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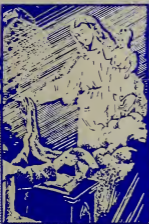


DID MARY APPEAR?



by

WINFRID HERBST, S.D.S.



*A QUEEN'S WORK
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DID MARY APPEAR?

By Winfrid Herbst, S. D. S.

Of late years there have been various accounts of apparitions of Our Lady to certain persons. What attitude should one take toward such visions, apparitions, private revelations? I mean when the Church has not yet spoken in the matter.

When you read or hear of a private revelation and are wondering what you should think about it, you may let yourself be guided by considerations like the following.

1. The principal thing, of course, is to ascertain whether the fact, event, or communication is strictly true.

2. Certainly it is not proper for a good Catholic at once and without more ado to conclude without examination that the revelation is to be rejected.

3. One proof that the revelation is true is the working of a miracle, if it is wrought for that purpose and is properly authenticated.

4. Another proof is a prophecy realized. A prophecy is as convincing as a miracle, if it is so precise that it cannot be the result of chance or a conjecture of the devil.

5. The sensible thing to do is to get information about the person thus favored. What are his natural qualities? education? virtues, especially humility? special graces of union with God? Were there other revelations? other predictions? Is

the person subjected to heavy trials and crosses (a good sign)? Does he fear deception (a good sign)? Is he open with his confessor (a good sign)? Does he desire revelations (a bad sign)?

6. After you have gotten detailed information about the person or persons (man, woman, or child), also make it a point to get detailed information about the revelation itself. Is it authentic? Does it agree with the teachings of the Church? Is there anything in it contrary to good morals? Does the whole seem to be helpful toward salvation? Is there about it an atmosphere of such dignity and seriousness as to become divine majesty? Is it productive of sentiments of peace and not disturbance—except perhaps at the first moments? How about the value of the good work proposed? Has it been subjected to the test of time? Has it been productive of great spiritual fruit? Here it is well to stress the warning that if the phenomena and statements run counter to faith, to sound piety, to approved Catholic customs, or if they are unbecoming or ludicrous, they are undeserving of belief because they absolutely exclude supernatural revelation.

7. If the revelation leads solely to the love of God and of the saints, one may provisionally regard it as divine.

8. Many theologians are of the opinion that those to whom or for whom private revelations are made *may* believe in them with real faith, provided they have had clear proof of their authenticity. Some are

stricter than that, inasmuch as they say that the person to whom the revelation is made by God may and even must believe it with divine faith, if he is convinced that it is a divine revelation. When he is certain of it, utterly convinced of it, he is obliged to believe the same; if he does not, he commits a sin of infidelity by disregarding the authority of God.

9. When a private revelation has not been officially approved of by the Church and when by all the rules of sound prudence it is evident that the revelation is genuine, the prudent course is neither to believe nor to deny it unless there is sufficient reason for doing so. One should not despise it; and it may be admitted according to the rules of prudence.

10. The Church recognizes that God can, if He wills, allow or command apparitions or visions, and that He can make the seer know for certain that the vision is real. If He does so, it is right for the seer to believe in the vision or revelation, as we have already stated; and it is also right for others to believe it if the evidence is convincing to them.

11. However, others may believe it only with human faith. And they are under no obligation to believe at all, either because the private revelation does not pertain to them, or because they can hardly ever have certitude about it, not even when the Church officially approves it; for ecclesiastical approbation only declares that there is nothing in the revelation contrary to

faith and morals and that consequently it may be popularized for the edification of the faithful.

12. But no matter how many may believe such a revelation or vision, even if the whole Church does so, as in the case of the apparitions of Lourdes, it remains true that such is not a part of the revelation God gave His Church when He made it, and consequently these private revelations never become a part of the Catholic faith.

13. However, we repeat that one who without sufficient reason denies a private revelation acts rashly and imprudently, both because private revelations often exhibit most profound and useful truths and also because they may be the word of God. But though such a doubter, when everything points to a true revelation according to the above rules, acts rashly, foolishly, imprudently, he does not commit a mortal sin.

