

JOHN PAUL II

“A SPECIAL CALL TO COME TO THIS PLACE”\*

“And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home” (Jn 19:27).

These are the concluding words of the Gospel in today’s liturgy at Fátima. The disciple’s name was John. It was he, John, the son of Zebedee, the apostle and evangelist, who heard from the Cross the words of Christ: “Behold, your mother” (Jn 19:27). But first Christ had said to his Mother: “Woman, behold, your son” (Jn 19:26). This was a wonderful testament.

As he left this world, Christ gave to his Mother a man, a human being, to be like a son for her: John. He entrusted him to her. And, as a consequence of this giving and entrusting, Mary became the mother of John. The Mother of God became the Mother of man.

From that hour John “took her to his own home” and became the earthly guardian of the Mother of his Master; for sons have the right and duty to care for their mother. John became by Christ’s will the son of the Mother of God. And in John every human being became her child.

The words “he took her to his own home” can be taken in the literal sense as referring to the place where he lived.

Mary’s motherhood in our regard is manifested in a particular way in the places where she meets us: her dwelling places; places in which a special presence of the Mother is felt.

There are many such dwelling places. They are of all kinds: from a special corner in the home or little wayside shrines adorned with an image of the Mother of God, to chapels and churches built in her honor. However, in certain places; the Mother’s presence is felt in a particularly vivid way. These places,

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sometimes radiate their light over a great distance and draw people from afar. Their radiance may extend over a diocese, a whole nation, or at times over several countries and even continents. These places are the Marian sanctuaries or shrines.

In all these places that unique testament of the Crucified Lord is wonderfully actualized: in them man feels that he is entrusted and confided to Mary; he goes there in order to be with her as with his Mother he opens his heart to her and speaks to her about everything: he “takes her to his own home”, that is to say, he brings her into all his problems, which at times are difficult. His own problems and those of others. The problems of the family, of societies, of nations, and of the whole of humanity.

Is not this the case with the shrine at Lourdes, in France? Is not this the case with Jasna Góra, in Poland, my own country’s shrine, which this year is celebrating its six hundredth anniversary?

There too, as in so many other shrines of Mary throughout the world, the words of today’s liturgy seem to resound with a particularly authentic force: “You are the great pride of our nation” (Jdt 15:9), and also: “When our nation was brought low ... you avenged our ruin, walking in the straight path before our God” (Jdt 13:20).

At Fátima these words resound; as one particular echo of the experiences not only of the Portuguese nation but also of so many other countries and peoples on this earth: indeed, they echo the experience of modern mankind as a whole, the whole of the human family.

And so I come here today because on this very day last year, in Saint Peter’s Square in Rome, the attempt on the Pope’s life was made, in mysterious coincidence with the anniversary of the first apparition at Fátima, which occurred on 13 May 1917.

I seemed to recognize in the coincidence of the dates a special call to come to this place. And so, today I am here. I have come in order to thank Divine Providence in this place which the Mother of God seems to have chosen in a particular way. “Misericordiae Domini, quia non sumus consumpti (“Through God’s mercy we were spared”—Lam 3:22), I repeat once more with the prophet.

I have come especially in order to confess here the glory of God himself: “Blessed be the Lord God, who created the heavens and the earth” (Jdt 13:18), I say in the words of today’s liturgy.

And to the Creator of heaven and earth I also raise that special hymn of glory which is she herself, the Immaculate Mother of the Incarnate Word: “O daughter, you are blessed by the Most High God above all women on earth ... your hope will never depart from the hearts of men, as they remember the power of God. May; God grant this to be a perpetual honor to you” (Jdt 13:18–20).

At the basis of this song of praise, which the Church lifts up with joy here as in so many other places on the earth, is the incomparable choice of a daughter of the human race to be the Mother of God.

And therefore let God above all be praised: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

May blessing and veneration be given to Mary, the model of the Church, as the “dwelling-place of the Most Holy Trinity.”

