

# **WORLD-PRAYER-CONGRESS for Life in LOURDES 2008**

28<sup>th</sup> of October – 4<sup>th</sup> of November 2008

„Maria, To You We Entrust The Cause Of Life.”

(Johannes Paul II., *Evangelium vitae* 105)

## **Talk No. 13**

from 1<sup>st</sup> of November 2008 by Nuno Prazeres:

**“The Fatima Message: A Call For Life“**

“In the end, my Immaculate Heart will triumph.”

*Our Lady of Fatima, July 13, 1917*

### **GREETINGS**

Dear friends gathered here to participate in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Worldwide Prayer Congress for Life.

### **THANKSGIVING**

It was with great pleasure that I received the invitation to participate in this great meeting of reflection and prayer. It is my privilege to serve as the International Secretary of the World Apostolate of Fatima. In that capacity I worked with *Human Life International* in organizing the first international Prayer Congress for Life, which was held in Fatima, Portugal, in the year 2006. On that occasion I had the joy of meeting many of you and I was impressed with your testimony in favour of the defence of life. Today, I want to try to build a bridge between Fatima and Lourdes because these sanctuaries have in common the living presence of Mary, they resound with the call of her maternal voice that proclaims the beauty and the gift of human life.

### **STRUCTURE OF THE CONFERENCE**

My talk is divided into three main parts:

- 1 – Justification of the theme “Fatima and the Defence of life”.
- 2 – Contribution of the Fatima message for the construction of a culture of Life.
- 3 – General conclusions and guidelines for reflection.

### **1 – PREAMBLE/ PRESENTATION**

First, I would like to explain the reason that brought me to Lourdes. I am also linked with a Marian sanctuary - the Sanctuary of Our Lady of the Rosary of Fatima. My work is to promote the Message which Our Lady brought from heaven so that, by knowing it, many people may contribute to establish a culture of peace in society, based upon upholding the dignity of every human life, made in the image and likeness of God. It is within this framework that the World Apostolate of Fatima joyfully associates with this cause.

It so happened that the congress that was organized in Fatima in 2006, by coincidence of divine providence was held on the eve of a referendum intended to open the doors for the legalization of abortion in Portugal up to the first ten weeks of a woman’s pregnancy. The

Congress helped us to understand more meaningfully our mission of introducing Our Lady's message into the hearts of those who are most in need of God's mercy. Although the "yes" vote in favour of abortion won the ballot, nevertheless the Congress bore much fruit. It made us reflect more seriously on the significance of the message of Fatima as a powerful instrument for defeating the numerous signs of death and sin that exist in our world, and in particular the crime of abortion. To overcome these evils, the Blessed Virgin Mary called for **Prayer, Sacrifice and Reparation**.

We are in Lourdes, but I think that Our Lady will not be sad if I dedicate this presentation to the message that She brought to Fatima ninety-one years ago. Besides, my personal story is closely linked to Fatima, because I was born and brought up there.

## **2 – THE HISTORY OF FATIMA**

My grandfather was a story teller. It was from him that I learned the story of three children who on a Spring day, in the year 1916, had a meeting that changed their lives forever. Following the tradition of my family, today I also invite you to sit down with me and to hear the story that I have come here to tell you. For many of you, it is certainly a story that you will know.

Fatima was unknown at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Its inhabitants were shepherds and farmers. At that time, the world was overwhelmed by the First World War. Many people had been recruited to fight in the war and so, the responsibility for looking after the flocks that were spread out on the hills was left to the children.

One of these children was Lucia, a nine year old girl, who was very responsible, energetic and had a contagious sense of joy. In her task of looking after the sheep she was helped by her cousins Francisco, eight years old and Jacinta, six years old.

### **Apparitions of the Angel**

One day in 1916, these children had an unexpected meeting with a being that looked like a young man, appearing out of the sky, who asked them to pray very much for the salvation of men. And after three meetings with this messenger of God, the next year they received the visit of "a Lady more brilliant than the sun" who told them that She was from Heaven. With motherly words, She invited them to offer themselves up to God, through prayer, sacrifices and penance, in order to heal the sins of mankind that were tormenting the world.

