

Welcome to the fourth evening of the Rosary Novena for the World Fatima Apostolate - Saginaw Division. Today is my last day - and tomorrow night and the remaining nights we will have Fr. Ben Ludtke. You will, no doubt, remember Fr. Ben from his wonderful talks at the May Rosary Triduum.

Last night's focus was on the Apparitions of the Angel at Fatima - the apparitions before the apparitions of Our Lady. The night before was about the visionaries of Fatima - particularly Blessed Francisco Marto ... and how they sought to embrace our Lady's admonition to (1) prayer, (2) sacrifice, (3) reparation, and (4) suffering ... with zeal and courage despite being children. And on Sunday night we heard about the centrality of the Rosary to Our Lady's message at Fatima. Tomorrow, besides being the fifth day of our Rosary Novena, and the beginning of Fr. Ben Ludtke's talks ... is also the opening day of the Year of Faith. On Sunday, in his Angelus address, our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI "[suggested] that families and parishes rediscover the prayer of the Rosary in the Year of Faith":

*With the Rosary, we allow ourselves to be guided by Mary, model of faith, in meditating on the mysteries of Christ, and day after day we are helped to assimilate the Gospel, so that it shapes all our lives ...*

The Holy Father further invites us *"to pray the Rosary [1] personally, [2]in [our] famil[ies] and [3] in [our] communit[ies], learning at the school of Mary, which leads us to Christ, the living center of our faith."*

And so it is very opportune that our Rosary Novena frames the opening day of the Holy Year of Faith.

In this evening's talk, I would like to look at three doctrinal assertions that are repeatedly found throughout the message and apparitions of Fatima.

The first doctrinal assertion contained in the message of Fatima is the existence of a personal God.

In the first place, the message of Fatima reminds all of humanity that God exists. In 1917, at almost the same time as the apparitions - that is, from May through October, nearly 3,000 miles away in Russia ... socialists were infiltrating the provisional government of post-Tsarist Russia. By the end of October, the Russian government was established as Marxist and Communist.

It was Karl Marx who promoted atheism in opposition to religion - calling religion "the opiate of the masses" ... teaching that religion makes people stupid.

In our own day, the rise of the New Atheism which seeks to no longer tolerate religion, but to counter, criticize, and expose religion. Such authors as Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, Sam Harris, and Christopher Hitchens have led the charge of this militant new atheism - assaulting religion with their so-called rationalist ideas.

In the second place, God is a personal being. We worship God as the Trinity - three Divine Persons in One Godhead. Not three gods, not one god with three jobs. Trinitarian theology is a most difficult undertaking, and in my seminary days, it was the only class I remember a professor stopping a student and telling them they were speaking heresy.

The Athanasian Creed which dates from the late 5th century states:

*... the catholic faith is this: That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; Neither confounding the Persons; nor dividing the Essence. For there is one Person of the Father; another of the Son; and another of the Holy Spirit. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, is all one; the Glory equal, the Majesty coeternal. Such as the Father is; such is the Son; and such is the Holy Spirit. The*

*Father uncreated; the Son uncreated; and the Holy Spirit uncreated. The Father unlimited; the Son unlimited; and the Holy Spirit unlimited. The Father eternal; the Son eternal; and the Holy Spirit eternal. And yet they are not three eternal; but one eternal. As also there are not three uncreated; nor three infinites, but one uncreated; and one infinite.*

...

*The Father is made of none; neither created, nor begotten. The Son is of the Father alone; not made, nor created; but begotten. The Holy Spirit is of the Father and of the Son; neither made, nor created, nor begotten; but proceeding. So there is one Father, not three Fathers; one Son, not three Sons; one Holy Spirit, not three Holy Spirits. And in this Trinity none is before, or after another; none is greater, or less than another. But the whole three Persons are coeternal, and coequal. So that in all things, as aforesaid; the Unity in Trinity, and the Trinity in Unity, is to be worshipped. He therefore that will be saved, let him thus think of the Trinity.*

Or as my late mentor and spiritual director used to say over and over: the Key to understanding Fatima is the Trinity.

And as a personal God, God desires a relationship with each one of us. I used to teach elementary school children what I called "The Easy Prayer." And it is simply this: *God I love you.* I encouraged them to say it often throughout the day - to allow them to call to mind the imminent presence of God no matter where they are and what they are doing; as well as to create an easy and consistent dialog of prayer with God. If anyone complained that the Easy Prayer was ... well ... too easy, I'd beef it up for them as: *Father I love you. Jesus I love you. Holy Spirit I love you.* That simple prayer has the power to change lives.