14. Still, even if you can say that there is evidence of a divine revelation, not everything in it is to be accepted as equally supernatural, because every private revelation is more or less dependent on the subjective views and the individuality of the person receiving it; and it is easy for purely human opinions and even errors to become mixed with a genuine communication from above.

15. You may be rightly suspicious and charitably critical, and suspect of fraud those persons whose behavior does not conform to the strict requirements of Chris-

tian morality, who are physically or mentally abnormal, who are obviously eager to create a sensation, who are extremely sensitive to criticism or doubts expressed by others regarding their good faith, who proudly raise themselves above and criticize others, or who even attempt to reform the Church itself.

16. Private revelations may not be published without ecclesiastical approbation, according to the Decrees of Urban VIII, March 13, 1625, and of Clement IX, May 23, 1668.

* * *

But every time there is a private revelation of some kind, you find articles about it in Catholic papers; and often printed sheets and folders that go into detail about the various apparitions are circulated; and all that without ecclesiastical approbation, as far as I can see. What is to be said about that?

Canon 1399 of Church law, in its enumeration of books forbidden by law, says that by the law itself are forbidden (5) books and pamphlets which give an account of new apparitions, revelations, visions, prophecies, or miracles, or which introduce new devotions (even if it is claimed that the devotions are private), unless the precepts of the Canons regarding their publication have been observed. Since this paragraph of the Canon specifically mentions books and booklets, it seems that books are to be taken here in the narrow sense, as not including, for example, periodicals,

printed sheets, small folders, which are neither books nor booklets. (See A. Coronata, II, n. 1963.) This seems to be all that need be said about that. Moreover, such printed accounts as you have in mind generally add what we might call a line of special caution, to the effect that what is printed is merely news, that no opinion is expressed as to its authenticity, that it is published without any intention of anticipating the judgment of the Church, etc. Look for the Bishop's *imprimatur* if the account of new apparitions, revelations, visions, prophecies, miracles appears in the form of a book, booklet, or pamphlet. If it is missing, the book or booklet or pamphlet is forbidden by the law itself.

We may add that for the publication of books in which are narrated the deeds, miracles, revelations, and other extraordinary gifts of *Servants of God*, in addition to the permission of the legitimate ecclesiastical superior, it is required by a Constitution of Pope Urban VIII and by prescriptions of the Holy Office that a twofold protestation be inserted, something like the following: "In complete conformity with the decrees of Urban VIII we hereby declare that everything said in this book regarding the miraculous and such like manifestations is submitted without reserve to the judgment of Holy Church. The expressions 'holy' or 'blessed,' in so far as they are applied to persons on whose virtues the Church has not yet pronounced, are not in any way intended to anticipate the judg-

ment of the Holy Apostolic See." (Cf. Wernz-Vidal, IV, 2, p. 168.) Many think that this prescription has been abrogated. For those who wish to study the matter further, the sources cited in Wernz-Vidal may be consulted.

Just for the sake of repetition, we translate the following from the place cited above: "As regards writings which treat of miracles, revelations, apparitions, etc., it seems to be required that they treat exclusively of those things or at least in a diffuse way and lay the matter before the reader as something supernatural in character; it is otherwise if the matter is proposed just in passing or merely as news, in the same way as is done regarding other facts that occur; nor does it seem that diaries are to be forbidden which narrate facts that seem to be miraculous, which, for instance, are said to have occurred in some pious pilgrimage, etc."

* * *

But why all this fuss about publishing accounts of apparitions, visions, revelations, miracles? What is the reason for this strict view of the matter?

The answer is very simple. The making known far and wide of apparitions, visions, revelations, miracles, etc., in the publication of which there is today a certain unrestricted foolishness (*effrenata quaedam vesania*, which Latin expression can also be rendered as "a peculiar unbridled insanity") — such publication, we say, plays right into the hands of the enemies of the

Catholic religion by offering them an occasion of ridiculing it and despising even the most solidly established truths of faith. And this they do even if in practice, as experience amply demonstrates, non-Catholics are more credulous and more superstitious and more easily taken in than are prudent and sensible Catholics.