Whenever he told me this story, my grandfather became overwhelmed with emotion, because these little shepherds were his own playmates. He himself was part of the story, and so it touched him deeply. Laughingly, he used to tell me that "if Our Lady had not appeared to him, it was because he was not as good as these children were".

God chooses the words with which He wants to speak to our heart. So which words would God choose to speak to little children, so that they could understand them in their mind and record them in their memory? Peace, Prayer, Sacrifice, Mercy, Reparation, Offences to God: these are some of the words chosen by God to be brought to the children by the angel.

In the first and second apparition, the Angel introduced himself saying: "Do not be afraid. I am the Angel of Peace. Pray with me. The Hearts of Jesus and Mary are attentive to the voice of your supplications". He launches an appeal: "Pray very much, offer prayers and sacrifices

constantly to the Most High... as an act of reparations for the sins by which he is offended, and in supplication for the conversion of sinners. You will thus draw down peace..."

In the third apparition, he taught them the prayer to the Most Holy Trinity, a prayer of reparation for the offences, sacrileges, crimes and indifferences with which God is much offended. And from the hand of the angel, the three cousins received in holy communion the body and blood of Jesus Christ, the food that sustains our souls and gives more life to life itself.

Children are very sensitive to other people's suffering. They do not like seeing somebody crying. Suffering is something contradictory and inconceivable for a child, who came to the world to be loved. When one is so close to the heart, as a child is in the womb of his mother, so close to the essential element of human life, to the original goodness that God has put into the heart of each human being, it is natural that one should live in the expectancy of receiving love and welcome, trust and tenderness. Children have a sense of disappointment when they see around them destruction, death and disrespect for life. And in such occasions, they feel impelled to repair the damage, to change things for the better, they look to console the sufferer and diminish the suffering.

My grandfather was twelve years old when he first heard the story of his little friends. He used to go to the same church, he had the same group of friends, the same ways of playing with them, he followed the same routine as they did. He remembered how the Apparitions came to change the inner self of the three seers, making them more reserved and mysterious, because now their minds were focused on different matters. Francisco, as Lucia writes, was very sad because of the enormous hurt that the sins of humankind were causing to Jesus. His task was to console Him, making reparation to Him with love, and asking people not to offend Him any more, because He was already much offended. He used to hide himself in order to pray, often missing school as to spend time in the church, close to the tabernacle containing the "hidden Jesus". Jacinta was also horrified because of the souls of sinners that were lost through being condemned to Hell. She decided to embrace prayer and constant sacrifices in order to prevent anyone else going to hell, by obtaining for them the grace of repentance, conversion and salvation.

Still today, at my parents' house, the rosary is recited every evening, around the fireplace. The rosary has been for a long time a popular prayer, but, as my grandfather told me, he remembered very well the way children at that time used to pray it: "Hail Mary, Holy Mary, Hail Mary, Holy Mary... they repeated these words ten times and very quickly a decade was finished. Above all, the rosary had become a routine that, in the case of children, was seen as something that would delay the time they wanted to devote to playing. But, for the three little shepherds, after Our Lady showed them the importance of praying the rosary daily, it became evident that the rosary was a powerful instrument that would obtain the longed-for peace in the world and in people's hearts.

For a child, it is not difficult to believe in the power of prayer. In the midst of a dark night, the two years old son calls out to his father, because he believes that he will appear to hug him. It is we, the adults who often have difficulty in establishing an intimate relationship with God. In other words, prayer has to do with humility, with the knowledge that we alone are small and powerless, always in the need of a protective lap. Prayer has also to do with hope, a virtue that is so rare in our days. Only this hope can keep us steady and faithful in serving the cause of life. Thus, the Holy Father Benedict XVI wrote in his encyclical letter "*Spe Salvi*" that the "first essential setting for learning hope is prayer. When no one listens to me any more, God still listens to me. When I can no longer talk to anyone or call upon anyone, I can always talk to God" (SS 32).

We are mistaken if we think we can do something to please God without prayer. And this, even a child understands.

