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Dear Friend of Saint Joseph Abbey,

IN 1985, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, at that time Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, was asked by the Italian journalist Vittorio Messori about the third secret of Fatima, which had not yet been revealed. To the journalist, who seemed worried about the “terrible” events supposedly predicted in this secret, the future Pope replied, “Even if that were so, it would only confirm the part of the message of Fatima already known. At Fatima a stern warning was launched that is directed against the prevailing frivolity, a summons to the seriousness of life, of History, to the perils that threaten Humanity. It is that which JESUS Himself recalls very frequently, not being afraid to say, *unless you repent you will all likewise perish* (Lk. 13 :3). Conversion—and Fatima fully recalls it to mind—is a constant demand of Christian life” (*The Ratzinger Report*, Ignatius, 1985).

This call to conversion, as demanding as it may be, is from the infinitely loving Heart of Our Lord. In her maternal concern for us, the Most Blessed Virgin MARY came to issue it to us once again. Over the course of her series of apparitions in Fatima, Our Lady, an unparalleled model of wisdom and kindness, demonstrates her supernatural pedagogy. In her first apparition, on May 13, 1917, she stirred up the desire for Heaven in the three young seers. As MARY, extraordinarily beautiful, entirely luminous, clothed in a long white robe and a veil down to her feet, stood before her, Lucia, the eldest of the group, asked her, “Where do you come from, Madame?”—“I am from Heaven.”—“And what do you want of us?”—“I have come to ask you to come here six times in a row, at this hour, on the 13th of each month. Afterwards, I will tell you who I am and what I want of you.”—“You come from Heaven! ... and will I go to Heaven?”—“Yes, you will go there.”—“And Jacinta?”—“She will, too.”—“And Francisco?”—“He will go to Heaven too, but he must say his Rosary...”

Heaven is the goal of our existence. “God, infinitely perfect and blessed in Himself, in a plan of sheer goodness freely created man to make him share in his own blessed life” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, CCC, no. 1). Those who die in the grace and friendship of God, and who are completely purified, go to Heaven where they become like God forever, because they see Him as He is (1 Jn. 3 :2), face to face (1 Cor. 13 :12). *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God* (Mt. 5 :8). This life of perfect communion and love with the Most Blessed Trinity, with the Virgin MARY, the angels, and the saints, all the result of a free gift from God, is also

the fulfillment of man’s deepest desires, the ultimate state of perfect happiness. God, in effect, has placed in the heart of man the desire for happiness in order to draw man to Himself. The hope of Heaven teaches us that true happiness is found neither in wealth or pleasure, nor in fame or power, nor in any human work, however useful it may be, such as science, technology, or the arts, nor in any creature, but in God alone, the source of every good and of all love (cf. CCC, 1723). “God alone satisfies,” affirmed Saint Thomas Aquinas.

“We are willing!”

After having strengthened the children with the incalculable promise of Heaven, the Lady introduced them to the mystery of Redemption, with which she, with exquisite delicacy, asked them to participate. “Will you offer yourselves to God to make sacrifices and willingly accept all the sufferings He sends you, in reparation for sins that offend His Divine Majesty? Are you willing to suffer for the conversion of sinners, and to make reparation for the blasphemies and other offenses committed against the Immaculate Heart of MARY?”—“Yes, we are willing!” answered Lucia.—“Then you will suffer greatly, but the grace of God will always be there to help and support you.” As she spoke, the Apparition opened her hands, spreading over the seers a ray of mysterious light that penetrated their souls, so that they saw themselves in God.

The following July 13, the Blessed Virgin unveiled a terrifying reality before the children’s eyes : “Our Lady showed us a great sea of fire, which seemed to be under the earth. Plunged in this fire were demons and souls,

in human form, like transparent burning embers, all blackened or burnished bronze, floating about in this conflagration in clouds of smoke, lifted by flames coming out of their bodies. They rose and fell on all sides, like sparks in roaring fires, without weight or direction, amid shrieks and groans of pain and despair that terrified us and made us tremble with fear. The demons could be distinguished by their terrifying and repellent likeness to frightful and unknown animals, black and transparent like burning coals. This vision lasted but a moment, thanks to our good Mother from Heaven who had warned us beforehand, and promised to take us to Heaven. Otherwise, I think we would have died of horror and fear. Then we raised our eyes to Our Lady, who said with kindness and sadness: 'You have seen Hell, where the souls of poor sinners go. To save them, God wishes to establish in the world devotion to My Immaculate Heart. If people do what I am going to tell you, many souls will be saved and there will be peace.' "

