

Today is the Memorial of St. John Neumann - the first bishop of Philadelphia ... named so by Pope Pius IX in 1852. After completing his Theological studies in Prague in 1835, he was met with a peculiar difficulty. The bishops of Europe had too many priests; and so they decided there would be no further ordinations. He wrote to the bishops in the United States, and was accepted by the bishop of New York, and ordained in 1836. He established the parochial school system throughout the United States, and originated the practice of the Forty Hours in this country. In order to minister to the immigrant population of this country, he learned many languages - of which he was a quick study. He was bishop of Philadelphia for only eight years - collapsing on a city street from a stroke; dead at the age of 49.

St. John Neumann was canonized in 1976 by Pope Paul VI. He was the first male citizen of the United States to be made a saint, and the third American saint.

Three miracles are attributed to his intercession. The first in 1923 in Northern Italy - where an 11-year-old girl was healed from acute peritonitis. The second was in 1949 - a music teacher had been crushed severely in an automobile accident with his skull crushed - five weeks after the accident, he was able to walk under his own power from the hospital. And the final miracle was in 1963, where a 6-year-old boy was healed from incurable cancer.

All of these miracles occurred in the 20th century. Miracles, you see, are part-and-parcel of our Faith. Today, we will experience the greatest miracle of all in the Holy Eucharist - simple bread and wine will be transubstantiated into the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ. Sadly, many people - ourselves included - do not appreciate, or even miss the almost constant stream of miracles provide through God's mighty work in our own time.

In 1925, in Pontevedra, Spain; Sister Lucia was in a Dorothean convent ... eight years after the apparitions of Fatima. Sister Lucia relates the following:

*The Most Holy Virgin appeared to me, and by her side, elevated on a luminous cloud, was the Child Jesus. The Most Holy Virgin rested her hand on my shoulder and as she did so, she showed me a heart encircled by thorns, which she was holding in her other hand.*

The Child Jesus asked Sister Lucia to have compassion on His Mother, referring to her as Lucia's own heavenly mother.

The conditions for fulfilling the Five First Saturdays are:

1. Sacramental Confession
2. Reception of Holy Communion
3. Recitation of 5 decades of the Rosary
4. 15 minutes of meditation on the Mysteries of the Rosary

That is why on these World Apostolate of Fatima monthly First Saturday events, we have priests hearing confessions. Not because any of those waiting in line are evil people - no more evil than any of us. But to assist in fulfilling the first requirement. Before Mass, we also have the recitation of 5 decades of the Rosary. Again, not just a nice thing, but rather fulfilling the third requirement. Your worthy reception of Holy Communion at this Holy Mass fulfills the second requirement. And finally - on your own - you need to reflect or meditate on the mysteries of the Rosary - all of which are events in the lives of Jesus and Mary. You could spend one minute each on the traditional 15 Mysteries, or 15 minutes on any one mystery. To my knowledge there is no wrong way to meditate on the life of Our Lord or Our Lady.

And finally, all of these should be done with the intention of making reparation to the Blessed Mother for blasphemies against her, her name and her holy initiatives.

At the apparition at Pontevedra, Sister Lucia also reported that Our Lady in showing her the Immaculate Heart said:

*Look, my daughter, at my Heart encircled by these thorns with which men pierce it at every moment by their blasphemies and ingratitude. You, at least, strive to console me, and so I announce: I promise to assist at the hour of death with the grace necessary*

*for salvation all those who, with the intention of making reparation to me, will, on the first Saturday of five consecutive months, go to confession, receive Holy Communion, say five decades of the beads, and keep me company for fifteen minutes while meditating on the fifteen mysteries of the Rosary.*

The practice of keeping a year of First Saturdays in honor of the Immaculate Conception was approved by Pope Pius X in 1905 - twenty years before this. In a sense, Our Lord and Our Lady lightened the requirement somewhat, but also added additional prayer, meditation, and the intention of doing it in reparation.

Fourteen months after the Pontevedra apparition, Sister Lucia reported that while emptying the garbage outside at the convent, she saw the Child Jesus Who reprimanded her for not doing more to promote the Five First Saturdays. Think about that when you are taking out the trash at your own house: What are you doing to promote the Five First Saturdays?

Today's first reading from the First Letter of Saint John reminds us that our Christian duties run against the grain of the world. While the world complains about recessions and fiscal cliffs, we are called to lay down our lives for each other - providing for those in need. Our actions must reflect the love that is manifested in the Most Holy Trinity. Only in this way can we be assured that we are living in the Truth - the Truth that is not an idea, but a person - Jesus Christ.

And as Our Lord called the first Apostles in today's Gospel ... may we hear His call to "Follow Him." As we strive to live out the message of Fatima through prayer, penance, sacrifice, and reparation.