The second doctrinal assertion of Fatima is that Heaven and Hell are real.

The first part of that is easy for us to stomach. There has been a flow of books from publishers on peoples' near-death experiences - including one with the catchy title "*Heaven is for real.*" And I highly recommend reading them. There is an eternal reward.

But we have to remember - when Lucia asked Our Lady if the three children would go to heaven; the Blessed Mother replied simply regarding Lucia and Jacinta ... "Yes." But in regards to Francisco, she replied: "*He will have to pray many Rosaries*" to get to heaven. That's quite an eye opener. It almost makes me want to hole up in a room somewhere and pray back-to-back Rosaries.

But far from leading us to despair - this should encourage us to pray with more frequency and more intensity. To embrace the zeal and courage of Francisco in living out the admonitions of Fatima: (1) pray, (2) sacrifice, (3) reparation, and (4) suffering.

There has been a movement of late among certain evangelicals and even within Catholic circles to write off God as an old softie who won't ever let anyone go to Hell. God is too nice of a guy to let that happen. Right?

Wrong! The counter argument to that is that God is too fair to force someone into heaven who doesn't desire it. Granted, we should always trust in God's mercy - but on the other hand we need to be reminded of God's justice.

Sister Lucia relates the vision in these words:

*The rays of light seemed to penetrate the earth, and we saw as it were a sea of fire. Plunged in this fire were demons and souls in human form, like transparent burning embers, all blackened or burnished bronze, floating about in the*

*conflagration, now raised into the air by the flames that issued from within themselves together with great clouds of smoke, now falling back on every side like sparks in huge fires, without weight or equilibrium, amid shrieks and groans of pain and despair, which horrified us and made us tremble with fear. (It must have been this sight which caused me to cry out, as people say they heard me). The demons could be distinguished by their terrifying and repellent likeness to frightful and unknown animals, black and transparent like burning coals.*

Hell isn't someplace that God sends people to ... rather, people can choose their independence from God in this life ... while still enjoying the benefits of God's goodness and graces ... but in Hell, you get to keep your independence from God for eternity - while no longer receiving any benefits of His grace. In the vision Sr. Lucia relates, the flames came from within the souls in Hell - I would guess that the flames come from the emptiness they experienced without the God's grace to 'bother' them. In other words, without God, there isn't anything good to fill that "God-shaped hole" ... or as St. Augustine says, "*Our hearts are restless, O Lord; until they rest in Thee.*" In Hell, there is no peace ... only eternal restlessness.

And the third doctrinal assertion of Fatima is: "*to Jesus through Mary.*"

There are many Bible-believing Christians who use Scripture to discount Mary as if she were just a surrogate mother. After Jesus was born, God sort of dumps her. That sort of mentality most certainly represents the dysfunctional culture of our time attempting to project itself into Scripture.

If we look at what is said of Mary in Scripture, we see that after the brief exchange with the angel Gabriel at the Annunciation - she

“goes in haste” to be of service to her cousin Elizabeth. When she arrives there, we hear her beautiful hymn recording in St. Luke’s Gospel which is called “The Magnificat” from the first words in Latin of the opening phrase in English: “*My soul doth magnify the Lord!*” At the Wedding in Cana, after a brief exchange with Our Lord about the wine situation, Mary turns to the servants and tells them “*Do whatever He [meaning Jesus] tells you.*” Excellent advice for anyone trying to follow Christ.

And the last time we see Mary is at the Cross; where Jesus places her into the care of the beloved disciple and tells the disciple - and us as well - “*Behold your Mother.*”

All good theology about Mary is good theology about Jesus. There is no competition - there is no “either-or.” Rather there is a “both-and” relationship. God isn’t compromised by or ashamed of His creation - nor is the Son of God compromised by or ashamed of His Mother. And neither should we.

Saint Bonaventure - quoted by Saint Louis de Montfort - says: “*De Maria, numquam satis*” ... that is, “regarding Mary, never enough.”

As we approach this altar to receive the Sacred Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ ... let us pray to renew our commitment to (1) prayer, (2) sacrifice, (3) reparation, and (4) suffering - offering our sacrifices and sufferings both in reparation for sins, as well as for the conversion of sinners. Let us embrace our Baptismal call - which is echoed in the message of Fatima - with zeal, perseverance, and courage. Let us be shining examples in the world of the Love of God - lived out in our lives ... so we may receive our inheritance as children of God the Father, redeemed in Jesus Christ, and filled with the transforming graces of the Holy Spirit.