

OUR LADY OF FATIMA, PRAY FOR US

They found Him in the Temple, sitting among the doctors. It's a huge privilege during this Centenary Year to welcome to our Diocese, the national Pilgrim Statue of Our Lady of Fatima, and the sacred relics of Saints Jacinta and Francisco. Our Diocese of Portsmouth is dedicated to Mary Immaculate, and only last night we returned from our annual pilgrimage to Lourdes. Given the call to the new evangelisation, both of ourselves and of others, these days we're spending with the Blessed Mother at the end of August have never been so urgently needed. So in this Mass and in our prayers this weekend let's turn to Mary the best loved member of the Church, and to the shepherd-children Jacinta and Francisco, to ask them to help us, as we heard in the Gospel, bring all people to Jesus in the Temple of His Body the Church.

The message of Fatima is extraordinarily relevant to us today in this early 21C. It's summed up in the Fatima prayer we say in the Rosary: *O my Jesus, forgive us our sins. Save us from the fires of hell. Lead all souls to heaven, especially those in most need of Your mercy.* It is a splendid prayer, a positive and beautiful prayer, a powerful prayer, expressing our hope and total dependence on Jesus our Saviour. It is a prayer that sums up today's Gospel, that everyone, all of us, all whom we know, might one day, their sins forgiven, be united with Jesus forever, in the Church triumphant in heaven.

The story of Fatima is well known. After visitations from a mysterious Angel of Peace, the Blessed Virgin appeared six times on 13th of each month, beginning in May 1917, to 3 Portuguese children: Lucia, Jacinta and Francisco. The Woman, brighter than the sun, wearing a white mantle, and holding beads in Her hand, asked them to pray the Rosary every day for sinners, for peace, for an end to war. She showed them a vision of hell, a world without God, a state of fearsome emptiness and suffering, and urged them to pray for the conversion of all, not least for Russia then adopting the ideology of communism. In the following months, especially for the last apparition in October 1917, large crowds gathered, drawn by reports of visions, miracles and secrets. Although Jacinta and Francisco died in subsequent years, Lucia, who later became a religious, lived until 2005. In spreading devotion to Mary's Immaculate Heart, she continued to promote the core message of Fatima: the call to conversion from sin that leads to peace on earth.

The history of these last 100 years is one of wonderful advances in science and technology, leisure and travel, medicine and the arts. But it's also a dreadful history, full of turbulence and political ideology, violence and war, poverty and suffering. Human beings can still be very sinful and very selfish, and this has led, especially since the social and sexual revolutions of the 1960s, to family breakdown, misery and unhappiness. If you want to see the fires of hell, you need only switch on the News. Indeed, our secular culture, which has lost its faith in God, is now rapidly losing its faith in Man and, through a dictatorship of relativism, seeks to impose on us all, a distorted anthropology or view of the human person, one that can never bring true happiness. This is why we need the message of Fatima. We need the Children to call us back to reality. We need the Blessed Mother to lead us to Her Son. For it is only in Christ that we can find the Way, the Truth and the Life and the very helps we need to overcome sin, suffering and death.

O my Jesus, forgive us our sins. Save us from the fires of hell. Lead all souls to heaven, especially those in most need of Your mercy. New evangelisation is always two-way: it's about ourselves growing in faith and it's about proposing our Christian faith to others. I'd like, then, to encourage everyone in our Diocese to say the Rosary each day for the evangelisation and conversion of England, and between the Mysteries, to include the joyful Fatima prayer. It sums up so well the spirituality we need to be effective missionary disciples:

- a personal love and friendship with Jesus, our Lord and Saviour;
- a deep conversion of life, turning from sin to believe the Gospel;
- and a real desire to reach out in mercy to others, especially to the poor and the most needy.

In this Mass, let us make this Fatima prayer our own. Let us venerate the Blessed Virgin and the Shepherd children, Saints Jacinta and Francisco. More, let us ask their prayers that everyone on earth will find their Way to Jesus in the full communion of His Church.