## **Apparitions of Our Lady**

After their encounter with the angel, another unexpected visitor came to meet the children: our Heavenly Mother. Nothing is more touching than the words of a mother pleading for Her son. Nothing is more touching for a mother than the pain of a son. Therefore, during six brief but intense meetings, the Blessed Virgin Mary, through three little humble children, addresses the world and repeats the central message of the Gospel: "Repent and believe the good news!" (Mk 1,15).

It is the call of a Mother who, with her heart in her hands, asks for daily recitation of the rosary and for people to make sacrifices in reparation for the sins committed against God and against Her Immaculate Heart.

The little shepherds understand the message. It is necessary to console Jesus with prayers and sacrifices of reparation, to obtain peace and to prevent more crimes and errors from spreading all over the world, causing more suffering to humankind.

I do not know how many times my grandfather told me the story of the apparitions. And each time he used to tell me the story with the same conviction as of somebody who had just seen it. In fact, he was there on that October 13<sup>th</sup> and he did indeed see the miracle of the sun, the great sign which Our Lady had promised to perform so that all may believe.

In the **first apparition, May 13, 1917**, Our Lady introduced Herself saying: "I am from Heaven" and asked them to pray the rosary daily to obtain peace for the world and the end of the war. The little shepherds started offering their sufferings in reparation to the hearts of Jesus and Mary and for the conversion of sinners. The actuality of this request made by Our Lady remains as relevant today as it was in 1917. The wars fought by weapons continue, but there is above all another war spreading all over the world and which Blessed Mother Theresa of Calcutta considered to be "the greater destroyer of the peace in the world". We are, of course, speaking about the evil of abortion and the culture of death that is spreading widely because of the indifference to God of so many, the anti-life propaganda and the lack of prayer.

On **June 13, in the second apparition**, Our Lady said to Lucia that Jesus was going to use her "to make me known and loved" and for establishing in the world devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. So it was that Lucia, during her long pilgrimage on this earth, did everything she could to make known the requests of Our Lady and to put them into practice. The mission entrusted to Lucia is, however, not yet finished.

Let us entrust this cause to Our Lady and let us believe that if we comply with her requests She will answer our prayers and will overcome the culture of death, in the same way that the tyranny of the former Soviet Union was overcome peacefully, after Pope John Paul II made the consecration of the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, on March 25, 1984!

In the **third apparition, July 13**, Our Lady showed the children Hell, where the souls of poor sinners go. She revealed them the secret which referred to the end of the war and that another war would begin if people "do not cease offending God" that would be worse, causing famine and persecutions of the Church and the Holy Father. We now know now that the last part of the secret referred to the attempted assassination of Pope John Paul II and the martyrdom suffered by the Church of the 20<sup>th</sup> century - the century of which we have all been a part.

**In the last apparition, on October 13<sup>th</sup>**, Our Lady reinforces her appeal: “Do not offend the Lord our God any more, because He is already so much offended”. Then the extraordinary miracle of the sun took place, as predicted by Our Lady and observed by many thousands of people. This apparition was also marked by the vision of the Holy Family, Mary, Joseph and the child Jesus, blessing the world, as a clear sign that the message of Fatima, and in a particular way this apparition, draws attention to children and the family.

The Christian idea of family life is threatened by many forces today. The family is called to be a sanctuary of love where life is conceived, welcomed and developed. Divorce, abortion, birth control policies, extramarital relations - all these factors are a threat to the family as the vital nucleus of human life. Fatima shows us the Holy Family as a model to follow, a space of graces and blessings for the world. It is the cell from which germinates society and the Church.

### **Synthesis:**

His Eminence Mgr. Jose Policarpo, cardinal-patriarch of Lisbon, summarizes the message of Fatima with three key concepts: “the gravity of sin, that seriously injures the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Maria; the urgency of making reparation to the majesty of God who is offended by the sins of men; the understanding of the children that sacrifices, accepted voluntarily, and constant prayer, are a powerful way to console the heart of God and to obtain the conversion of sinners, “in order not to offend Our Lord any more”. “Penance and prayer” are thus the key words issuing from Fatima that direct the Church along the paths of conversion and reparation”.