And if it is also a case of a new devotion that is introduced, there is always danger that solid piety will suffer rather than be promoted and that people will be so captivated by novelties that they will despise and neglect those devotions that are recommended or commanded by the Church. Such things also lead to the introduction of false mysticism. (Cf. Wernz-Vidal.)

* * *

All right, then; that takes care of private revelations when the Church has not yet spoken in the matter. What is to be said about them when they are approved by the Church?

When private revelations are approved by the Church, you may let yourself be guided by considerations like the following.

1. There is nothing in them contrary to faith and good morals.

2. They may be read without danger and even with great spiritual profit.

3. But no obligation is thereby imposed upon the faithful to believe them. "It is not obligatory, nor even possible, to give them the assent of Catholic faith," says

Benedict XIV, "but only of human faith, in conformity with the dictates of prudence, which presents them to us as probable and worthy of pious belief."

4. To refuse assent to private revelations even when approved is not generally an offense against divine faith (*any* revealed truth because of the authority of God Himself), except perhaps in the case of those to whom they are given.

5. To dissent from such revelations is not a sin against Catholic faith (revealed truth proposed as such by the Church), unless in rejecting them one would also reject defined dogma.

6. To dissent from such revelations is not a sin against ecclesiastical faith (internal assent to truths connected with revelation, to facts closely related to dogma), unless other errors are also involved.

7. The Church does permit but does not exact in these approved revelations that belief which is called the assent of human faith, a faith which rests upon the authority of man.

8. One would be at fault, however, if through pride or contempt or without sufficient reason one were to reject such approved revelations.

9. So, too, to reject apparitions like the appearance of Our Lady at Lourdes, for which the Church has instituted feasts, could easily make one guilty of contempt or temerity, even though the Church offers

such particular facts of history for human faith alone.

10. The approbation of private revelations in connection with a person's beatification or canonization is merely negative, signifying that nothing contrary to faith or morals is contained in those revelations but that the Church decrees nothing about their divine origin.

11. When, however, the Church positively approves of certain revelations, inasmuch as ecclesiastical authority explicitly or implicitly decrees that a revelation has really been made by God to a definite person (e.g., as in the case of St. Francis of Assisi, St. Margaret Mary Alacoque, St. Bernadette of Lourdes), they should be given the assent of obedient children. We should give an interior, religious assent.

12. Such positively approved revelations, though supported by ecclesiastical authority, are nevertheless not infallibly certain; wherefore they merit only human faith, and it is allowed to doubt them or even to deny them, provided there seems to be sufficient reason for the denial. But prudence often forbids us to set our opinion against the great authority of ecclesiastical approbation, and always forbids when it is the authority of the Pope, aided as he is by the counsel of eminent theologians.

13. To repeat, when private revelations are approved by the Church, they are not proposed as to be believed by divine faith. The Church merely declares:

- (1) that they contain nothing contrary to faith and morals;
- (2) that there are sufficient indications that prudently, piously, and without superstition they may be believed with human faith;
- (3) that *it is not right to despise them.*

* * *

I cannot understand why some Catholics are so slow to believe in private revelations, apparitions, extraordinary and mystical phenomena. They are so incredulous, such doubting Thomases. Can you explain? And, please, I was just reading about a bleeding crucifix. How can a statue or the figure on the cross bleed?

Perhaps the following excerpts will help you to understand—and make you incredulous yourself, within proper bounds.

“The opinion of St. Thomas [Aquinas], which is generally held, is that after His Ascension, Our Lord rarely appeared in Person; He merely appeared in a visible form, but not in His real body. His apparitions in the Eucharist may be explained in two ways, says St. Thomas; either by a miraculous impression made on the sense of sight (which is the case when He manifests Himself to a single person) or by a form that is real and visible, but distinct from His own body; for, the Saint adds, the Body of Our Saviour cannot be seen in its own proper form except in the one place which actually contains it. — What has been said of Our Lord applies also to the Blessed Virgin. When she appeared at

Lourdes, for instance, her body remained in heaven, and at the spot of the apparition there was but a sensible form which represented her. This explains how she could appear now under one aspect, now under another. — The same conclusion is deduced from the testimony of St. Teresa, Relation XIII, where she says: 'By some things which He told me, I understood that after He ascended into heaven He never descended on earth to converse with anyone, except in the Holy Sacrament.'

