



APOSTOLIC JOURNEY
OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO FÁTIMA (MAY, 12-13, 2000)

**ADDRESS OF CARDINAL ANGELO SODANO
REGARDING THE "THIRD PART" OF THE SECRET OF FATIMA
AT THE CONCLUSION OF THE SOLEMN MASS
OF JOHN PAUL II**

Fatima, 13 May 2000

Brothers and Sisters in the Lord!

At the conclusion of this solemn celebration, I feel bound to offer to our beloved Holy Father John Paul II, on behalf of all present, heartfelt good wishes for his approaching Eightieth Birthday and to thank him for his significant pastoral ministry for the good of all God's Holy Church.

On the solemn occasion of his visit to Fatima, His Holiness has directed me to make an announcement to you. As you know, the purpose of his visit to Fatima has been to beatify the two "little shepherds". Nevertheless he also wishes his pilgrimage to be a renewed gesture of gratitude to Our Lady for her protection during these years of his papacy. This protection seems also to be linked to the so-called "third part" of the secret of Fatima.

That text contains a prophetic vision similar to those found in Sacred Scripture, which do not describe with photographic clarity the details of future events, but rather synthesize and condense against a unified background events spread out over time in a succession and a duration which are not specified. As a result, the text must be interpreted in a symbolic key.

The vision of Fatima concerns above all the war waged by atheist systems against the Church and Christians, and it describes the immense suffering endured by the witnesses to the faith in the last century of the second millennium. It is an interminable Way of the Cross led by the Popes of the twentieth century.

According to the interpretation of the "little shepherds", which was also recently confirmed by Sister Lucia, the "Bishop clothed in white" who prays for all the faithful is the Pope. As he makes his way with great effort towards the Cross amid the corpses of those who were martyred (Bishops, priests, men and women religious and many lay persons), he too falls to the ground, apparently dead, under a burst of gunfire.

After the assassination attempt of 13 May 1981, it appeared evident to His Holiness that it was "a motherly hand which guided the bullet's path", enabling the "dying Pope" to halt "at the threshold of death" (Pope John Paul II. *Meditation with the Italian Bishops from the Policlinico Gemelli, Insegnamenti*, vol XVII/1, 1994, p. 1061). On the occasion of a visit to Rome by the then Bishop of Leiria-Fatima, the Pope decided to give him the bullet which had remained in the jeep after the assassination attempt, so that it might be kept in the Shrine. At the behest of the Bishop, the bullet was later set in the crown of the statue of Our Lady of Fatima.

The successive events of 1989 led, both in the Soviet Union and in a number of countries of Eastern Europe, to the fall of the Communist regime which promoted atheism. For this too His Holiness offers heartfelt thanks to the Most Holy Virgin. In other parts of the world, however, attacks against the Church and against Christians, together with the burden of suffering which they involve, tragically continue. Even if the events to which the third part of the Secret of Fatima refers now seem part of the past, Our Lady's call to conversion and penance, issued at the beginning of the twentieth century, remains timely and urgent today. "The Lady of the message seems to read the signs of the times - the signs of our time - with special insight... The insistent invitation of Mary Most Holy to penance is nothing but the manifestation of her maternal concern for the fate of the human family, in need of conversion and forgiveness" (Pope John Paul II, *Message for the 1997 World Day of the Sick, N. 1, Insegnamenti*, vol XIX/2, 1996, p. 561).

In order that the faithful may better receive the message of Our Lady of Fatima, the Pope has charged the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith with making public the third part of the secret, after the preparation of an appropriate commentary.

Let us thank Our Lady of Fatima for her protection. To her maternal intercession let us entrust the Church of the Third Millennium.

Sub tuum praesidium confugimus, Sancta Dei Genetrix!

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