

MARY, MODEL OF FAITH, HOPE AND CHARITY FOR THE THIRD MILLENNIUM

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Our Blessed Mother promised us in Fatima that at the end of the great spiritual battle we would have to live through, Her Immaculate Heart would triumph (July 13th, 1917, Third Apparition). The Triumph of Her Immaculate Heart is the victory of grace over sin, holiness over corruption. But until this spiritual victory takes place, we are still in the middle of the battle; we are still in the decisive moments in which life or death is being chosen. This is why we could say that we are in times of suffering, persecution and tribulation: "The Church of the first millennium was born of the blood of the martyrs..At the end of the second millennium, the Church has once again become a Church of martyrs" (John Paul II, *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 37). This martyrdom and suffering is being experienced today in different forms: in the body or in the heart. It is the perception of many that this is a time of Calvary and of Passion for the Mystical Body of Christ, the Church. No one can deny the fact that suffering, sin, and a loss of faith and morals have touched, in some way, their families or friends. This is the hour of the Cross.



Our Blessed Mother was standing at the foot of the Cross, uniting Her heart to the sufferings of the Heart of Jesus. It is because of this union that Mary's Heart was mystically pierced by the same sword that pierced Jesus' Heart. This was the most painful time for Our Lady; yet the Scriptures say that Mary was standing by the Cross.

Standing is a posture which represents the inner realities of Mary's Heart. By standing at the foot of the Cross, Mary revealed the strength and integrity of Her Heart, the undivided love for God and for humanity, and the faithfulness to Her mission. Standing at the foot of the Cross, She showed us that Her Heart, being immaculate and never touched by either darkness or sin, could not even be touched by evil in the darkest and most painful hour: the Passion and death of Her Son.

Mary did not allow the consequences of the great evil around Her to enter into Her Heart, even though suffering did enter it through a piercing by a sword. Mary kept Her interior freedom as a child of God because She did not allow Herself to be overcome by fear, despair or hatred. For as the second Letter of Peter says, "a person is a slave of whatever overcomes him" (2:19). Mary was never subjected to darkness; She was always - as She herself proclaimed - a servant of the Lord and His plan (cf. Lk 1:38). In the encyclical of Pope John Paul II, *Mother of the Redeemer (Redemptoris Mater*, hereafter *RM*), we read, "at the side of Her Son, she is the most perfect image of freedom and of the liberation of humanity and of the universe" (no.37).

Because Mary's Heart was untouched by despair, hatred, or doubt in the darkest of hours, and because She in fact lived the opposite virtues, She now can call us to imitate those virtues in our own difficulties and sufferings. She not only calls us, but She also imparts the graces that we need to be faithful and to respond with holiness to all adversities and difficulties we may experience personally, or as families and societies, in the world and in the Church.

Three pillars sustained Mary's Heart at the foot of the Cross: Her unshakeable faith, Her unflinching hope, and Her profound sacrificial love. If throughout Mary's life we see these three virtues acting powerfully in Her because of Her unique privileges, it is on Calvary that we contemplate how far these virtues can move our hearts to be faithful to Christ in the most difficult moments. If we nourish these virtues we will be capable of doing what our Mother did at Calvary: stand at the foot of the Cross.

From Mary we learn to live in faith, hope and love at the foot of our own crosses. She not only teaches us to stand firm in the midst of the storm by the power of these three virtues, but She comes to us to defend us with Her maternal presence and lead us through the desert of tribulation. Just as the column of cloud during the day and the column of fire during the night preceded the Israelites in the desert to show them the way and never left its place in front of the people (cf. Ex 13, 21-22), Our Lady, as the "New Column" described in the dream of St. John Bosco, goes before us in these times of confusion and battle, leading us safely to the Heart of Her Son and to His Church.

The Holy Father tells us in *Tertio Millennio Adveniente (TMA)*, "The greatest homage which all the Churches can give to Christ on the threshold of the third millennium will be to manifest the Redeemer's all-powerful presence through the fruits of faith, hope and charity" (no. 37).

Why are these three virtues so crucial at the threshold of the third millennium? Because the difficult times in which we live are the result of three crises: a crisis of faith, a crisis of hope and a crisis of love. These three crises were prophesied by Our Lady in Fatima, and we know they come from the direct influence of Satan in the world and in hearts. But in Fatima, Our Lady also gave us the remedy.

I. The Crisis of Faith

In Fatima, Our Lady spoke of “errors” being spread all over the world. In a particular way She spoke of the errors spread by Russia. What is the greatest error spread by Russia? – Atheism, that is, the denial of God and the denial of an absolute truth.

Faith is assenting to the Word of God, to his revelation: “To believe means to abandon oneself to the truth of the word of the living God, knowing and humbly recognizing how unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways” (*RM*, 14).