From the time when Jesus, dying on the Cross, said to John: “Behold, your mother”; from the time when “the disciple took her to his own home,” the mystery of the spiritual motherhood of Mary has been actualized boundlessly in history. Motherhood means caring for the life of the child. Since Mary is the mother of us all, her care for the life of man is universal. The care of a mother embraces her child totally. Mary’s motherhood has its beginning in her motherly care for Christ. In Christ, at the foot of the Cross, she accepted John, and in John she accepted all of us totally. Mary embraces us all with special solicitude in the Holy Spirit. For as we profess in our Creed, he is “the giver of life.” It is he who gives the fullness of life, open towards eternity.

Mary’s spiritual motherhood is therefore a sharing in the power of the Holy Spirit, of “the giver of life”. It is the humble service of her who says of herself: “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord” (Lk 1:38).

In the light of the mystery of Mary’s spiritual motherhood, let us seek to understand the extraordinary message, which began on 13 May 1917 to resound throughout the world from Fátima, continuing for five months until 13 October of the same year.

The Church has always taught and continues to proclaim that God’s revelation was brought to completion in Jesus Christ, who is the fullness of that revelation, and that “no new public revelation is to be expected before the glorious manifestation of our Lord.”<sup>1</sup> The Church evaluates and judges private revelations by the criterion of conformity with that single public Revelation.

If the Church has accepted the message of Fátima, it is above all because that message contains a truth and a call whose basic content is the truth and the call of the Gospel itself.

“Repent, and believe in the gospel” (Mk 1:15): these are the first words that the Messiah addressed to humanity. The message of Fátima is, in its basic nucleus, a call to conversion and repentance, as in the Gospel. This call was uttered at the beginning of the twentieth century, and it was thus addressed particularly to this present century. The Lady of the message seems to have read with special insight the „signs of the times”, the signs of our time.

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<sup>1</sup> Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, Section 4, The Holy See, [https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19651118\\_dei-verbum\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html).

The call to repentance is a motherly one, and at the same time it is strong and decisive. The love that “rejoices in the truth” (1 Cor 13:6) is capable of being clear-cut and firm. The call to repentance is linked, as always, with a call to prayer. In harmony with the tradition of many centuries, the Lady of the message indicates the *Rosary*, which can rightly be defined as “Mary’s prayer”: the prayer in which she feels particularly united with us. She herself prays with us. The rosary prayer embraces the problems of the Church, of the See of Saint Peter, the problems of the whole world. In it we also remember sinners, that they may be converted and saved, and the souls in Purgatory.

The words of the message were addressed to children aged from seven to ten. Children, like Bernadette of Lourdes, are particularly privileged in these apparitions of the Mother of God. Hence the fact that also her language is simple, within the limits of their understanding. The children of Fátima became partners in dialogue with the Lady of the message and collaborators with her. One of them is still living.

When Jesus on the Cross said: “Woman, behold, your son” (Jn 19:26), in a new way he opened his Mother’s Heart, the Immaculate Heart, and revealed to it the new dimensions and extent of the love to which she was called in the Holy Spirit by the power of the sacrifice of the Cross.

In the words of Fátima we seem to find this dimension of motherly love, whose range covers the whole of man’s path towards God; the path that leads through this world and that goes, through Purgatory, beyond this world. The solicitude of the Mother of the Savior is solicitude for the work of salvation: the work of her Son. It is solicitude for the salvation, the eternal salvation, of all. Now that sixty-five years have passed since that 13 May 1917, it is difficult to fail to notice how the range of this salvific love of the Mother embraces, in a particular way, our century.

In the light of a mother’s love we understand the whole message of the Lady of Fátima. The greatest obstacle to man’s journey towards God is sin, perseverance in sin, and, finally, denial of God. The deliberate blotting out of God from the world of human thought. The detachment from him of the whole of man’s earthly activity. The rejection of God by man.

In reality, the eternal salvation of man is only in God. Man’s rejection of God, if it becomes definitive, leads logically to God’s rejection of man (see Mt 7:23; 10:33), to damnation.

Can the Mother who with all the force of the love that she fosters in the Holy Spirit desires everyone’s salvation keep silence on what undermines the very bases of their salvation? No, she cannot.

