

Homily
5EasterA.5.13.17
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Saint Bernard Church
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We hear in tonight's Gospel the familiar words of Jesus, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

This raises the question, "How do we come to know the way? What is the surest and quickest path to knowing, loving and obeying Jesus?"

Many of the saints have answered this question by saying that the surest path to Jesus is through His mother. Mary wants nothing more than for all of humanity to know and love her son. Since she knows Him and loves Him better than any human being ever has or ever will, we can completely trust her guidance and inspiration.

As evidence of this, Mary has been for over 2,000 years the greatest and most powerful evangelist for Jesus. Through her many apparitions around the world, which have been investigated and approved by the Church, she has brought millions and millions of people into a deeper relationship with Jesus.

Lourdes, Fatima, Guadalupe, Knock and many others. Her reported appearance at Medjugorje, in the former Yugoslavia, which began in 1981 and continues today, has attracted an estimated 30 million pilgrims.

I know we may not feel a connection between our own lives and so many of the serious problems facing the world today. But since today is the 100th Anniversary of Fatima, I want to spend a few moments explaining why the messages of Mary at Fatima are still relevant today. The Fatima messages will help us see that the outcome of the biggest issues in the world, including world peace, depend on our individual attitudes and behavior.

At Fatima, Mary appeared in 1917 to three poor shepherd children in Portugal. She told them that "the sins of the world are very great." The renewal of Christian family life was one of her constant themes. She said, "Many marriages are not of God and do not please our Lord." At one point, she gave all three children a vision of hell.

She warned that if people did not stop offending God, the world would be punished with another great war worse than World War I, with famine, the persecution of the Church and the persecution of the Pope, and that Russia would spread its errors to the rest of the world.

She said that to avoid these punishments, people needed to pray the rosary, Russia should be consecrated to her Immaculate Heart and the faithful should worthily receive Holy Communion on five consecutive first Saturdays of the month. In Mary's own words, "My Immaculate Heart will be your refuge and the way that will lead you to God." She said that peace would depend on the way we lived our lives and made reparations for sins in the world. We were instructed to pray and make sacrifices to make up for the many offenses against God.

It's logical to ask why the role of Mary would be so important to the course of human history. Jesus answered this question when he told one of the shepherd children at Fatima that He had placed the peace of the world into the hands and heart of His mother. He wanted His mother to be honored for all that she had suffered for Him and with Him.

It's very clear that the world's response to Mary's pleadings at Fatima were inadequate. World War II came, and with it the deaths of 60 million people. In our modern times we have had millions of abortions, a dramatic instability in family life, great increases in child abuse, promiscuity, pornography, drug abuse and addiction, and now an attempt to persecute Christians with death in the Middle East and intimidation or worse here in the United States. Atheism and indifference to God are very much on the rise.

Pope Saint John Paul II has said, "Fatima is more important now than in 1917." He was convinced that the world today is engaged in an enormous struggle between the forces of good and the forces of evil, between faith in God and the rejection of God. He saw that one of the main themes of Mary at Fatima, the renewal of Christian family life, was more threatened now than in 1917.

Pope Benedict XVI, in May of 2010, stated that the prophetic mission of Fatima is incomplete. He prayed for the glorious triumph of the Immaculate Heart of Mary by 2017.

I know that when we think about the huge problems that plague the world today, each of us is tempted to think that, individually, our efforts and prayers are so insignificant. It might seem to each of us that we're like one little drop of water in the Colorado River as it winds through the Grand Canyon.

What Mary is telling each of us, though, is that our individual prayers do make a difference. She asking each one of us to resist so many of the false temptations of modern times and to lead a holy and prayerful life.

She's asking each one of us to arm ourselves with one of her greatest weapons, the rosary, and to say it often. She wants us to encourage others to do the same.

Our prayers are not powerless. They are not meaningless. They are not insignificant. To the contrary, they are critically important to the direction that our world will go at this crucial moment in history.

I'll close with this quote from Pope Benedict XVI:

“The heart open to God, purified by contemplation of God, is stronger than guns and weapons of every kind.”

What is in your heart today, tomorrow and for the near future, will shape the history of the world. That's what Mary said in 1917, and that's what she is still saying today.