



MARIAN FESTIVAL

SACRED HEART CATHEDRAL

BENDIGO

13TH OCTOBER, 2024

As we meet here today to honour our Blessed Lady, we look particularly at the last apparition of Our Lady to the three children at Fatima, for today, October 13, is the anniversary of that last apparition.

Much has been written and spoken about 13 October 1917, as it marked the last Marian apparition in Fátima and the day on which thousands of people bore witness to the miracle of the spectacular dancing sun — and it is widely reported at that time, that the miracle shattered the prevalent belief that God was no longer relevant.

During her appearances, Our Lady of Fátima is said to have given the children three secrets and repeatedly exhorted them to pray the rosary for world peace and emphasised the necessity of devotions to her Immaculate Heart in order for souls to be saved.

Let us refresh our memories of the secrets of Fatima. There are three of these so-called secrets that were not immediately made public, which were parts of the message Mary revealed to the shepherd children, Francisco, Jacinta, and Lucia; ages 10, 9 and 7. This is especially true with the third secret of Fatima, which Lucia only revealed when directly ordered to do so by her bishop and it was not made public until 1960.

1. The first was a vision of Hell.



2. In the second there was a prediction of the end of World War I and a prediction of the beginning of a worse war (understood as World War II), as well as a call to consecrate Russia to the Immaculate Heart of Mary to bring peace.
3. In the words of Pope Benedict XVI, the third message was a vision speaking “of dangers and how we might be saved from them.” He said, “it is meant to mobilize the forces of change in the right direction.”

Our Lady of Fatima is the Blessed Virgin Mary’s title given in connection with her apparitions to three shepherd children in Fatima, Portugal, during World War I. Each year we celebrate the feast of Our Lady of Fatima on May 13, which is the first day she appeared to Lucia dos Santos and her cousins Jacinta and Francisco Marto in 1917. Our Lady appeared to the three children then once a month over the next six months in 1917, and she continued to appear to Lucia many times after that.

While the story of these apparitions has garnered attention for its secrets, prophecies and miracles; at its heart, the message of Our Lady of Fatima is a simple one: pray!

In her apparitions, Mary asked the children to pray the rosary every day to bring peace to the world, which was at war; she instructed them in devotions, including asking them to add the Fatima prayer (*O my Jesus, forgive us our sins, save us from the fires of hell, and lead all souls to heaven, especially those most in need of Thy mercy*) to the end of each decade of the rosary; and she asked them to make sacrifices and offer their suffering for the salvation of sinners and for the world.

All the feast days of Mary mark the great mysteries of her life and her part in the work of redemption. While the final battle continues to rage in the world, the key is to not be afraid and trust that Our Lady will triumph, and peace will reign.

Way back in the twelfth century, Saint Bernard of Clairvaux wrote: "If the winds of temptation arise; if you are driven upon the rocks of tribulation look to the star,



call on Mary. If you are tossed upon the waves of pride, of ambition, of envy, of rivalry, look to the star, call on Mary. Should anger, or avarice, or fle

shly desire violently assail the frail vessel of your soul, look at the star, call upon Mary." In his encyclical *Doctor Mellifluus*, Pope Pius XII also quoted Bernard of Clairvaux in saying: "Mary... is interpreted to mean 'Star of the Sea'. This admirably befits the Virgin Mother... (for) as the ray does not diminish the brightness of the star, so neither did the Child born of her tarnish the beauty of Mary's virginity."

We are mindful that Our Lady has many titles and on August 15 the Church celebrates one of the most important feasts dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary: the Solemnity of Her Assumption. Pope Francis said that the current devotion of the faithful throughout the world have toward the Blessed Virgin, confirms the earlier expectations of Pope Pius XII who said: "We pray to Mary in a particular way, through the Rosary. This prayer brings us closer to the Blessed Mother and to her Son. We join in her suffering and her glory and rejoice looking to eternity and giving us hope that we, too, will follow Our Lady when our life is ended."

The Feast Day of the Assumption is a celebration for a particular community – the community of the whole of humankind. The feast of the Assumption also speaks to us about the communion of saints. We live within a society that seems to put the communion of saints on the backburner and question the older language about Mary as mediatrix of all graces, and even the concept of praying to Mary.

However, Prayer is not about the generation of words but rather the making of the opportunity to take the time to work towards resonating our own lives with God's vision for the whole of humankind.

Prayer to Mary holds within itself the same focus of resonating our own lives with God's vision for the whole of humankind.

Prayer to the saints (i.e. engaging within the context of the communion of saints) also holds within itself the same focus of resonating our own lives with God's vision for the whole of humankind. It is the faith context of prayer that enables



prayer to become a time for coming face to face with God's vision for the whole of humanity.

Our lives, in the here and now, are also in communion with those who have gone before us and died. As a consequence, there is a whole 'heavenly' community linked with and interested in our lives. This community has both permanence and stability and is peopled by persons no longer characterised by struggle and growth, but by fulfilment absolutely attained. There, life is lived to the fullest. Our bond with the saints goes therefore beyond community to communion.

The Assumption is a celebration of Mary being at the heart of this communion. She reaches out to us and invites us to make that relationship real. She welcomes us now just as she welcomed God and God's plans for the whole of humankind within the dusty environment of Nazareth. We celebrate all that is comprehended in Nazareth, Bethlehem, Jerusalem, Calvary. We celebrate all that she experienced in her involvement as a partner in the salvation brought about by Jesus. All of that she makes present to us in the here and now, and in this way is deeply concerned and deeply involved in the life of each one of us.

The celebration of the Assumption can thus become a joyful celebration challenging all of humankind to consider the implications for their own life in the here and now. This fits so well with her pleas at Fatima!

It follows that the central mystery of her life and person is her divine motherhood, celebrated both at Christmas and a week later (Jan. 1) on the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God. The Immaculate Conception (Dec. 8) marks the preparation for that motherhood, so that she had the fullness of grace from the first moment of her existence, completely untouched by sin. The Assumption completes God's work in her since it was not fitting that the flesh that had given human life to God himself should ever undergo corruption.

Our Lady of Fatima called for prayer! She urgently desired for all the faithful to pray daily for the salvation of poor sinners and for the whole world, especially with the devotion of the rosary.



From Fatima, Mary calls us to conversion, and a daily turning away from sin. Mary told the children that our prayers can help save souls, *“Pray, pray very much, and make sacrifices for sinners; for many souls there are none to sacrifice themselves and to pray for them.”* **Are we doing our part?**

As faithful disciples, we are called to be holy, and to be intercessors for each other. Fatima is a wake-up call. Amid a passing world, we need to ‘get right with eternal things’: Reconciliation, the Eucharist, prayer, especially the Rosary, for Mary’s intercession.

O Most Holy Virgin Mary, Queen of the most holy Rosary, you were pleased to appear to the children of Fatima. We implore you, inspire in our hearts a fervent love for the recitation of the Rosary. By meditating on the mysteries of the redemption may we obtain the graces and virtues that we ask, through the merits of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Redeemer. Amen