

## **Mary is always our trustworthy guide to her Son**

*Homily by Most Reverend John T. Folda, Bishop of Fargo*

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Shanley High School  
Fargo, ND*

One hundred years ago today, God gave a beautiful gift to his people near a little, out-of-the-way town in Portugal. In a place called Fatima, three shepherd children were greeted by the Blessed Virgin Mary, and they were given a message and program of life to help them and us on our journey to heaven. It's no surprise that many were skeptical about this vision, and some still are. But if we believe that angels are sent by God to guide us along our way, why should we be surprised that he would even send his mother?

Today, Mary comes to meet us, just as she did 100 years ago at Fatima. She comes to us with the love of a mother, always looking after her children. She desires only the best for us, and so she always points us towards Jesus, her Son. As a good mother, she tells us where we have gone astray, and with love she warns us of the dangers that lie ahead. But she does more than that. Mary gives us the means of getting back on track. She shows us that through prayer, and penance, and acts of reparation, we can repair the damage that has been done in our world through sin. She encourages us and urges us on, never letting us give up or give in. Mary is a gentle mother, but she is also persistent. She keeps after us because she cares so much, and she doesn't let us off the hook, so to speak. Mary challenges us to always seek Jesus, who as we read in today's Gospel, is "the way, the truth, and the life." She challenges us to strive for holiness, the holiness of life in Christ.

All through salvation history, God has chosen the little ones, the unknowns, to carry out his work. He called David, a simple shepherd, to be a warrior king. He called Peter, James, John, and the others, mostly ordinary fishermen, to be his apostles, his missionaries, those who would launch his Church into the world. And he chose Mary, a young, unknown maiden of Nazareth, to be his mother, the one who would bring the Son of God into our world. So again, we shouldn't be surprised that God called the three little shepherd children of Fatima to receive the grace of these apparitions. In their innocence and devotion, they welcomed the visit of Mary and her messages. Their little hearts were filled with great love, and they listened eagerly to all that Mary told them. They were willing to suffer in order to carry out the mission that Mary gave them. For Jacinta and Francisco, that meant accepting misunderstanding and illness, and even accepting an early death while they were still children. For Lucia, that meant living a long life, passing along the great messages of Mary, and continuing to witness to her apparitions throughout the horrors of the last century.

When he visited Fatima seven years ago, Pope Benedict XVI said, "We would be mistaken to think that Fatima's prophetic mission is complete." It goes on, and now God and his Mother call upon us to carry on this mission. You could say that we too are little ones, mostly unknown in this great world, but still able to do great things. Just as God could work through simple fishermen or little shepherd children, so he can work through us to accomplish his purposes. He asks us to be apostles of prayer, especially of the Rosary, for the sake of peace and conversion in the world. Mary repeatedly asked the children of Fatima to pray the Rosary, and so should we. The Rosary is a beautiful meditation on the mysteries of Christ and our redemption, and Pope St. John Paul II said that when we pray the Rosary we look with Mary on the face of Jesus. What better prayer companion could we ask for? By praying the Rosary and by the devotion of the five First Saturdays, we meditate on the mysteries of our faith, and we bring to the throne of God all the needs of the world, especially the need for peace, and for conversion of hearts.

We also carry on the mission of Fatima by simply living good, holy Christian lives. So many in our world have forgotten or ignored God and his commandments, but we must not forget. Our Blessed Mother calls us to virtue, to holiness, by obeying the commandments and fulfilling the duties of our station in life. That means we must strive every day to avoid sin, and become models of purity to our brothers and sisters. Our witness of humble and joyful fidelity can certainly be an occasion of grace for many others. By the witness of our lives, we can inspire others to leave sin behind, and we can draw them into the peace of God's Kingdom.

In our own way, we too can make sacrifices for the conversion of sinners. Like the little shepherd children, and like Jesus himself, we can accept suffering patiently in reparation for our own sins and the sins of others. There is no better way to grow closer to Jesus than to unite ourselves to him upon the cross. By joining our own sacrifices and sufferings to his, we can participate in God's salvation of the world. The greatest power in the world is the sacrificial love of Christ, and we are called, invited, to share in it.

Dear friends, this anniversary is more than just a date to remember and then move on. No, this anniversary of Fatima is an occasion of grace, and it has enduring power in our time. Pope St. John Paul II recognized that our Lady's message was crucial for the times we live in, and he even said it was more urgent and important now than it was in 1917. After the sorrows of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and before the challenges of this century, we must be more fervent than ever in our devotion to Jesus, who is risen from the dead and lives forever. We must allow him to be our way, our truth, and our life, our salvation and Lord. And Mary is still with us, still directing us to him, still urging us to "do whatever he tells you."

The message and program of Fatima is one of great hope, because Mary told the shepherd children, "In the end, my Immaculate Heart will triumph." What can this mean but the triumph of holiness, the triumph of conversion to Jesus? In a few short minutes, I will ask you along with all the people of our diocese to join me in consecrating the Diocese of Fargo to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. This will happen in all our churches at every Mass throughout the diocese this weekend. My friends, Mary's heart belongs entirely to Jesus, and when we unite our hearts to hers, we are united with him. Mary's triumph happens whenever we pray, whenever a soul turns away from sin and towards Jesus, whenever peace gains a little foothold in some corner of the world, perhaps in our own homes and families. "In the end, my Immaculate Heart will triumph." As we consecrate ourselves to her, let us dwell in her motherly care. Mary is always our trustworthy guide to her Son, and with her we cannot go wrong.