

St. John Paul II and Our Lady of Fatima

“I have personally come to understand in a special way the message of Our Lady of Fatima. The first time, on May 13, 1981.” (Pope John Paul II)

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On May 13, 1981, Pope John Paul II suffered a grave attack in St. Peter's Square. On that same date a year later, the Holy Father went to Portugal to thank our Lady for her protection and to renew the

consecration of the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

This world of people and nations I too have before my eyes today, as I renew the entrusting and consecration carried out by my Predecessor in the See of Peter: the world of the Second Millennium that is drawing to a close, the modern world, our world today!

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On Sunday March 15, 1984, shortly before closing the Jubilee Year of the Redemption, John Paul II decided to renew again the consecration of the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

In addition to the consecration of the world to Mary, the Jubilee of Families was also being held in St. Peter's Square. The Pope celebrated the Mass which was presided over by the image of Our Lady of Fatima to the left of the altar. The Holy Father gave the Shrine at Fatima the bullet that

doctors had removed in the surgery after the attempt on his life. It was placed in the crown that our Lady wears on special days, among the pearls and other precious stones.

In October 1945, a few months after the Second World War ended, the pastor of a parish in Berlin arranged to have the pilgrim statue of Our Lady of Fatima visit certain capitals in Eastern Europe. The image began its journey on May 13, 1947, but it was forbidden entrance to the Communist zone and had to be brought back.

In 1978 this pilgrimage was again attempted. The image traveled through Hungary, passed over Czechoslovakia and entered Poland, stopping at the Shrine of Our Lady of Czestochowa. On May 8th, eve of the 33rd anniversary of the pact that cut off the eastern part of Berlin, the image passed close to the Iron

Curtain. That same year a Pope from Eastern Europe was called to the Chair of Peter in Rome.

Not many years later, on November 9, 1989, the Berlin wall was torn down, which since 1961 had caused so much death and desolation. In his January 1990 letter, Blessed Alvaro mentioned these happenings:

Everything has its time. You can already see what is happening in the countries of Eastern Europe. Regimes that had tried to close their iron gates to God, today seem to be opening up to freedom, and consequently to evangelizing action. These are events in which one can clearly perceive God's Providence and the maternal love of our Mother the Virgin Mary.^[2]

Four years later, on June 13, 1994, during a meeting with the College of Cardinals in preparation for the great Jubilee of the year 2000, Saint John Paul II said: *I have personally*

come to understand in a special way the message of Our Lady of Fatima. The first time, on May 13, 1981, in the attempt on the life of the Pope. Later, at the end of the 80's, with the fall of Communism in the countries of the Soviet block. I think this should be clear to everyone. We trust that the Holy Virgin, who walks before the pilgrim People of God throughout history, will help us to overcome the difficulties that even after 1989 are still very present in the nations of Europe and on other continents.[3]

On August 13th of that year a Monument to Peace, consisting of a piece of the Berlin Wall, was inaugurated before the Capelinha. Beforehand the Pope was given a rosary made of small pieces of cement from the wall. The rosary was then left at the Shrine to commemorate those historic changes in Eastern Europe.

Later Fatima would again be the scene of important events. On May 13, 2000, John Paul II beatified Francisco and Jacinta there and renewed his gratitude to our Lady for her protection during his pontificate. At the end of that ceremony, the third secret revealed by our Lady to the shepherd children during the apparition on July 13, 1917 was made public. At the insistence of the bishop of Leiria, Sister Lucia had written it down in Tuy, on January 3, 1944:

At the left of our Lady and a little above, we saw an Angel with a flaming sword in his left hand; flashing, it gave out flames that looked as though they would set the world on fire; but they died out in contact with the splendor that our Lady radiated towards him from her right hand. Pointing to the earth with his right hand, the Angel cried out in a loud voice: "Penance, Penance,

Penance!." And we saw in an immense light that is God, something similar to how people appear in a mirror when they pass in front of it, a Bishop dressed in white. We had the impression that it was the Holy Father. Other bishops, priests, men and women religious were going up a steep mountain, at the top of which there was a big Cross of rough-hewn trunks as of a cork-tree with the bark. Before reaching there the Holy Father passed through a big city half in ruins, and half trembling with halting step, afflicted with pain and sorrow, he prayed for the souls of the corpses he met on his way; having reached the top of the mountain, on his knees at the foot of the big Cross he was killed by a group of soldiers who fired bullets and arrows at him, and in the same way there died one after another the other bishops, priests, men and women religious, and various lay people of different ranks and positions. Beneath the two arms of the

Cross there were two Angels each with a crystal container in his hand, in which they gathered up the blood of the Martyrs and with it sprinkled the souls that were making their way to God.[4]

In the theological commentary that was published with the text, Cardinal Ratzinger interpreted the figure of a Bishop dressed in white climbing up to the Cross as a symbolic representation of the Popes who guided the Church during the 20th century, a period of martyrs. And referring to John Paul II, he remarked: *When, after the attempted assassination on 13 May 1981, the Holy Father had the text of the third part of the “secret” brought to him, was it not inevitable that he should see in it his own fate? He had been very close to death, and he himself explained his survival in the following words: “it was a mother’s hand that guided the bullet’s path and in its*

throes the Pope halted at the threshold of death” (13 May 1994). That here “a mother’s hand” had deflected the fateful bullet only shows once more that there is no immutable destiny, that faith and prayer are forces which can influence history and that in the end prayer is more powerful than bullets and faith more powerful than armies.[5]

Sister Lucia died in the Coimbra Carmelite monastery on February 13, 2005, after a long life dedicated to spreading the message of Fatima. Now her mortal remains lie in the basilica of the Shrine next to those of Francisco and Jacinta. A few weeks later, on April 2, 2005, our Lord called John Paul II to himself.

Fatima, altar do mundo, is a common expression in Portugal. All the world’s roads meet in Fatima. Like Saint Josemaria, the first pilgrim to that shrine raised to the altars, we

too have gone there in our mind and heart to pray to our Lady. Bishop Javier Echevarría, during one of his stays in Fatima, urged us to place ourselves under the maternal protection of Mary Most Holy in all the circumstances of our life:

Mother, how good it is to be close to you! What serenity we feel in our soul when we realize that you know us, that you understand us, that you help us, and that you are going to present to God all our needs much better than each of us could do on our own! We have recourse to you who are Omnipotent Supplication.[6]

[1] John Paul II, Consecration of the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, 13 May 1982.

[2] Blessed Alvaro, Pastoral letter, 1 February 1994.

[3] John Paul II, Discourse to the Cardinals in the 5th extraordinary Consistory, 13 June 1994.

[4] Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *The Message of Fatima*, 26 June 2000.

[5] *Ibid.*

[6] Javier Echevarría, Homily, 31 May 1995.

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