And so, while the message of Our Lady of Fátima is a motherly one, it is also strong and decisive. It sounds severe. It sounds like John the Baptist

speaking on the banks of the Jordan. It invites to repentance. It gives a warning. It calls to prayer. It recommends the *Rosary*.

The message is addressed to every human being. The love of the Saviour’s Mother reaches every place touched by the work of salvation. Her care extends to every individual of our time, and to all the societies nations and peoples. Societies menaced by apostasy, threatened by moral degradation. The collapse of morality involves the collapse of societies.

On the Cross Christ said: “Woman, behold, your son!” With these words he opened in a new way his Mother’s heart. A little later, the Roman soldier’s spear pierced the side of the Crucified One. That pierced heart became a sign of the redemption achieved through the death of the Lamb of God.

The Immaculate Heart of Mary, opened with the words “Woman, behold, your son!”, is spiritually united with the heart of her Son opened by the soldier’s spear. Mary’s Heart was opened by the same love for man and for the world with which Christ loved man and the world, offering himself for them on the Cross, until the soldier’s spear struck that blow.

Consecrating the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary means drawing near, through the Mother’s intercession, to the very Fountain of life that sprang from Golgotha. This Fountain pours forth unceasingly redemption and grace. In it reparation is made continually for the sins of the world. It is a ceaseless source of new life and holiness.

Consecrating the world to the Immaculate Heart of the Mother means returning beneath the Cross of the Son. It means consecrating this world to the pierced Heart of the Saviour, bringing it back to the very source of its Redemption. Redemption is always greater than man’s sin and the “sin of the world.” The power of the Redemption is infinitely superior to the whole range of evil in man and the world.

The Heart of the Mother is aware of this, more than any other heart in the whole universe, visible and invisible.

And so she calls us. She not only calls us to be converted: she calls us to accept her motherly help to return to the source of Redemption.

Consecrating ourselves to Mary means accepting her help to offer ourselves and the whole of mankind to Him who is Holy, infinitely Holy; it means accepting her help by having recourse to her motherly Heart, which beneath the Cross was opened to love for every human being, for the whole world in order to offer the world, the individual human being, mankind as a whole, and all the nations to Him who is infinitely Holy. God’s holiness showed itself in the redemption of man, of the world, of the whole of mankind, and of the nations: a redemption brought about through the Sacrifice of the Cross. “For their sake I consecrate myself,” Jesus had said (Jn 17:19).

By the power of the redemption the world and man have been consecrated. They have been consecrated to Him who is infinitely Holy. They have been offered and entrusted to Love itself, merciful Love.

The Mother of Christ calls us, invites us to join with the Church of the living God in the consecration of the world, in this act of confiding by which the world, mankind as a whole, the nations, and each individual person are presented to the Eternal Father with the power of the Redemption won by Christ. They are offered in the Heart of the Redeemer which was pierced on the Cross.

The appeal of the Lady of the message of Fátima is so deeply rooted in the Gospel and the whole of Tradition that the Church feels that the message imposes a commitment on her.

She has responded through the Servant of God Pius XII (whose episcopal ordination took place precisely on 13 May 1917): he consecrated the human race and especially the Peoples of Russia to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Was not that consecration his response to the evangelical eloquence of the call of Fátima?

In its Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*<sup>2</sup>) and its Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*<sup>3</sup>) the Second Vatican Council amply illustrated the reasons for the link between the Church and the world of today. Furthermore, its teaching on Mary's special place in the mystery of Christ and the Church bore mature fruit in Paul VI's action in calling Mary Mother of the Church<sup>4</sup> and thus indicating more profoundly the nature of her union with the Church and of her care for the world, for mankind, for each human being, and for all the nations: what characterizes them is her motherhood.

This brought a further deepening of understanding of the meaning of the act of consecrating that the Church is called upon to perform with the help of the Heart of Christ's Mother and ours.