One more proof

The existence of Hell arouses disputes. Sister Lucia wrote, a few years before her death on February 13, 2005: "There is no shortage of unbelievers in the world who deny these truths, but they are no less true for being denied. Their disbelief does not save unbelievers from the horrors of Hell, should a life of sin lead them there. ... At Fatima, (God) sent us His Message as one more proof of these truths. This Message recalls them to us, so that we do not let ourselves be fooled by the false doctrines of unbelievers who deny them, or of deceivers who distort them. To this end, the Message assures us that Hell is a fact, and that the souls of poor sinners end up there" (*Calls from the Message of Fatima* 2003, ch. 14).

During His public life, our Savior JESUS often returned to the subject of Hell, of *Gehenna*, of *the unquenchable fire* (cf. Mk. 9 :43-48) reserved for those who until the end of their lives refuse to believe and convert, and where both body and soul can be lost (cf. Mt. 10 :28). The *Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church* (no. 395) reminds us: "Mortal sin destroys charity in us, deprives us of sanctifying grace, and, if unrepented, leads us to the eternal death of Hell." The Magisterium of the Church has often spoken on this topic. Pope Pius XII emphasized, on March 23, 1949: "Preaching on the first truths of the faith and the final ends, has not only lost nothing of its opportuneness in our time, but has become more necessary and urgent than ever, including preaching about Hell. Of course this subject must be treated with dignity and wisdom. But, as for the substance of this truth, the Church has the sacred duty before God and before men to announce and teach it without watering it down in any way, just as Christ revealed it, and there is no

circumstance of time that could ever lessen the force of this obligation. It binds in conscience every priest entrusted, in ordinary or extraordinary ministry, with the task of instructing, warning, and guiding the faithful. It is true that the desire for Heaven is in itself a more perfect motivation than the fear of eternal punishment, but that does not mean that for all men it is the most effective motivation to keep them from sin and convert them to God."

A Mother's concern

There is therefore no reason to be surprised at Our Lady's intervention with the children in Fatima. Like a good Mother who is concerned, she warns us for the sake of our conversion and eternal salvation. On October 13, 1917, she told the little young seers: "Men must mend their ways and ask forgiveness for their sins. They must stop offending God Our Lord, Who has already been offended too much." From then on, the children could not hold back their tears when they recalled the sadness on the face of the Apparition. About these words of Our Lady, Lucia would say: "What a loving complaint they contain, and what a plea! Oh, I wish they could echo throughout the whole world, and all the children of the heavenly Mother could hear her voice!"

The message of Fatima is essentially that of the Gospel. From the beginning of His public life, Our Lord proclaimed, *The kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the Gospel* (Mk. 1 :15). This call is continually at the heart of the Church's teaching. Saint Benedict says it at the beginning of the prologue of his *Rule*: "Listen, O my son, to the teaching of the master, and incline the ear of your heart: willingly receive and faithfully fulfill the admonition of your loving father; that you may return by the labor of obedience to Him from whom you had departed through the sloth of disobedience. ... The days of this life are lengthened and a truce granted us for this very reason, that we may amend our evil ways. As the Apostle says, *Do you not know that God's patience is inviting you to repent?* (Rom. 2 :4). For the merciful Lord tells us, *I desire not the death of the sinner, but that he should be converted and live* (Ez. 33 :11)."