We have a crisis of faith, because there is a lack of obedience to God who has revealed Himself and also to the Truth He has given to us. *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* states, “It cannot be denied that, for many Christians, the spiritual life is passing through a time of uncertainty which affects not only their moral life but also their life of prayer and the theological correctness of their faith. Faith, already put to the test by the challenges of our times, is sometimes disoriented by erroneous theological views, the spread of which is increased by the crisis of obedience to the Church’s Magisterium” (no. 36).

The Holy Father is telling us that our faith is being put to the test in these times because error has entered into all the areas of our lives: spirituality, morality and doctrine. Because of this crisis of faith, minds have been darkened and consciences are disoriented and confused. Sin is no longer called by its name, and that is why we see much chaos, intellectual pride, rebelliousness, searching for truth outside of God, and defining truth according to one’s own personal interpretations. We also have a fascination with the occult and the New Age movement. All of these confusions can be sometimes observed, unfortunately, even in religious circles.

In this crisis of faith Our Lady is our sure refuge. For in Her Immaculate Heart, so whole and pure, Revelation was never diluted or reduced to accommodate to Her own will and pleasures. In *Redemptoris Mater* we read, “Her exceptional pilgrimage of faith represents a constant point of reference for the Church, for individuals and for communities, for peoples and nations and, in a sense, for all humanity” (no.6).

Because of Her faith, the Word – to whom She always listened, loved, obeyed and reverently kept in Her Heart – was made flesh in Her, and through Her was given to the world. She is calling us to listen to and obey what Christ has said and continues to say through the Church in a very unique way through the Holy Father and the Magisterium.

It is Her faith that Mary wants to share with Her children; for as *Mother of the Redeemer* says, “Mary’s faith...ever remains in the Church’s heart...All [those in the Church]...in a sense share in Mary’s faith” (no.27). This is what Mary did at Cana; She believed in the power of Her Son to change the water into wine, and She told the servants to “do whatever he tells you” (Jn 2:5). Our Lady’s interventions are always a call to grow in faith, to hear and to obey what we have heard. The Scriptures say that because of this miracle at Cana, the “disciples began to believe in Him” (Jn 2:11). Her mission in our crisis of faith is, therefore, to lead us to the true faith: faith in Jesus Her Son.

Mary is telling us today to believe in the truth of the Word of God and to trust in the power behind each of His commandments and mandates. Spokeswoman of Her Son’s will, She wants us to understand that the narrow path is the one that leads us to life and brings true happiness; the path of salvation is narrow for our flesh but true life for our souls.

The errors spreading in our time are darkness to our souls and our lives, for what we believe or do not believe affects our behavior and decisions. Faith in God’s revelation is light to our hearts and minds. Our minds, enlightened by truth, move our wills to obey the Word of God, and loving and obeying His will is the true fulfillment of the human being. Our Lady says, “Do [act] whatever He tells you.” This is a call to faith, which is assenting to and obeying revelation.

This crisis of faith has become the great flood which threatens the spiritual survival of humanity. That is why we need to enter into the Immaculate Heart, the “new Noah’s Ark,” in which our faith will be preserved. Genesis says “that the swelling waters increased greatly, but the ark floated on the surface of the waters...Only Noah and those with him in the ark were left” (7:18, 23). Mary, as the “New Ark,” is our refuge and those who are “in the ark” will be preserved from the “swelling waters” of our modern times.

II. Crisis of Hope

“Hope is the theological virtue by which we desire the kingdom of heaven and eternal life as our happiness, placing our trust in Christ’s promises and relying not on our own strength, but on the help of the grace of the Holy Spirit” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, hereafter *CCC*, 1817).

In Fatima, Our Lady spoke not only about the crisis of faith, but about the consequent crisis of hope. If there is a denial of the existence of God and His truth, there certainly will be a denial of His promises of eternal life and the eternal consequences for those who live in grace or live in sin. This is why She revealed to the children, even in the first apparition, the realities of heaven and its eternal rewards: joy, love and light. She also spoke of purgatory and its sufferings. In the third apparition, She showed them hell and the pains and despair experienced there - in other words, its eternal punishments.

The greatest manifestation of this crisis of hope is the minimizing or even a forgetting of the realities of eternal life, leading many to live only for the pleasures of this world; to develop a materialistic way of life; to seek self-fulfillment only in the things of this world; and to avoid at all cost any kind of suffering since happiness here has become almost an idol and obsession. In this excessive search for happiness in this world, and in the avoidance of any kind of suffering, we encounter the greatest sins of our times: abortion, euthanasia, sexual immorality, suicide, selfishness, greed, gluttony, complacency and addictions.