## **3 – CONCLUSIONS**

**1 – The children** – Let us be inspired by the three little shepherds of Fatima, as well as by St. Bernadette! In the changes which took place in their lives, following the Apparitions, they incarnate and witness, in such a true and courageous way, the mission that Heaven entrusted to them. It is with children, who are a visible sign of God’s tenderness that we have to start. From their childhood, they must be educated to respect life. A clear line of action must be set up and implemented for all who are involved in pastoral work so that the specific nature of this formation is emphasised. In catechesis, in teaching Religion and Morality, teachers must bear in mind the imperative need of speaking to the children (and also to the adolescents), particularly about the great problem of abortion, but also about any other serious attacks on the integrity of human life. Let this be done within the context of seeking the solution to these evils through the example of Prayer and Penance that was lived by the little shepherds of Fatima. Let us place the children in the front line. They are at the heart of this struggle because the way that it unfolds in the future will be determined by the way in which they are formed today, for they will become fathers and mothers of the next generation.

**2 – Prayer** –It is the Blessed Virgin’s call for prayer that resonates through the whole message of Fatima. This is what should animate all our actions in defence of human life. Dr. Thereza Ameal, founder of the “Chain of Prayer for Life”, who is present at this congress, maintains that the true answer for the problem of abortion and all the attacks on human life, is to be found in prayer and penance, in the self offering of our lives. Those who pray for Life, who think about it, who are educated to love and respect it, are thereby stimulated to act in its defence.”

In the encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*, John Paul II writes: “I repeat what I said to those families who carry out their challenging mission amid so many difficulties: a great prayer for life is urgently needed, a prayer which will rise up throughout the world” (E. V. 100). A great prayer for life, which will rise up throughout the world... In 2005, the World Apostolate of Fatima promoted its first Worldwide Prayer Day for Life, on the first Sunday of October. From then

on, every year, together with other pro-life movements, the members of the Apostolate, present in more than one hundred countries, organise, in their communities, prayer meetings and reflections about pro life issues, which ideally are preceded by time spent in Eucharistic Adoration. Through the intercession of Mary, Mother of the Life Within, we invoke the power from on high, because it is from God that we receive strength, the only strength that is capable of defeating the culture of death. Let's hope that from this 3<sup>rd</sup> Worldwide prayer for life congress here in Lourdes, a renewed commitment to engage in action and prayer for life may be generated that will penetrate and overcome all the structures that are impregnated with death.

**3 – Sacrifices (fasting)** – It is also in *Evangelium Vitae* that John Paul II reminds us: “Jesus himself has shown us by his own example that prayer and fasting are the first and most effective weapons against the forces of evil (cf. Mt 4:1-11). As he taught his disciples, some demons cannot be driven out except in this way (cf. Mk 9:29). Let us therefore discover again the humility and the courage to pray and fast so that the walls of lies and deceit will break down, those walls which hide from the sight of so many of our brothers and sisters the evil practices and laws which are hostile to life. May this same power turn their hearts to resolutions and goals inspired by the civilization of life and love.

The little shepherds of Fatima soon understood that prayer and sacrifices, mainly through fasting, were necessary instruments to obtain the conversion of sinners and peace for the world. Frequently, they gave their lunch to the poor, offering that act of self-denial and fasting for the conversion of sinners. For us, there remains the challenge of learning how to act in solidarity within this wide fraternity in defence of life and the dignity of all human beings, where all the sacrifices that are made with love will be rewarded.

**4 – Reparation** – This is a concept in the message of Fatima which can also inspire the spirituality of the pro-life movement. Our Lady asked us to make reparation for the sins by which God is offended. She even presented us with a model of reparation that consists in the reparatory communion of the five First Saturdays. Reparation — that is prayer, offering up sacrifices, adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, fraternal charity — should always have the goal of re-establishing the relationship between men and God, because we believe that He is the one who gives life, and gives it abundantly. Our task is not to create something new – because God is the Creator – it is only to repair what mankind has damaged: the fragile existence of life.

