apostolate of Fatima has the cooperation of many sources to fulfil this story including many from the Catholic Church and many members throughout the world who are interested in an accurate documentary of this story.

IV. Focus on story. There are several possible focuses of a documentary on Fatima: the relationship of Pope John Paul II to Fatima; the story of Sister Lucia's life in the service of Our Lady; the efforts of the Catholic Church to reconcile the various religions of the world or, the ongoing fascination with the apparitions themselves (Fatima, Pontevedra and Tuy).

The World Apostolate of Fatima is composed of 41 national constituent organizations around the world on five continents. The membership of these organisations ranged from several hundred thousand to several hundred. This membership represents an audience and potential source for the purchase of DVD's. There are members in 120 countries throughout the world.

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