

Good afternoon and welcome to our World Apostolate of Fatima First Saturday devotions.

I want to thank Holy Family Parish, and Deacon Roger Pasioneck for the use of this beautiful church. This is our 17th month of First Saturday Devotions centered here in Saginaw.

I would like to thank my brother priests, Fr. ... Fr ... who are concelebrating, and Fr. ... who has been hearing confessions in the back until all are heard.

In keeping with the practices of the First Saturdays. These four elements being (1) Confession, (2) Holy Communion, (3) praying the Rosary, and (4) meditation on the mysteries of the Rosary for 15 minutes. All of these are to be done in a spirit of reparation for our sins and in atonement for the sins of the world.

These requests were made to Sister Lucia by Our Lady at Fatima, and further developed when Lucia was in the convent by a vision of Our Lord.

On a personal note, today marks the fifth anniversary of the death of Fr. Valerian Rykowski, who was a priest known to this apostolate for many years. Fr. Val was also my spiritual director for many years, and a firm devotee of Fatima.

Fr. Val said to me, often, that the true secret to understanding Fatima is in the Trinity. And it was in that spirit that I pursued my initial graduate studies in Theology, focusing on the Trinity first ... followed by later work in Marian Theology.

On this, the fifth anniversary of Fr. Val's death ... Eternal rest grant ...

Today is also the memorial of the only Welsh saint, Saint David. He lived in the sixth century and died at the beginning of the seventh century. He is credited with founding a dozen monasteries in the country of Wales, as well as opposing the Pelagian heresy.

Now the Pelagian heresy, although ancient, is uniquely tempting to Americans. We are a people who "do" things. We pull ourselves up by our bootstraps, and we are a "can-do" sort of people. Yet when this hard work ethic invades our spiritual life, we begin to have problems.

Pelagianism holds that we can effect our own salvation. Pelagianism holds that Jesus set us free, and whatever we do is our climbing of the mountain. It was the "new age" before its time. Pelagianism, like many progressive

thinkers in our contemporary age, holds that sin is not a factor in our lives anymore. They wrongly hold that if we just keep doing something, everything will be all right.

Pelagianism, like many in our own time, left no room for prayer, saw no need for confession, penance, or reparation. Pelagianism leaves out God's grace, and without grace, we have no need for Our Blessed Lady - the Mediatrix of Grace.

Pelagianism is the ultimate "loner's" religion. And of course, it is heresy.

We need to remember that every good thing we do is nothing more than our positive response to God's grace. And every evil thing we do is our rejection of that grace. We need to pray - for ourselves and for others. We need to be open to God's grace - His grace poured out on us at all times, as well as the Supernatural grace poured out on us in the Sacraments - most especially in Confession and in the Eucharist. We cannot do this alone. Rather, we need to rely completely on God's grace, God's mercy, and God's love. And we need all the help we can muster through the intercession of Our Lady and all the saints.

We often tread a tight-rope when we think our actions are our own, and fail to realize that what we do is nothing more than a response to the graces received in Baptism and God's gift to us. Every aspect of our lives is a gracious gift from God. And we should show forth our gratitude to Him and ask His mercy for the many times we may have thought we did it on our own.

On Wednesday, we begin the Holy Season of Lent. A time of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. We can extend, as well, the spirit of reparation and atonement into our efforts during Lent.

As we approach this altar to receive the Sacred Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ, let us give thanks for the graces that have brought us to this point, and ask God that we might continue to live in His grace. Let us remember to pray in reparation for our failings, and offer our prayers in atonement for the sins of the world.

May we, through our Blessed Mother's intercession, and through God's generous grace, experience the Triumph of the Immaculate Heart in ourselves, our families, and in the world.