To convert, to change one's life, means to return to God showing our regret for having offended Him. Especially struck by Our Lady's sadness when she asked that her Son be offended no longer, Francisco wanted to console her, beginning with abstaining from all sin. "I love Our Lord so much! But He is so sad because of all our sins. No! We will not sin again." Consequently, the three children were ready to face persecutions and death rather than lie to free themselves. But to change one's life means, in addition to sacramental confession

to receive forgiveness of sins, mortifying the heart and the senses to make reparation for past sins, and uniting oneself to Christ in His Passion. Remarkably, the apparitions ignited in the three seers' hearts an ardent zeal to share in the sufferings of Christ. For example, they decided to give their daily lunch to poor children, and to make do with what they could find in the countryside. One day, the mother of one of the children offered them some juicy figs to eat. Jacinta sat down beside the basket and already was taking delight in the thought of eating such beautiful fruit. She took one, but then suddenly changed her mind: "We haven't made any sacrifices yet for sinners. Let's make this one." And she returned the fig to the basket.

When the grace of God enters a soul, it is not satisfied with doing penance for its own sins, but wishes also to sacrifice for others. Thus Jacinta, during the long and cruel illness that would carry her off on February 20, 1920, was encouraged by the certainty that her sufferings, united to the Lord's, would convert sinners and save them from damnation. This delicate little girl, withdrawn by nature, became patient and even strong in the face of suffering. Shortly before her death, she told Sister Maria of the Purification Godinho, the nun who was caring for her, "Mortification and sacrifices greatly please Our Lord! Oh! Flee indulgence. Flee wealth. Love holy poverty very much. Be very charitable, even to bad people. Never say bad things about anyone and avoid those who speak ill of others. Be very patient, because patience leads to Heaven. Pray very much for sinners! Pray very much for priests, religious, and governments. Priests should be concerned only with the affairs of the Church. They must be pure, very pure! The disobedience of priests and religious to their superiors and to the Holy Father greatly offends Our Lord."

The penance God expects

What sacrifices are most pleasing to God? A few months before Our Lady's first apparition, the children received a visit from an Angel, who told them, "Above all, accept and endure the sufferings the Lord will send you." Many years later, in 1943, Sister Lucia would write, "God greatly desires the return of peace, but He is saddened to see so few souls in a state of grace and prepared to practice the renunciations that He asks of them to follow His Law. And this is precisely the penance God is asking for right now, the sacrifice that each must impose on himself so as to live a just life in conformity with His Law. For mortification He wants us to simply and honestly perform our daily tasks, and to accept difficulties and cares. And He wants us to make this path clearly known to souls, for many, taking the word penance to mean 'great austerity,' for which they feel neither the strength nor the generosity, become discouraged and fall into a life of indifference and sin."

Our Lord later told Lucia, "The sacrifice required of everyone is the proper fulfillment of his duty and the observance of My Law; such is the penance that I now ask for and require."

The need to say the Rosary is also at the heart of the Fatima apparitions. The Blessed Virgin MARY spoke of it on several occasions. In 1917, the world was still suffering the horrors of the First World War with no end in sight. During the third apparition, on July 13, Our Lady insisted, "You must say the Rosary every day in honor of the Blessed Virgin to obtain the end of the war through her intercession, because only she can help." And on October 13, she called herself the "Lady of the Rosary." She asked that, during this traditional prayer, the following invocation be added at the end of each decade: "O 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." For God's saving grace extends as far as possible. No one is excluded from God's salvific will nor, consequently, from the motherly care of MARY, who teaches us the essential role of prayer in the work of salvation. "We must pray very much to save souls from going to Hell," Jacinta would often repeat.

"Take up the Rosary once again!"

"The Rosary is one of the traditional paths of Christian prayer directed to the contemplation of Christ's face. ... The Church has always attributed particular efficacy to this prayer, entrusting to the Rosary, to its choral recitation and to its constant practice, the most difficult problems. At times when Christianity itself seemed under threat, its deliverance was attributed to the power of this prayer, and Our Lady of the Rosary was acclaimed as the one whose intercession brought salvation" (John Paul II, *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, October 16, 2002, nos. 18, 39). So today, when our world has rejected JESUS CHRIST and races towards the abyss, with the greatest danger to souls, recourse to the holy Rosary is more necessary than ever. Let us then follow the advice of John Paul II: "We need to return to the practice of family prayer and prayer for families, continuing to use the Rosary. ... The family that prays together stays together. I look to all of you, brothers and sisters of every state of life, to you, Christian families, to you, the sick and elderly, and to you, young people: confidently take up the Rosary once again. ... May this appeal of mine not go unheard!" (*ibid.* 41, 43).