Christ teaches us in the Gospels that our true fulfillment is in loving, which requires our self-denial and the taking up of our cross and following the Lord - in other words, the emptying of ourselves of all that is passing and the seeking of the things of the Kingdom before anything else. In the Beatitudes (a word that means *the source of happiness*), the Lord showed us that those who suffer persecution and deny themselves to suffer for truth, justice, purity, peace, humility, poverty, mercy are the ones that will enter the Kingdom of heaven and have a great reward.

The Beatitudes are exhortations totally opposed to the invitations of this world. The world invites us to seek self-pleasure, to think only of our own interests, and to find self-realization in doing what we please regardless of the harm it may bring to our souls and to the lives of others. The Beatitudes invite us and teach us the way to obtain abundant life now and in eternity.

Our Lady throughout Her apparitions is calling us to pay attention to eternal realities. She often has taken visionaries to see or experience heaven, purgatory and hell. She suffers because of the many souls that are in mortal sin and losing their souls. But She is also concerned for those of us that may not be in mortal sin but that are not putting forth the effort and mortification necessary to reach the holiness required for heaven; for nothing impure can be in the presence of God (cf. Rev 21:27). She is calling us to take Her messages seriously, and Her most serious message is conversion, prayer and penance. Only through a life of prayer and penance will we die to all our sins and imperfections and acquire virtue and holiness.

Let us not be afraid to suffer what is needed for our purification, for St. Paul says, "So we do not lose heart... for this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, because we look not to the things that are visible but to the things that are invisible; for what is seen is transitory, but what is unseen is eternal" (cf. 2 Cor 4:16-18).

III. Crisis of love

Our Lady in Fatima called us to love and sacrifice for God and others. She warned us of a great crisis of love that was coming to humanity. This crisis can be observed in the world today by an extreme and almost diabolical selfishness. All the structures of society are teaching humanity to think only of themselves and their own interests, creating what I consider to be the greatest idol of our times: ourselves.

Mary, who lived only to love God and others - and in Her perfect association of love with Her Son, offered Her life as a living sacrifice for the redemption of humanity - is calling us to return to love, sacrifice and self-giving. For "in her heart there is no shade of selfishness: she desires nothing for herself except God's glory and human salvation" (John Paul II, Angelus, Dec. 8th, 1997, no.2).

She asked the children in Fatima, "Are you willing to offer yourselves to God and to bear the sufferings He wills to send you as an act of reparation for the sins by which He is offended and for the conversion of sinners?" (May 13th, 1917). She called them to offer their lives as a sacrifice of reparation to God and also for the conversion of sinners - a call they generously embraced by making many sacrifices and accepting joyfully all kinds of sufferings.

Our Mother is calling us to do any and all the sacrifices required to bring about our conversion and the conversion of others. She is calling us to pray and sacrifice in reparation to the Heart of Jesus to bring His Mercy into the world. She is also inviting us, just as She did, to cooperate, through our sufferings, in the redemption of humanity and to cooperate in bringing about the plan of God in this historic moment. The great drama of our lives is whether or not we are open to having our hearts pierced in union with Christ, like Mary. Are we open to the purifying grace of God that comes many times through suffering?...Or do we close the door and run away from pain, sacrifice, renunciation, allowing ourselves to be overcome by resentment, selfishness, comfort, self-interest and the frivolity of our culture? In our culture, suffering is viewed as something that needs to be avoided at all costs. However, our faith teaches us the power of our sufferings and penances united to the Cross of Christ: a power that brings about salvation and redemption (Col 1:24: "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ on behalf of his body, which is the church.").

Our Lady said, "Pray, pray very much and make sacrifices; for many souls go to Hell because there are none to sacrifice themselves and to pray for them" (Aug 13th, 1917). This is a call to true charity - to suffer, to sacrifice and to pray out of love for sinners, until they are brought back as prodigal sons and daughters into the House of the Father.

Today, the word "love" has been very much distorted. Many teach that love is the acceptance of sin as an expression of mercy and compassion. True compassion is suffering and sacrificing for sinners until they renounce their sins. True love is not to abandon others in their sins, but to respectfully show them the truth, the truth that will set them free. True love is not to tell them it is "OK" to be in sin or that it is part of their nature and personality. True love and compassion is to be convinced of their dignity as children of God; therefore, their greatest dignity is to be free of sin.

In Fatima, Our Lady also called us to offer our lives in reparation to the Hearts of Jesus and Mary for the sins which offend them. It is a calling of love for the Two Hearts. The Angel told the children, "Pray, pray very much! The most holy Hearts of Jesus and Mary have designs of Mercy on you. Offer prayers and sacrifices constantly to the Most High. Make everything you can a sacrifice, and offer it to God as an act of reparation for the sins by which He is offended, and in supplication for the conversion of sinners" (Spring of 1916, First Apparition).