"There are some persons who, through pride or through the desire for recognition, voluntarily simulate ecstasies and visions. A notable instance was that of Magdalen of the Cross, a Franciscan Nun of Cordova, of the XVI Century, who after having given herself to the devil from her infancy, entered the convent at the age of seventeen and was three times elected Abbess of her monastery. Aided by the demon, she simulated all the mystical phenomena of ecstasy, levitation, stigmata, revelations and prophecies repeatedly fulfilled. Thinking herself at the point of death, she made a confession which she later retracted, was exorcised and moved to another convent of her order.

"In the life of St. Catherine of Bologna it is related that the devil sometimes appeared to her in the form of the crucified Christ and demanded of her, under the appearance of perfection, the most impossible things, in order to drive her to despair." (Tanqueray, *The Spiritual Life.*)

Though one should always be respectful and reverent and not too quick to ridicule, nevertheless one cannot be too prudent in matters such as those mentioned in your question.

We do not know how it is possible for a statue to bleed, if such a thing really happens. Perhaps we might say that it is not impossible for a statue to sweat or shed tears or to bleed because wood and stone often when mouldering collect moisture within them and it may exude with various colors taken from the air. We might hazard the remark that it is not impossible that statues should make sounds like moaning, because of the tearing asunder of the particles of which they are composed. But, by the way, we cannot imagine how a statue can talk: it seems altogether impossible that articulate human speech should come from inanimate things, the organs of speech being conspicuously missing. Must we not suppose that if one hears a statue speak, his imagination is influenced by some sensation which appears to resemble a real one, just as in dreams, for instance? But we do not know. Anyhow, how much do you know about electricity? about the radio? about television? Maybe you can explain these things in words; but when it comes right down to their essence . . .

However, when certain phenomena cannot be explained naturally, one may say that they are at least possibly or even probably miraculous; and when the Church officially

declares a certain thing to be miraculous, one must say it is certainly so.

* * *

How do you explain the extraordinary mystical phenomena of which we read in the lives of the saints or of saintly persons? I mean particularly levitation, luminous rays, fragrant odors, prolonged fasting, and stigmatization.

In *levitation* the body is raised above the ground and sustained in midair without any natural support; thus, St. Joseph Cupertino, seeing how some workmen were trying to get a heavy mission cross in place, flew up into the air and without effort put the cross in the place prepared for it. Akin to this phenomenon is extraordinary immobility; thus, we read of a saint who could not be moved from the spot where she was by any means whatsoever.

Luminous rays means that there is a halo around the head of the saint or a glow enveloping the whole body. This sometimes accompanies ecstasy.

Fragrant odors means that sometimes God permits the bodies of the saints during their lifetime or after their death to give forth a fragrant odor, a symbol, so to speak, of the virtues they practiced; thus, the stigmata of St. Francis of Assisi occasionally emitted a sweet perfume. And there are many similar facts.

Prolonged fasting means that some have lived many years without taking any other food than Holy Communion; thus, Blessed Angela of Foligno, twelve years; St. Cath-

erine of Siena, about eight years; Blessed Elizabeth of Rente, over fifteen years; St. Ledwina, twenty-eight years; Blessed Catherine Racconigi, ten years; Rosa Andriani, twenty-eight years; Louis Lateau, fourteen years; Theresa Neumann, over twenty years. Akin to this is going without sleep; thus, St. Peter of Alcantara slept but one hour and a half a night for forty years.

Stigmatization means that there is a kind of impression of the Saviour's wounds made upon the feet, hands, side, and brow. These wounds spontaneously appear of themselves, without any exterior hurt, and periodically there is a flow of fresh blood. The first person to bear the stigmata was St. Francis of Assisi, who received them on September 17, 1222, and retained them until his death. Since then there have been at least 320 such cases, 40 of them men, and 62 of these persons have been canonized.

