

## The Design of God with the Little Shepherds of Fatima

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“I give praise to you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned you have revealed them to the childlike. Yes, Father, such has been your gracious will.” (Mt. 11:25-26). With these words of Sacred Scripture, St. John Paul II began his homily at the beatification of the shepherd children visionaries of the apparitions of Our Lady of Fatima, on May 13 of the year 2000, in front of 3 million people.

In 1916, during the second apparition of the angel to the little shepherds, he told them, “Pray! Pray very much! The Hearts of Jesus and Mary have designs of Mercy for you.” God the Father did not only want to open the Kingdom to the little ones, but through Marian apparitions we see how he wanted to choose the little ones to fulfill His designs of mercy for different historical moments, even the moments of the most serious threats and challenges. It was the divine design that in 1917, the Blessed Virgin came from Heaven in search of some little shepherds from a small village in Portugal, to make them a clear call to prayer, penance, sacrifice, offering, consecration and to give themselves in heroic love for the salvation of sinners. With a Mother’s heart, she spoke to their little hearts and revealed to them the pain she experienced because of the offenses committed against the Heart of Her Son; she spoke to them about sinners and the consequences of choosing a life far from God, His love, and His commandments. She showed them hell through a painful vision, which deeply impacted each of them, especially Jacinta. She revealed to them Her Immaculate Heart as a refuge and sure path to God. She invited them to offer themselves as victims of reparation and to embrace all the sufferings that the Lord would send for the conversion of sinners. Our Lady announced to them times of tribulation for the Church and the world; she spoke to them of wars, persecutions against the Church; she showed them the suffering of a Pope whom they even saw with his white cassock stained with blood as well as the danger that was so grave that it threatened the eternal as well as the earthly destiny of humanity.



Repeating the words of Christ in the Gospel of St. Matthew, I also want to give thanks to the Father for having revealed all of this to the little shepherds of Fatima; today Saints Jacinta and Francisco, and the Servant of God Lucia. These children embraced with great love and seriousness the words of Our Lady, and because of this, St. John Paul II wanted to go to Fatima and beatify them there, on May 13, 2000 during the Jubilee Year. How many tears did we see on the face of our beloved St. John Paul. We lived a historic moment; we were before one of the most important apparitions of our times and the one who beatified those children was the Pope who, with his cassock soaked in blood on May 13, 1981, offered his life to Jesus through Mary for the good of the Church. Thanks to the offerings of these little shepherds, and especially Jacinta who offered herself for the protection of “that Pope”, John Paul could cry out, “Thank you, Jacinta, for saving my life with your suffering. Thank you, Mother, Our Lady of Fatima, because one hand shot the bullet and yours diverted it.” St. John Paul II began the Jubilee Year canonizing St. Faustina, the Apostle of Divine Mercy of the Heart of Christ, and the beatification of the little shepherds, called to enter into the designs of mercy that the Two Hearts have for humanity. The 21<sup>st</sup> century would need apostles of the Two Hearts, would need many who are consecrated to Their Hearts who would be the light of the world and who would build a new civilization of love and life in a world in so much turmoil. That is why he said: **“With this beatification the Church wishes to put on the candelabrum these two candles which God lit to illumine humanity in its dark and anxious hours.”**

The Church presents to us in these dark hours, two candles who illumine our journey in this historic moment: Saints Francisco and Jacinta. Why? Because both disposed themselves completely to fulfill the designs of the Two Hearts, designs of mercy that would have to be brought about with their prayer, the prayer of the Holy Rosary, their penances and sacrifices, their high degree of generosity and with their life of heroic charity, especially towards those most in need of mercy. Yes, they lived a high degree of heroism as children, but it was authentic heroism, St. John Paul II told us.

What were the designs of mercy that the little shepherds were called to participate in?

The Lord gave Francisco the grace to deeply understand how sad the Immaculate Heart of Mary was because of the offenses committed against the Lord. The experience of Our Lady telling them: “Do you want to offer yourselves in reparation for the signs with which God is so offended?” forever marked his heart. One day, that Francisco was very quiet and reserved, Lucia asked him what had happened and he answered that he was thinking that God was very sad because of so many sins. Francisco continued, “If I could console Him!” This is how he became the consoler of the Eucharistic Heart. He spent long hours in adoration and contemplation of Jesus in the Eucharist, whom he called “hidden Jesus.” For him, the prayer that the angel had taught them became his life: “My God, I believe, I adore, I trust, and I love Thee. I beg pardon for those who do not believe, do not adore, do not trust, and do not love Thee.” So Francisco gave himself to a very intense spiritual life of assiduous and fervent prayer that took him to a true mystical communion with the Lord, and a progressive purification of spirit through the renunciation of what he liked, including games. A radical transformation took place in him. He bore the greatest sufferings of the sickness that would bring about his death without uttering a single complaint.

The vision of hell and the destiny of souls that were in mortal sin moved Jacinta so much that for her there were not enough sacrifices to help poor sinners. Animated by an ardent charity for these souls, she gave herself as a victim soul for them. The words of Our Lady: “Do you want to offer yourselves to God and accept all the sufferings that He desires to send you in reparation for the sins by which He is offended and to implore for the conversion of sinners?” marked her heart forever and to the point that she told Lucia during the last stages of her painful illness: “Tell them (Jesus and Mary) that I am disposed to suffer everything they desire so as to convert sinners.” Jacinta also had another great desire: to pray and sacrifice herself for the Holy Father, especially for that “bishop dressed in white” whom she had seen suffer in the vision.

In Fatima, the Blessed Virgin chose three little shepherds to participate in the designs of mercy of the Hearts of Jesus and Mary. Children, who with their “yes”, obtained abundant graces for the Church and humanity in an era of so many shadows and tribulations. These children, totally given to the hands of Our Lady, consecrated to Her Immaculate Heart, allowing themselves to be formed by Her and receiving the whole maternal mission of Our Lady, became efficacious instruments to draw down mercy and conversion for souls.

What a great lesson Sts. Francisco and Jacinta give us today! **We must be like children to enter the Kingdom of Heaven and to cooperate with the establishment of the Reign of the Two Hearts.** We have to be like children to dispose ourselves with humility and obedience to allow ourselves to be guided by Our Lady and to listen to the designs of the Heart of Christ through Her Immaculate Heart. We have to be little, very little, to participate in the designs of mercy that the Hearts of Jesus and Mary have for us. We have to have pure and simple hearts to learn to “Contemplate like Francisco and Love like Jacinta” (Theme of their Beatification and Canonization, which was celebrated by Pope Francis also in Fatima during the centenary of the apparitions.)

May the Hearts of Jesus and Mary reveal to us Their designs of love and mercy. May we be able to, with generous and obedient hearts, like that of St. Francisco and St. Jacinta, respond to such a sublime call and offer our lives for the fulfillment of those designs, especially in such turbulent times which are so uncertain and dangerous for humanity. May they, who died from a pandemic, intercede so that the virus that threatens us today may cease, but above all may they intercede for the virus’ that threaten our souls and our eternal salvation.

**May the Two Hearts Reign!!**