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Pilgrimage of the Holy Father Francis to the “Shrine of Our Lady of Fátima” on the occasion of the centenary of the apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary at the Cova da Iria (12-13 May 2017) – Holy Mass at the Marian Vigil, presided at by the Cardinal Secretary of State

Following the blessing of the candles at the Chapel of the Apparitions of the Shrine of Our Lady of Fátima and after the recital of the Rosary led by the Holy Father, at around 10.00, Cardinal Secretary of State Pietro Parolin presided at the Holy Mass of the Marian Vigil for the solemnity of 13 May.

The following is the homily that the Cardinal Secretary of State pronounced during the celebration.

Homily of the Cardinal Secretary of State, Pietro Parolin

Dear Pilgrims to Fatima,

With joy and gratitude, we have gathered at this Shrine that commemorates the apparitions of Our Lady to the three shepherd children. We join the throngs of pilgrims who in these hundred years have come here to show their trust in the Mother of Heaven. We are celebrating this Eucharist in honour of her Immaculate Heart. In the first reading, we heard the people exclaim: “You averted our ruin, walking in the straight path before our God” (*Jdt* 13:20). These words of praise and gratitude were addressed by the city of Bethulia to Judith, their champion, whom “the Lord God, who created the heavens and the earth... guided to cut off the head of the leader of our enemies” (*Jdt* 13:18). But they take on their full meaning in the Immaculate Virgin Mary. Thanks to her offspring – Christ the Lord – she was able to “crush the head” (cf. *Gen* 3:15) of the “ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world”. He, in turn, “was angry with the woman, and went off to make war on the rest of her children, those who keep the commandments of God and hold the testimony of Jesus” (*Rev* 12:9.17).

As a Mother concerned for the trials of her children, Mary appeared here with a message of consolation and hope for a world at war and for the Church in travail: “In the end, my Immaculate Heart will triumph” (Apparition of July, 1917). In other words: “Trust! In the end, love and peace will triumph, because God’s mercy is stronger than the power of evil. What seems impossible to men is possible to God”. Our Lady also asks us to join in this battle of her divine Son, particularly by the daily recitation of the Rosary for peace in the world. Even though

everything depends on God and his grace, we still need to act as if everything depended on us, by asking the Virgin Mary that the hearts of individuals, the homes of families, the history of peoples and the fraternal soul of all humanity be consecrated to her and placed under her protection and guidance. She wants people who entrust themselves to her! “If they do what I tell you, many souls will be saved and have peace” (Apparition of July, 1917). In the end, what will win the war is a heart: the Heart of the Mother will obtain the victory, at the head of millions of her sons and daughters.

This evening, we offer thanks and praise to the Most Holy Trinity for the commitment of so many men and women to this mission of peace entrusted to the Virgin Mother. From East to West, the love of the Immaculate Heart of Mary has won a place in the heart of peoples as a source of hope and consolation. The Second Vatican Ecumenical Council met in order to renew the face of the Church, and presented itself essentially as the Council of love. The faithful, the bishops, the Pope did not fail to heed the requests of the Mother of God and of man: the whole world was consecrated to her. Everywhere groups and communities of believers continue to grow. Awakening from yesterday’s apathy, they now work to show to the world the true face of Christianity.

“If they do what I tell you, they will have peace”. A hundred years after the apparitions, it is true that, as Pope Francis has observed, “for many people today, peace appears as a blessing to be taken for granted, for all intents an acquired right to which not much thought is given, yet for all too many others, peace remains merely a distant dream. Millions of people still live in the midst of senseless conflicts. Even in places once considered safe, a general sense of fear is felt. We are frequently overwhelmed by images of death, by the pain of innocent men, women and children who plead for help and consolation, by the grief of those mourning the loss of a dear one due to hatred and violence, and by the drama of refugees fleeing war and migrants meeting tragic deaths” (*Address to the Diplomatic Corps*, 9 January 2017). In the midst of great concern and uncertainty about the future, what does Fatima ask of us? Perseverance in the consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, shown daily by the recitation of the Rosary. And what if, despite our prayers, wars continue? Even though immediate results may not be evident, let us persevere in prayer. Prayer is never useless. Sooner or later, it will bear fruit. Prayer is capital in the hands of God; he turns it to good account in his own times and ways, which are very different from our own.

Our responsorial psalm was the Cantic of the *Magnificat*, with its sharp contrast between the “great” story of the nations and their conflicts, the story of the great and powerful with its own chronology and geography of power, and the “little” history of the poor, the humble and the powerless. The latter are called to work for peace with another force, with other seemingly useless or ineffective means, such as conversion, reparation, and trust. They are asked to halt the advance of evil by plunging into the ocean of divine Love as resistance – not surrender – to the banality and the inevitability of evil.

What must we do? Let me explain with an example (cf. Eloy Bueno de la Fuente, *A Mensagem de Fátima. A misericórdia de Deus: o triunfo do amor nos dramas da história*, 2014, 235-237). If someone passes us a counterfeit banknote, a spontaneous and even logical reaction could be to pass it on to somebody else. This shows us how ready we are to fall into a perverse logic that takes over and makes us spread evil. If I act according to this logic, my situation changes. I was an innocent victim when I received the counterfeit banknote, a victim of the evil of others. But once I decide to pass the counterfeit notes to someone else, I am innocent no longer. I have been won over by the seductive power of evil, creating a new victim. I have become an agent of evil, now responsible and guilty. The alternative is to halt the advance of evil, but that happens only by paying a price, by keeping the counterfeit banknote and thus freeing others from the advance of evil.

This is the only reaction that can stop evil and prevail over it. Human beings win this victory when they are capable of a sacrifice that becomes reparation. Christ carries it out, thus showing that his way of loving is mercy. This excess of love can be seen in the cross of Jesus. He takes on the full weight of the hatred and violence that rain down on him, without responding with insults or threatening revenge. Instead, he forgives, and thus shows that there is a greater love. Only he can do this, taking on – as it were – the “counterfeit banknote”. His death was a victory over the evil unleashed by his tormentors, which all of us are. Jesus, crucified and risen, is our peace and reconciliation (cf. *Eph 2:14; 2 Cor 5:18*).

“You averted our ruin, walking in the straight path before our God”. Let us pray at this evening vigil as a great pilgrim people, following in the footsteps of the risen Jesus, enlightening one another and helping one another to advance, based on our faith in Christ Jesus. The Fathers of the Church tell us that Mary conceived Jesus first in faith and then in the flesh, when she said “Yes” to God’s call to her through the angel. But what took place in a singular way in the Virgin Mother takes place spiritually in us whenever we hear the word of God and put it into practice, as the Gospel says (cf. *Lk 11:28*). Imitating Mary’s generosity and courage, let us present our bodies to Jesus so that he can continue to dwell in our midst. Let us offer him our hands to caress the little ones and the poor, our feet to draw near to our brothers and sisters, our arms to shore up the weak and to work in the Lord’s vineyard, our minds to think and plan in the light of the Gospel, and above all, our hearts to love and make decisions in accordance with God’s will.

In this way, may the Virgin Mother shape us, pressing us to her Immaculate Heart, as she did with Lucia, Blessed Francisco and Blessed Jacinta. On this centenary of the apparitions, with gratitude for the gift which the event, the message and the shrine of Fatima have been throughout the past century, let us join our voices to that of the Virgin Mary: “My soul magnifies the Lord... for he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant... his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation” (*Lk 1:46-50*).