Later the Angel taught them the great prayer of reparation: "My God, I believe, I adore, I hope, and I love thee. I ask pardon of you for those who do not believe, do not adore, do not hope and do not love you" (ibid). Reparation is to offer our lives in love and holiness to console the Hearts of Jesus and Mary and to repair with our love and self-giving the sins of the whole world. "Love covers a multitude of sins" (1 Pt 4:8). In these messages we are called to love God above all, and to love others with a sacrificial love.

The Remedies

Our Lady, after speaking of the three crises of faith, hope and love gave us three remedies: FIDELITY TO THE HOLY FATHER, THE HOLY ROSARY, AND CONSECRATION TO HER IMMACULATE HEART.

Fidelity to the Holy Father

Our Holy Father, as successor of Peter, is the visible head of the Church and the Vicar of Christ. To him, the keys of the kingdom have been given (cf. Mt 16:19). Of Peter, Jesus said, "Upon this rock I will build my Church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Mt 16:18-19). What power has been given to the Vicar of Christ!

Our Holy Father is the voice of Christ to us - not only to the Church but also to the world. He who listens to him, listens to Christ. He who rejects his teachings, rejects the teaching of Christ (Lk 10:16). Why should we look for the truth in any other place but the voice of the Holy Father and the Magisterium of the Church? We read in the Gospel of Luke that the Lord was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret while the crowds were listening to the word of God. Jesus saw two boats there alongside the lake. He got into the boat belonging to Simon and from there he taught the crowds (5:1-4). The Lord will only teach from the boat of Peter. In the dream of St. John Bosco, the Holy Father was the one that led the Church, symbolized by a boat, in the midst of a great storm and battle; he steered the boat between two pillars, the Eucharist and Our Lady. When he tied the boat of the Church to the pillars, suddenly, the storm ceased.

Why the Rosary

When the Holy Father in Fatima on May 13th, 1982 was asked about the third secret, he replied, "Would you like me to tell you a secret? It is simple, and after all, it is not a secret. Pray, pray, pray. Say the Rosary every day."

He said three times to pray, just as our Lady has been saying in other recent apparitions. We can conclude that maybe the third secret of Fatima described these three crises in a more specific way and that the Holy Father has called us to pray the Rosary every day.

By praying and meditating on the Joyful Mysteries, we repair for the crisis of faith and for atheism by meditating upon Mary's faith. But we are also called - and we receive the graces to do so - to grow in the virtue of faith, which is an assent to God's revelation; in this way we cooperate, with our obedience and total dedication, to His plan for our lives and for humanity.

By praying and meditating on the Sorrowful Mysteries, we repair for the crisis of love and for the pervading selfishness in the hearts of men. By contemplating the sufferings of our Lord and the unique participation of Mary in those sufferings for our salvation, we are called - and receive the graces to do so - to grow in heroic charity, which is the giving of ourselves unconditionally, whatever the cost, for the glory of God and for the good of others.

By praying and meditating on the Glorious Mysteries, we repair for the crisis of hope and for the materialistic attitude of contemporary men. By contemplating the eternal rewards promised for our fidelity to the will of God, even in the midst of suffering, we are called - and receive the graces to do so - to grow in "hope against all hope," which is a trusting in the love and power of God that acts in all our present situations with the view of our eternal salvation always in mind.

Consecration to the Immaculate Heart

I said in the beginning that Mary's Heart is the "New Ark" where we are safe from the present flood of atheism, materialism and egotism. We are called to enter into the Ark by consecrating ourselves to Her Immaculate Heart. Once we are totally given to Her, we allow Her to be our Mother, teacher and guide and allow Her virtues of faith, hope and charity to mold and transform our hearts.

The Holy Father John Paul II said in Fatima in 1982, "My heart is oppressed when I see the sin of the world and the whole range of dangers that gather like dark clouds over mankind; but it also rejoices with hope because I am consecrating the world to the Heart of the Mother. 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" (cf. Homily, May 13th, no.8).

The Holy Father has placed his confidence in the power given by God to Mary to bring about the victories needed by the Church and the world: "If victory comes it will be brought by Mary. Christ will conquer through her, because He wants the Church's victories now and in the future to be linked to her" (John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, p. 221).

Let us ask Our Lady to intervene and enter into our hearts and those of all humanity, giving us Her virtues of faith, hope and charity. For as the Holy Father John Paul II exhorted us in *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, "The Jubilee celebration should confirm the Christians of today in their faith in God who has revealed himself in Christ, sustain their hope which reaches out in expectation of eternal life, and rekindle their charity in active service to their brothers and sisters" (no.31).

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