The Bishop of Fatima, Mgr. António Marto, in one of his prayers to Mary offers the following reflection on the passage in the Gospel about the visit of Our Lady to Her cousin Elizabeth: “The Gospel tells us that, with your greeting, the little baby-boy leaped with joy in the womb of Elizabeth. We ask ourselves before You O Mary: do the babies of today's world leap with joy in the wombs of their mothers? Do they all leap with joy in the hope of the life that comes from a welcoming love and a tenderness that accepts them? Is there present in the babies of the world that are still in their mothers' wombs, the hope that we are preparing for them a future of love, welcome and peace? It is this thought which troubles us, O Mary!”

So now we see what is the precise nature of our mission: to foster acceptance of this leap with joy in the mothers' womb, as well as hope and trust in the existence of a good, healthy and courageous humankind; to form fathers and mothers capable of receiving their children with love and to form Christian communities and societies willing to provide for the future of those that are still to be born into the light of this world.

As you will certainly be aware, in the past year, the Portuguese government legalized the practice of abortion on demand up to the tenth week of pregnancy. The majority of the European governments have already advanced down this path of liberalization.... under the cover of legislation. This makes us sad and concerned, but it does not make us give up. Rather,

it stimulates in us a greater determination to renew our prayer and action. It is even encouraging to note that although the law legalized abortion in Portugal, as a result of its introduction it also gave rise to many new pro-life associations and centres of counselling and support for pregnant women.

Nothing is lost and, who saves one soul...saves the entire humanity! While there is life, there is hope. Every human life is worth fighting for. All souls to whom the right to be born has been denied by these enactments are in the vanguard of this fight!

**5 – Consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary** – To consecrate means to swear fidelity. It is a promise of love to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, the Queen who always wins the struggle against evil. When in Fatima, Our Lady said that She would come to ask for the consecration of Russia to Her Immaculate Heart, which was to be carried out years later, She showed how much she was concerned about the situation of the world. Just reflect, Russia was the first country in the world to legalize abortion, in 1920. Perhaps this was the reason why, when John Paul II consecrated the entire world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, in spiritual union with all the bishops, on March 25, 1984, he included in his act the following explicit invocation: “From sins against the life of man from its very beginning, deliver us!”

A world consecrated to the Immaculate Heart of the Blessed Virgin Mary, mother of all living creatures, mother of the author of Life, is a world that tries to follow the footsteps of a woman who is the symbol of purity, chastity and the excellence of true love. Some time before going to the hospital, little Jacinta said to the Lucia: “Tell everybody that God grants us graces through the Immaculate Heart of Mary; that people are to ask her for them...”. Knowing this truth, some two centuries earlier S. Louis Monfort had written in his *Treatise on true devotion to the Blessed Virgin*, that “we make more progress in a brief period of submission to and dependence on Mary than in whole years of following our own will and relying on ourselves (n. 155)”.

Let us entrust ourselves to the arms of Mary and stay close to Her Immaculate Heart, in order to establish in the world the triumph that she has promised through her Immaculate Heart, and with it an era of peace.

### **Final words**

The message of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary in Fatima is even more relevant today than it was at the beginning of the last century. The words of Our Lady in 1917 ring out as if she is speaking to us today about the times through which we are living: “Pray the Rosary every day, in order to obtain peace for the world, and the end of the war” and “do not offend the Lord Our God any more, because He is already so much offended”. After all, if we had not heard this appeal, we would not be here. Each organization represented here has its own specific work, its own way of acting, but there is something deeper that unites us all, and it is that that gives us strength. Fatima, as well as Lourdes and all the Marian sanctuaries of the world, must become centres where the proclamation and the celebration of the Gospel of life is present in a special way. This congress is an example of this imperative need.

I ask you all to pray the prayer that the Angel taught the three little shepherds in a nice afternoon in the spring of 1916: “My God, I believe, I adore, I hope and I love You! I ask pardon of You for those who do not believe, do not adore, do not hope and do not love You!”

Thank you.

Nuno Prazeres,  
World Apostolate of Fatima,

