Marian Mass on the occasion of Consecration of Tasmania to the Immaculate Heart of Mary

Today we recall the events of Sunday, May 13, 1917, when three children, Lucia and her two cousins, Francisco and Jacinta, after going to Mass in the nearby parish of Fatima, took a small flock of sheep off into the countryside to let them graze. The children reported that as they were playing after lunch they were startled by a brilliant flash of light. They turned and saw a Lady. She was so beautiful that they were never really able to describe her in terms they believed expressed her radiance and glory. The Lady was young - no more than sixteen years old, and she appeared to be standing on the topmost fragile leaves of a small oak tree, looking down at them with tender interest.

The Lady said, "Please don't be afraid of me, I'm not going to harm you." Lucia asked, “Where are you from”. She replied, “I come from heaven”. The Lady asked them to return on the thirteenth of each month for the next six months, and at the very same hour. She asked one other thing of them: “Will you offer yourselves to God, and bear all the sufferings He sends you? In atonement for all the sins that offend Him? And for the conversion of sinners?" She urged them to say the Rosary every day to bring peace to the world and an end to the war.

Today as we recall the apparitions and the message, we ponder their significance for us now. Certainly, our Lady spoke to the children about events on their century – the world wars and the rise of Communistic Russia. She urged serious prayer for peace in the world. Warning that Russia would become a source of much suffering in the world and for the Church she said, “I shall come to ask for the Consecration of Russia to My Immaculate Heart” and promised that, by this single public act, Russia would be converted and peace would be given to the world.

This message was responded to and the Catholic world prayed for the conversion of Russia. In 1989, we witnessed the extraordinary change in Russia as she abandoned Communism and granted religious freedom to its citizens.

The notion of consecrating a nation to the Immaculate Heart of Mary has been taken up by the Popes. For example, on May 13, 1982, Pope St John Paul II, in a visit to Fatima, consecrated the whole world to our Lady of Fatima. In his prayer the Pope said, “O Immaculate Heart! Help us to conquer the menace of evil, which so easily takes root in the hearts of the people of today, and whose immeasurable effects already weigh down upon our modern world and seem to block the paths towards the future!”

Pope Francis dedicated his papacy to the Blessed Virgin Mary and on October 13, 2013, before an image of Our Lady of Fatima, in St Peter’s Square, he consecrated the whole world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

In this centenary year of the apparitions of the Blessed Virgin to the children of Fatima a number of bishops across the world have consecrated their dioceses to the Immaculate of Mary. Today I have solemnly consecrated Tasmania to the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

I have done this beseeching the Virgin Mary to take Tasmania under the mantle of her protection. I pray that under her protection the grace of God will flow upon the peoples of this island. In this time when so many have lost sight of God I pray that through Our Lady’s intercession many may return to the faith. In this consecration I pray that the darkness that has come upon the hearts of so many will be lifted. I pray that evil will not triumph over the peoples of this island.

Of course, this is no magical solution. The consecration needs to be accompanied by our prayer. Our Lady urged the young seers to prayer and penance. She particularly commended saying the Rosary. The consecration needs to be associated with our own dedication to intercessory prayer. The act of consecration needs to be accompanied by our own personal response. Simply we need to pray: to pray frequently to the Virgin Mary; to pray the Rosary; to pray for Tasmania; to pray for the mission of the Church of the Archdiocese of Hobart.

As the Virgin Mary urged of the children: pray; pray; pray. There is no substitute for prayer. The prayer our Lady encouraged was prayer of intercession for the world. We are involved in a spiritual struggle for the salvation of humanity. There are powerful spiritual forces at work in the world and they cannot be defeated but by prayer. St Paul reminds us: “For it is not against human enemies that we have to struggle, but against the Sovereignties and the Powers who originate the darkness in this world” (Eph 6:12). Let us never doubt the importance and the effectiveness of our prayers. Let us not weaken in our resolve to pray and keep praying. We need to stem the advance of the powers of darkness.

The Virgin Mary is a powerful intercessor, capable of turning the tide of history, as was witnessed in the messages at Fatima. Sacred Scripture testifies that from the very beginning the ‘woman’ will be at enmity with the serpent (Gen 3:15). We need to seek her intercession in the spiritual struggle for the souls of men and women.

On the cross, Jesus said, “Woman, behold your son!” With these words, He asked his mother to take humanity into her heart, her Immaculate heart, her maternal heart. On the occasion of the centenary of the apparitions of the Immaculate Virgin Mary at Fatima let us all embrace the offer of Jesus from the Cross and accept the Virgin Mary as our mother and mother of the Church.

Immaculate virgin, pray for us.

Archbishop Julian Porteous

Saturday, 13 May 2017