

Benedict XVI
Light Of The World
A Conversation with Peter Seewald

Chapter 16. Mary and the Message of Fatima

Unlike your predecessor, you are regarded as a theologian who focuses more on Jesus than on Mary. Yet already a month after your election, you called upon the faithful gathered in Saint Peter's Square to entrust themselves to Our Lady of Fatima. You made some sensational remarks when you visited Fatima in May 2010. You said that the event that took place ninety-three years ago in Fatima, when the heavens opened above Portugal, should be thought of "as a window of hope" that God opens "when man closes the door to him". The very Pope who is known to the world as the defender of reason was now saying that "the Virgin Mary came from heaven to remind us of Gospel truths."

It is true that I grew up with a primarily Christocentric piety of the sort that had developed between the two world wars through the reawakened interest in the Bible and the Fathers. This was a piety that fed very consciously and decidedly on the Bible and that, as the name suggests, focuses on Christ. But it goes without saying that the Mother of God, the Mother of the Lord, is an essential part of this picture. She figures in the Bible, in Luke and in John, relatively late, but with great radiance and clarity, and she has therefore always been a part of Christian life. She very quickly took on an essential significance in the Eastern Churches, as the Council of Ephesus in 431 shows, to take just one example. And throughout history, God has never ceased to use her as the light through which he leads us to himself.

In Latin America, for instance, Mexico became Christian at the moment when our Lady appeared in Guadalupe. It was then that people realized, Yes, this is our faith, it really is here that we come to God, the Mother shows him to us, all the riches of our religions are transformed and preserved on a higher level in her. In the end, there were two figures that enabled the people of Latin America to embrace the faith: on the one hand, the Mother of God; on the other hand, the God who suffers, who also suffers in all what they themselves have experienced of violence. So we have to say that faith includes history. Cardinal Newman brought this to light. Faith develops. And part of this development is precisely the increasingly emphatic interventions by which the Mother of God enters the world as a guide along the right path, as a light from God, as the Mother through whom we are also able to know the Son and the Father in turn. God, in other words, has given us signs. In the very midst of the twentieth century. In our rationalism, and in the face of the rising power of dictatorships, God shows us the humility of the Mother, who appears to little children and speaks to them of the essentials: faith, hope, love, penance. It therefore makes sense to me that people find windows here, as it were. In Fatima I witnessed the presence of hundreds of thousands of people whose eyes, you might say, had regained the ability to see God, through all the barriers and enclosures of this world, thanks to what Mary had said to little children in Fatima.

The famous "third secret of Fatima" was not revealed until the year 2000—by Cardinal Ratzinger at the behest of John Paul II. The text speaks of a bishop clothed in white who collapses amid the bullets fired by a group of soldiers—a scene that was interpreted as a prophecy of the attempted assassination of John Paul II. Now you stated that "we would be mistaken to think that Fatima's prophetic mission is complete." What did you mean? Does the fulfillment of the message of Fatima really still lie in the future?

There are two aspects of the message of Fatima that have to be distinguished. On the one hand, there is a particular event, which is recounted in forms typical of visionary experience, and, on the other hand, there is the fundamental significance of the event. I mean, the point was not to satisfy some curiosity. If that had been the case, it would have been logical for us to publish the text much sooner. No, the purpose was to allude to a critical point, a critical moment in history, by which I mean the whole power of evil that

came to a head in the major dictatorships of this twentieth century—and that in another way is still at work today.

On the other hand, the answer to this challenge is also an important point here. This answer does not consist in great political actions, but, when all is said and done, it can only come from the transformation of the heart—through faith, hope, love, and penance. In this sense, the message is precisely not a thing of the past, even though the two major dictatorships have disappeared. The Church continues to suffer, and a threat still hangs over man, so the quest for the answer continues as well, which also means that the indication Mary has given us retains its validity. Even now there is tribulation. Even now, in every conceivable form, power threatens to trample down faith. Even now, then, there is need for the answer about which the Mother of God spoke to the children.

The homily you delivered on May 13, 2010, in Fatima struck a rather dramatic note. “Mankind has succeeded in unleashing a cycle of death and terror”, you proclaimed, “but failed in bringing it to an end.” On that day, before half a million of the faithful, you expressed a wish that is actually quite spectacular: “May the seven years which separate us from the centenary of the apparitions”, you said, “hasten the fulfillment of the prophecy of the triumph of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, to the glory of the Most Holy Trinity.”

Do these words mean that the Pope, who, after all, is the holder of a prophetic office, thinks that within the coming seven years the Mother of God could actually appear in a manner that would be tantamount to a triumph?

I said that the “triumph” will draw closer. This is equivalent in meaning to our praying for the coming of God’s Kingdom. This statement was not intended—I may be too rationalistic for that—to express any expectation on my part that there is going to be a huge turnaround and that history will suddenly take a totally different course. The point was rather that the power of evil is restrained again and again, that again and again the power of God himself is shown in the Mother’s power and keeps it alive.

The Church is always called upon to do what God asked of Abraham, which is to see to it that there are enough righteous men to repress evil and destruction. I understood my words as a prayer that the energies of the good might regain their vigor. So you could say the triumphs of God, the triumphs of Mary, are quiet, but they are real nonetheless.

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