

The day the sun danced

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

Oct. 12, 2017

Fatima Holy Hour – Cathedral
Cathedral of St. Mary
Fargo, ND

One hundred years ago today, a miracle occurred and was witnessed by over 70,000 people. Before the eyes of a great crowd in a little village of Portugal, the sky grew dark, and then the sun burst through the clouds, dancing and spinning across the sky. It shed colored light across the landscape. Tens of thousands of people reported seeing the same thing. A newspaper reported that “the sun trembled, the sun made unusual movements, defying the laws of the cosmos, and according to the typical expression of the peasants, the sun danced.”

This event was the culmination of the wondrous visits of Mary to three small children in Fatima. For months she had appeared to them, urging them to pray the rosary for peace, to do penance and to make reparation for sinners. She had shown them the terrors of hell, but she also reassured them that her Immaculate Heart would triumph in the end, which really means that Jesus, her Son, would triumph. And she promised them a great sign that would prove the truth of her message. Nearly a century after these apparitions, Pope St. John Paul II said that the most important message of Fatima is that we should pray to the Blessed Mother to defeat the evil of this world. “Pray, pray, and ask for nothing else,” he said. Put everything in the hands of the Mother of God.”

The appearance of the Blessed Mother at Fatima was a grace for the whole world and the most important Marian apparition of our era. The message is simply this: that the whole world should turn from sin, and pray for the grace of salvation in Jesus Christ, especially through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary. This message is the message of the Gospel, and a message the world needs today, more than ever. It is a message of conversion, penance, and peace.

This evening we are praying in adoration before Christ in the Blessed Sacrament of the Eucharist. And there can be no doubt that Mary is with us, joining us in our adoration of her Son. She is at our side, taking us by the hand, showing us the face of Jesus, drawing our attention to him at this very moment, but also in every moment of our lives. Throughout his life on earth, Mary gazed upon Jesus, seeing in him not just her Son, but God’s Son.

In my mind’s eye, two images of Mary stand out. First we see her bending over the infant Jesus in the manger, just gazing in wonder at this child who came to her in a moment of grace, who was born from her flesh. There he was, the One who would be the Savior of the world! And then we see her standing at the foot of the cross, this time looking up with compassion to the One she had carried in her womb, held in her arms, cared for as a boy, and loved as a man. In both cases, we see the loving gaze of Mary on the two pillars of our faith: Jesus the Incarnate Word, and Jesus the Redeemer. Whenever we approach Mary, she leads us to the great mystery of Jesus, and she shows us in Jesus the depth of God’s love for his people.

We come together on this specific day because of a miracle, a remarkable sign of God's power and Mary's motherly care for her children. But I would suggest that an even greater miracle occurs every time one of God's children turns away from sin and is restored to his grace. When one of us repents of sin, when we welcome the Lord Jesus into our lives, when his mercy fills our souls with his grace, we experience an even greater miracle than the one that happened at Fatima.

Our Lady appeared to the children at Fatima to promise them and us that Christ can bring peace to the world, and peace to every single heart. She begged us to pray for that peace, and to offer up every sacrifice for the conversion of the world. As we remember her appearance at Fatima, let us pray for peace through the intercession of her Immaculate Heart.

In 1984, Pope John Paul consecrated the entire world to Our Lady of Fatima, and he urged all people to entrust their lives to her intercession. In 2013, Pope Francis renewed that same consecration. And last May 13th, we consecrated the Diocese of Fargo and all its people to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, that heart that is perfectly united to the heart of Christ. We go to Jesus through Mary because she is his mother, and her prayers are especially powerful. We go to Jesus with Mary, because she is always near him. We need her prayers for the world, and we need her prayers for ourselves and our families. By placing ourselves under the holy protection of Mary, we cannot help but draw closer to the Heart of Jesus her Son. No one was closer to Jesus than Mary, and by uniting ourselves in spirit to her, we share more fully in the intimacy that she enjoys with him.

May Our Lady of Fatima intercede for all of us. May we repent of our sins, pray for the defeat of every kind of evil, and entrust ourselves and our families to the powerful prayers of the Mother of God, who made the sun dance across the sky. May she lead us always to her Son, Jesus.