

6th Sunday of Eastertide (A)

14th May 2023

‘Our Lady of Fatima & Marian devotion in May’

Acts 8: Philip in Samaria; Peter & John confirm with HSp.

Ps 32: *I will tell what He did for my soul*

1Pt 3: *In the Spirit He was raised to life ...*

Jn 14: 15–21: *the Father will give you another Advocate, ... that Spirit of Truth ...*

As little children in Primary School, we would often sing, in this month of May: “May is the month of Mary / Month we all love so well / Mary is God’s own Mother / Gladly her praise we tell / Mary is beautiful, Mary is fair / Gladly we praise her in song and in prayer.” It was a simple set of words, but it had a nice tune, and we loved to sing it. In May it is right that we make devotion to the Mother of God a particular focus. The rosary, especially, can form a lovely part of that May devotion: a simple yet powerful prayer, weaving together inextricably the salvation won by Christ and the role of His holy Mother whose faith meant she was there from the Annunciation, ... to the Crucifixion, ... to Pentecost ... and to her being Queen of Heaven.

The 5 [Glorious Mysteries of the Rosary](#) — which we are praying, one by one before Sunday Mass this month — are a great way of bringing together this devotion to Our

Lady, and celebrating the Easter season: the Resurrection, and then the Ascension of Jesus; the Coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost; then, later, the Assumption of Our Lady into heaven, and her being crowned Queen of Heaven. *Because:* Our Lady was there in Jerusalem at the time of Our Lord’s crucifixion and resurrection; she was with the apostolic community when they received that outpouring of the Spirit from on high; and then at the end of her earthly life she immediately shared in the fruits of Our Lord’s resurrection and ascension, being borne to heaven body & soul. Our Lady is, therefore, our most sure guide to what it means as a human being to share fully in life (Easter/Resurrection life) in Christ.

In the Gospel passage set for this 6th Sunday of Easter, Jesus alludes both to His withdrawing at the Ascension and to His promise of Pentecost. He says to us (Jn 14): “*I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in*

me, and I in you.” (vv. 18–20). Maybe it helps to think of this, firstly, as addressed to Mary herself: “... *I will come to you. Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me.*” Yes, Mary belongs, before any of us, in the joys of heavenly bliss, the life of the resurrection, for her love and commitment to Christ were perfect. Her being in heaven demonstrates just what Our Lord would intend for all humanity if we also commit ourselves to Christ. Praying the Rosary — especially at this time of year the Glorious Mysteries — reminds us that with Our Lady’s help, we can align ourselves with God’s intended holy destiny for us. By meditating on the incomparable event of the Resurrection; by gazing at Jesus ascended back to the Father; by receiving and asking again and again for the Holy Spirit’s anointing with spiritual gifts; by longing for heaven ourselves; by invoking the prayers of the communion of saints, and in particular the Queen of all Saints, we are better focussed on what a human life is really all about. This is the power of the rosary, it situates our individual little lives in the great

picture that God has already painted, and which is a masterpiece, if only we knew it! Mary’s life, culminating in her being assumed into heaven to share fully in the Resurrection, shows us that this is true ... True for her already, and therefore can be true one day for us too. It is not make-believe, myth or fairytale! Our Lord’s sacrifice, victory, and return to the Father have showered blessings from on high, and Mary shows that this is so. When she has offered messages in various visions and apparitions down the centuries, she has always reinforced the Christian message of absolute commitment to Her divine Son — Mary always, and only ever, leads us to greater faith and closeness to Our Lord.

Yesterday it was the special Marian feast of [Our Lady of Fatima](#). 106 years ago — May 13th 1917 — at the height of WW I, and with the Russian communist revolution in the offing, she appeared to three lowly shepherd children under 10 yrs old on a remote Portugal hillside. Her robust, even stark, message, on the 13th day of each of 6 consecutive months to these 3 little children

then is her message to all humanity always: *Prayer, ... Penance, ... Peace ...*

I've only been once to Fatima; it was a few days after the centenary, in May 2017, and I was leading a pilgrimage from local parishes. I was deeply touched by the simplicity and prayerfulness of the place, and the very gentle and genuine welcome offered to pilgrims by the people of Fatima. I am delighted, then, that our World Youth Day pilgrimage — those of us with the Westminster diocesan group — is going to be staying in Fatima for the duration of WYD, rather than in Lisbon itself. It will also give us a chance to participate in the shrine devotions on one evening and to absorb some spirituality of Fatima.

A few of us watched a dramatization about the Fatima visionaries and the apparitions of Our Lady to them, the other evening. What struck me most? Well, one was the *seriousness* of the message: Our Lady did not hold back on the life-or-death nature of our spiritual well-being, our striving for heaven and avoiding hell. And then, another thing: the sheer *courage* of the children in their

keeping faith with what they had seen and heard from Our Lady: how *little* were these children! — just 9, 8 & 6 yrs old. And yet, with simplicity, innocence, and bravery in the face of mortal threats from the local-government authorities, they continued to state only that which they had truly experienced, and they continued to withhold that which they has been asked to keep secret. Surely, a miracle indeed — and a mark of the veracity of the heavenly apparition — that such youth showed such bravery and faithfulness. And to see these children's love for Our Lady and the deep prayer that imbued their souls is a great reminder that we should be imitating them. They were shepherd children in a remote, rural corner of 1917 Portugal; we are university students, graduates, chaplains in some of the great universities of London ... and yet, what we have in common should be greater than that which separates us, namely the depth of our Catholic faith. As we come towards the heart of this month of May, let's allow this feast of Our Lady of Fatima to give focus to our Marian prayer — let's offer Mary this gift of *praying* the

rosary, daily if possible; let's accept the *penances* that come our way, with patience, as a generous offering of our hearts; and let's strive for *peace*, beginning with those we live with. We implore Mary's prayers to boost our own feeble prayers, and keep us faithful to Christ, and to help us imitate the beauty of soul shown by little Lucia, Francisco & Jacinta. And, as we remember the timing of Our Lady's apparitions in 1917 amidst war and revolution, and her key message with regard to the conversion of Russia, we pray in a very keen way for a cessation of the current aggression against the Ukraine. Maybe it was no coincidence that the Ukrainian President visited the Pope on 13th May, yesterday; I'm sure the Holy Father will have prayed dearly, as we all should, that peace come upon this desperately destructive situation.

Let me end in the words of Sister Lucia, from her memoirs, as she recalled the messages of Our Blessed Lady, and may we take these invitations to heart as we keep this month of May:

i. *"Are you willing to offer yourselves to God and bear*

all the sufferings He wills to send you, as an act of reparation for the sins by which He is offended, and of supplication for the conversion of sinners?"
(May)

ii. *"Pray the Rosary every day, in order to obtain peace for the world, and an end of the war."* (May)

iii. *"... my daughter, are you suffering a great deal? Don't lose heart. I will never forsake you. My Immaculate Heart will be your refuge and the way that will lead you to God."* (June)

iv. *"You have seen hell where the souls of poor sinners go. To save them, God wishes to establish in the world devotion to my Immaculate Heart. If what I say to you is done, many souls will be saved and there will be peace. ... In the end, my Immaculate Heart will triumph."* (July)

v. And finally, as she taught the children to say, as a part of the Rosary: *"Oh Jesus, forgive us our sins, save us from the fires of hell, lead all souls to heaven especially those most in need of Thy mercy."*