Today John Paul II, successor of Peter, continuer of the work of Pius, John, and Paul, and particular heir of the Second Vatican Council, presents himself before the Mother of the Son of God in her Shrine at Fátima. In what way does he come?

He presents himself, reading again with trepidation the motherly call to penance, to conversion, the ardent appeal of the Heart of Mary that resounded at

<sup>2</sup> See Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, The Holy See, [https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19641121\\_lumen-gentium\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html).

<sup>3</sup> See Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, The Holy See, [https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19651207\\_gaudium-et-spes\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html).

<sup>4</sup> See Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Signum Magnum*, The Holy See, [https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_exh\\_19670513\\_signum-magnum.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19670513_signum-magnum.html).

Fátima sixty-five years ago. Yes, he reads it again with trepidation in his heart, because he sees how many people and societies—how many Christians—have gone in the opposite direction to the one indicated in the message of Fátima. Sin has thus made itself firmly at home in the world, and denial of God has become widespread in the ideologies, ideas and plans of human beings.

But for this very reason the evangelical call to repentance and conversion, uttered in the Mother’s message, remains ever relevant. It is still more relevant than it was sixty-five years ago. It is still more urgent. And so it is to be the subject of next year’s Synod of Bishops, which we are already preparing for.

The successor of Peter presents himself here also as a witness to the immensity of human suffering, a witness to the almost apocalyptic menaces looking over the nations and mankind as a whole. He is trying to embrace these sufferings with his own weak human heart, as he places himself before the mystery of the Heart of the Mother, the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

In the name of these sufferings and with awareness of the evil that is spreading throughout the world and menacing the individual human being, the nations, and mankind as a whole, Peter’s successor presents himself here with greater faith in the redemption of the world, in the saving Love that is always stronger, always more powerful than any evil.

My heart is oppressed when I see the sin of the world and the whole range of menaces gathering like a dark cloud over mankind, but it also rejoices with hope as I once more do what has been done by my Predecessors, when they consecrated the world to the Heart of the Mother, when they consecrated especially to that Heart those peoples which particularly need to be consecrated. Doing this means consecrating the world to Him who is infinite Holiness. This Holiness means redemption. It means a love more powerful than evil. No „sin of the world” can ever overcome this Love.

Once more this act is being done. Mary’s appeal is not for just once. Her appeal must be taken up by generation after generation, in accordance with the ever new “signs of the times.” It must be unceasingly returned to. It must ever be taken up anew.

The author of the Apocalypse wrote: “And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband and I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them’” (Rev 21:2–3).

This is the faith by which the Church lives. This is the faith with which the People of God makes its journey.

“The dwelling of God is with men” on earth even now. In that dwelling is the Heart of the Bride and Mother, Mary, a Heart adorned with the jewel of her Immaculate Conception. The heart of the Bride and Mother which was opened

beneath the Cross by the word of her Son to a great new love for man and the world. The Heart of the Bride and Mother which is aware of all the sufferings of individuals and societies on earth.

The People of God is a pilgrim along the ways of this world in an eschatological direction. It is making its pilgrimage towards the eternal Jerusalem, towards “the dwelling of God with men.” God will there “wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away” (Rev 21:4).

But at present “the former things” are still in existence. They it is that constitute the temporal setting of our pilgrimage. For that reason we look towards “him who sits upon the throne and says, ‘Behold, I make all things new’” (Rev 21:5).

And together with the Evangelist and Apostle we try to see with the eyes of faith “the new heaven and the new earth” (Rev 21:1); for the first heaven and the first earth have passed away.

But “the first heaven and the first earth” still exist about us and within us. We cannot ignore it. But this enables us to recognize what an immense grace was granted to us human beings when, in the midst of our pilgrimage, there shone forth on the horizon of the faith of our times this “great portent, a woman” (Rev 12:1).

Yes, truly we can repeat: “O daughter, you are blessed by the Most High God above all women on earth... walking in the straight path before our God, you have avenged our ruin.”

Truly indeed, you are blessed.

Yes, here and throughout the Church, in the heart of every individual and in the world as a whole, may you be blessed, O Mary, our sweet Mother.