The message of Fatima also includes devotion to the Immaculate Heart of MARY. On June 13, 1917, the Virgin showed the children her wounded Heart surrounded by thorns, and told Lucia, "You must remain on earth. JESUS wants to use you to make me known and loved. He wants to spread devotion to my

Immaculate Heart throughout the world. I promise salvation to those who take up this devotion. Their souls will be loved by God with a preferential love, like flowers placed by me before His Throne.” Several years later, on December 10, 1925, Our Lady, holding the Child JESUS close, appeared to Sister Lucia at her convent in Pontevedra, Spain, and showed her her Heart. The Child said, “Have pity on the heart of your Blessed Mother, which is covered with thorns that ungrateful men push in at every moment, with no one making an act of reparation to pull them out.” MARY added, “Look, my daughter, at my Heart surrounded by thorns that ungrateful men are continually pushing in with their blasphemies and their ingratitude. You, at least, must take care to console me. Tell everyone for me that if they, on the first Saturday of five consecutive months, make a good confession, receive Holy Communion, say a Rosary, and keep Me company for a quarter of an hour by meditating on the mysteries of the Rosary in reparation to me, I promise to assist them at the hour of death with all the graces necessary for the salvation of their souls.”

One may ask what are these outrages that inflict such pain on the Heart of Our Lady. In general, they are all the sins that offend God. Among them, some especially offend the Heart of Our Mother of Heaven : first of all, blasphemies against her three great privileges—her Immaculate Conception, her perpetual Virginity, and her Divine Maternity ; then, insults against images of her ; and lastly, the offense of those who teach children to scorn, mock, and even hate their Heavenly Mother. No doubt violations of the virtue of purity must also be counted as particularly offending her Immaculate Heart. On this issue, Jacinta related to Sister Maria of the Purification what Our Lady told her : “The sins that cast the most souls into Hell are sins of impurity.

Certain fashions will arise that will greatly offend Our Lord. People who serve God must not follow these fashions.” Later, shortly before her death, Jacinta told Lucia, “You will remain here below to make known to men that the Lord wants to spread devotion to the Immaculate Heart of MARY throughout the world. Let the whole world know that it is through the Immaculate Heart of MARY that God wishes to grant His graces ; it is from her Immaculate Heart that we must ask for them.... The Heart of JESUS wants the Immaculate Heart of MARY to be venerated with His own.”

“Pray, pray much!”

The message of Fatima is as relevant today as ever. On the threshold of the third millennium, Pope John Paul II expressed himself in these words during the beatification of Francisco and Jacinta : “The message of Fatima is a call to conversion, alerting humanity to have nothing to do with the *dragon whose tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven, and cast them to the earth* (Rv. 12 :4). Man’s final goal is Heaven, his true home, where the heavenly Father awaits everyone with His merciful love. God does not want anyone to be lost ; that is why 2,000 years ago He sent His Son to earth, *to seek and to save the lost* (Lk. 19 :10). And He saved us by His death on the cross. Let no one empty that Cross of its power ! JESUS died and rose from the dead to be *the first-born among many brethren* (Rom. 8 :29). In her motherly concern, the Blessed Virgin came here to Fatima to ask men and women ‘to stop offending God, Our Lord, who is already very offended.’ It is a mother’s sorrow that compels her to speak ; the destiny of her children is at stake. For this reason she asks the little shepherds : ‘Pray, pray much and make sacrifices for sinners ; many souls go to Hell because they have no one to pray and make sacrifices for them’ ” (May 13, 2000).

May we contribute to the establishment of devotion to the Immaculate Heart of MARY throughout the world, in order to lead many souls to conversion and to an ardent love for JESUS and MARY.

Dom Antoine Marie
O.S.B.

P. S. This monthly letter is free of charge. We gratefully accept the addresses of other persons who may enjoy receiving it. – Also available free of charge are: tract about the divinity of Jesus Christ; tract about the Truths of the Catholic Religion; scapular of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, with explanatory notice; the promises of the Sacred Heart; the mysteries of the Rosary.

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