

Welcome to the third day of the World Apostolate of Fatima's Rosary Novena.

On Sunday night, we focused on the centrality of the Rosary to Our Lady's message over the six apparitions which occurred from May through October in 1917. Last night, we focused in on one of the children - Blessed Francesco Marto ... Who despite his young age, embraced Our Lady's directions for prayer, sacrifice, reparation and suffering with fervor, zeal, and courage. Tonight, I would like us to take a look at the apparitions that preceded the apparitions of Our Lady - namely the apparitions of the angel which occurred in the spring and summer of 1916.

An angel is, of course, a heavenly messenger. The word "angel" is from the Greek word "angelos" which means a messenger. In our own modern use of the word - it nearly always applies to a heavenly messenger.

The angel appeared to be - in Sister Lucia's words: "a young man, about fourteen or fifteen years old, whiter than snow, transparent as crystal when the sun shines through it, and of great beauty."

His first words to the three children echo those words of angels throughout Holy Scripture: "Do not be afraid."

The angel then identifies himself as the Angel of Peace, and commands the children to pray with him.

*He teaches them a prayer, which we have all heard: "My God, I believe, I adore, I hope, and I love you. I ask pardon of you for those who do not believe, do not adore, do not hope, and do not love you."*

The prayer is two-parts - first, a personal act of faith, adoration, hope, and love; and secondly an appeal for pardon of those who do not.

Faith, Hope, and Love are the supernatural virtues - infused in all of us at Baptism, and strengthened through the action of all the remaining Sacraments. When we find it difficult to believe, hope, and love - we need to pray for the graces necessary to strengthen those supernatural virtues ... as well as utilize the Sacraments to strengthen, renew, and repair our relationship with Almighty God - so that we might better tap into these supernatural virtues.

I often tell school-aged children that the supernatural virtues are like super-powers. After all, we can believe someone who has proven trustworthy; and we don't believe someone who has shown themselves unworthy of natural faith. But the supernatural virtue of Faith allows us to believe in the unbelievable - when we have no evidence before us, but only the promises of the unseen God.

We can hope in something when we see a clear path to achieving the goal - that is, when we see the light at the end of the tunnel. But the supernatural virtue of Hope allows us to expect the miracle, even when every one else - including the experts - have told us that nothing can be done.

And finally, we can love someone who is kind to us, or cute and cuddly. But the supernatural virtue of Love allows us to love the unloveable - even those who are cruel and mean.

These are our super-powers, if you will ... and they allow us, as the children of God, to bring the Love of God into a world that is starved for - or perhaps has never experienced - that Love.

And the fourth part of the prayer - adoration. The Catechism of the Catholic Church tells us that there are five types of prayer: (1) Blessing and adoration, (2) Petition, (3) Intercession, (4) Thanksgiving, (5) and Praise. It goes on to tell us that adoration is:

*the first attitude of man acknowledging that he is a creature before his Creator. It exalts the greatness of the Lord who made us and the almighty power of the Savior who sets us free from evil. Adoration is homage of the spirit to the "King of Glory," respectful silence in the presence of the "ever greater" God. Adoration of the thrice-holy and sovereign God of love blends with humility and gives assurance to our supplications.*

In our own day and age - adoration is something most people reserve for sports figures, movies stars, politicians, or some other human hero. In many cases, the only thing that some people adore are themselves. The new paganism is a self-centered worship of one's own self - resulting in the many ills of our age.

When we adore God, we acknowledge that He is God, and we are not. That, in fact, is an excellent prayer to pray - especially when we want to be in charge of everything and find ourselves frustrated by whatever circumstances we find ourselves in.

The second apparition of the angel came in the Summer of 1916. The angel said to the children:

*Pray! Pray very much! The Hearts of Jesus and Mary have designs of Mercy for you. Offer constant prayers and sacrifices to the Almighty.*

Lucia asks him how are they supposed to sacrifice, and receives in reply:

*Make of everything you can a sacrifice, and offer it to God as an act of reparation for the sins by which He is offended, and in supplication for the conversion of sinners. ... Above all, accept and bear with submission, the suffering which the Lord will send you.*

This is brilliant advice. In life we pretty much never get our way exactly. We learn to tolerate a certain level of frustration, and get angry when things are outside of that tolerance. Yet here we have an untapped source of grace. Everything frustration, every pain, every inconvenience - everything - can be turned into grace if we offer it in reparation to God.

And the second part - that we are to bear with submission and accept whatever suffering we are sent by God.

This second part makes us a bit uncomfortable. Yet - we who are the Church are the mystical Body of Christ. And just as our Lord suffered on the Cross, we too are called to share in that suffering. The world will tell us that we need to live a pristine existence without any difficulties, frustrations, or sufferings. But here in the trenches ... here in the real world ... there are countless opportunities to offer situations up in reparation for the sins that offend God - whether those are our own sins, or the sins of the world.

The final apparition, which occurred in early Autumn of 1916, of the angel appeared with a Chalice and a Host. While leaving them suspended in mid-air, he bowed down and prayed:

*Most Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, I Adore You Profoundly, and I offer You the Most Precious Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ, present in all the tabernacles of the*

*world, in reparation for the outrages, sacrileges and indifference with which He Himself is offended. And, through the infinite merits of His Most Sacred Heart, and the Immaculate Heart of Mary, I beg of You the Conversion of Poor Sinners.*

The angel then rose and gave the Host to Lucia, and Francesco and Jacinta drank what was in the Chalice. The angel then said:

*Take and drink the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, horribly outraged by ungrateful men. Repair their crimes and console your God.*

In this third apparition of the angel, brings them Holy Communion. Again stressing reparation for sins, and praying for the conversion of sinners.

This final appearance of the angel should focus us on the Eucharist. I know that at St. Joseph here in Bay City there is perpetual adoration. And for those who aren't in this area, you might feel left out regarding Eucharistic adoration. But I can tell you that if you drive up to a locked church building, and try to park as close to the tabernacle as you can - you'll probably be closer to it than if you were sitting in the back row.

In other words - we have countless opportunities for Eucharistic Adoration.

This type of "through the wall" adoration was inspired in my thoughts by a scene from the Passion of the Christ - where Mary is lying on the stone pavement and Jesus is below her in a dungeon.

And so, in the apparitions of the angel we find the roots of Our Lady's message at Fatima. Perhaps not fully developed, but certainly laying the groundwork for the children of Fatima - as well as for us.

As we approach this altar to receive the Sacred Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ - let us beg for the graces to grow in Faith, Hope, and Love. Let us ardently desire to Adore God and God alone - casting aside anything else or anyone else to whom we may be giving adoration improperly. Let us desire to find ways to pray and make sacrifices in reparation - offering our sufferings for the conversion of sinners. Let us beg God to pour out His graces upon us so that we may become the saints He has created us to be.