

Homily for the 28th Sunday in Ordinary Time

All during the night of October 12, 1917, it had poured, soaking the ground and the pilgrims, who were making their way to Fatima, Portugal from all directions by the thousands. On foot, by cart and even by car they came, entering the little valley – the cove – that was the site of five previous apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary to 3 shepherd children, named Lucia, Francisco, and Jacinta. These children themselves on the morning of October 13th also were making their way to the cove amid the adulation and skepticism which had followed them since May, five months earlier.

When the young children finally arrived, they found critics who questioned their veracity and the punctuality of the Lady, who had promised to arrive at noon. But, as the sun arrived at its zenith, the Lady appeared as she had said she would. “What do you want of me?”, Lucia asked her. The Virgin Maria replied, **“I want a chapel built here in my honor. I want you to continue saying the Rosary every day. The war will end soon, and the soldiers will return to their homes.”** “Yes. Yes. Will you now tell me your name?” **I am the Lady of the Rosary.** “I have many petitions from many people. Will you grant them?” **“Some I shall grant, and others I must deny. People must amend their lives and ask pardon for their sins. They must not offend our Lord any more, for He is already too much offended!”** “And is that all you have to ask”, said Lucia? **“There is nothing more”**, replied our Blessed Mother.

Then, as the Lady of the Rosary rose toward the east she turned the palms of her hands toward the dark sky. The torrential rain stopped, and the sky, pearly grey in color, illuminated the vast arid landscape with a strange light. The grey mother-of-pearl tone turned into a sheet of silver which broke up as the clouds were torn apart and the silver sun was seen to whirl and turn in the circle of broken clouds. Then, a cry went up from every mouth and people fell to their knees on the muddy ground.

The sun began turning everything to different colors – yellow, blue, white. Then it shook and trembled. It looked like a wheel of fire that was going to fall on the people. They began to cry out, “We shall all be killed!” Others called to our Lady to save them. They recited acts of contrition. One woman began to confess her sins aloud, advertising that she had done this and that.

When at last the sun stopped leaping and moving, we all breathed our relief. We were still alive, and the miracle which the children had foretold months before, had been seen by everyone, some 70,000 people – believers and non-believers alike. And our previously wet clothes had become “suddenly and completely dry, as well as the wet and muddy ground that had been previously soaked.”

A little over two weeks ago, all the Catholic bishops of Pennsylvania gathered at St. Patrick Cathedral in Harrisburg to entrust all of the dioceses in our state to Our Lady of Fatima. I had the honor to be in attendance in our cathedral filled with people. And now this weekend, as we have just celebrated the 100th anniversary of the miracle of the sun on October 13th, all the parishes in our entire state will pray that same prayer of consecration to Our Lady of Fatima that our bishops had just done. To pray this consecration is a beautiful act of faith. But words are easy to say. Living them, however, is not always so easy. Simple, yes. Easy, no.

My brothers and sisters, the Blessed Virgin Mary has called us to more closely follow Jesus through a life of prayer and of offering sacrifice for others. In other words, as I have mentioned over the past several months – we are called to really enter into a meaningful time of prayer each day with God, and in a special way devoting time to praying the Rosary from our hearts. At the same time, we are also called to put others first, even to the point of sacrificing for the sins they have committed.

And why would we do this? Because God loves us so much. Prayer helps us come into deeper relationship with God our Father, so that we can more personally know His perfect love. And then, having known that love more fully, penance – that is, offering sacrifice for others – leads us to repair in some way what our sin has damaged in ourselves and in the world.

“O my 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. Amen.” God bless you.