If these extraordinary phenomena are well authenticated, they can hardly be explained on natural grounds.

Some of these phenomena, however, are not beyond the power of angels or of demons.

Some of them are a sort of anticipation of a prerogative of glorified bodies.

Each case must first of all be thoroughly verified so as to eliminate any chance of fraud. (Cf. Tanqueray, *The Spiritual Life*.)

* * *

Some people, and you among them, are pretty hard on private revelations of all kinds. Pretty soon you'll be questioning the promises connected with the nine first Fridays, the five first Saturdays, maybe even the Fatima peace promises. Isn't there danger of its coming to pass that people won't believe in anything?

Of course, one should not be too skeptical either. Quite fitting here are these words of Blessed Pope Pius X: "The most Holy Congregation of Rites declared thirty years ago (May 2, 1877): 'Such apparitions or revelations have neither been approved nor condemned by the Apostolic See, but are only permitted as objects of pious belief on merely human faith, according to the tradition which they bear, which is also confirmed by suitable records and testimonies.' Whoever holds to this principle will be relieved of all fear. For the religious character of any apparition, according as it regards the fact itself, is called relative, and is always implicitly conditioned on the truth of the fact; but according as it is absolute, it is always based on truth, for its object is the persons of the Saints who are honored. A parallel affirmation may be made concerning relics." (Encyclical *Pascendi*.)

"In all these matters, however, it behooves Christians to observe the greatest caution, since the traditions received in the Church may not lightly be rejected without condemnable temerity. A prudent religious assent should be given to them;

but if grave reasons to the contrary arise, they should be humbly submitted to ecclesiastical authority, to which it alone pertains to judge of the opportuneness of alterations or corrections" (Herve, *Manuale Th. Dog.*, I, p. 517).

It seems to us that people will not believe in anything if they are permitted to believe in everything. When there are so many visions and apparitions and revelations everywhere, and when people gather in crowds at places where visions and wonders are supposed to have taken place, true miracles are in danger of being discredited, the Church and the sacraments and preaching and instruction are neglected or abandoned, and only too often the Pope, the bishops, and the priests are spoken of critically because they refuse to take part or share in the enthusiasms of the mob. Nay, more, there are even acts of deplorable disobedience to ecclesiastical authorities when they intervene and issue prohibitions.

To quote some pertinent passages from the article "True Christianity, Signs and Wonders" by Msgr. Alfred Ottaviani, Assessor of the Holy Office, which appeared in *Osservatore Romano*, February 4, 1951 (NCWC News Service translation, mainly):

"As in the case of other feelings, there can be, and in point of fact there are, also deviations from true religious feeling. Religious sentiment must be guided by reason, nourished by grace, and as is our whole

life, controlled by the Church, and even more strictly. There are such things as religious instruction, religious education and religious training. Those who have fought the authority of the Church and religious sentiment in so light-headed a way find themselves today faced with imposing outbursts of an instinctive religious feeling entirely deficient in the light of reason and the consciousness of grace, one that has no check or control. . . .

“There is no doubt that the Church does not wish to cast into the shadow the wonders which God works. It merely wants to keep the faithful watchful concerning what comes from God and what does not come from God, and which can come from His and our adversary. The Church is the enemy of the *false* miracle.

“A good Catholic knows from his catechism that the true religion rests on the true Faith, on Revelation, which ended with the death of the last Apostle and has been entrusted to the Church, its interpreter and custodian. Nothing else necessary to our salvation can be revealed to us. There is nothing more for which we must look. We have everything, if we wish to make use of it. Even the most accredited vision can furnish us with new motives for fervor but not with new elements of life or doctrine. True religion abides essentially, apart from in the conscience, in the love of God and the consequent love of our neighbor. And more than in acts of worship and rite, the love of God consists in doing the will of

God, obeying His commandments. This is true religion.

“A good Catholic knows that in the saints themselves the nature of sanctity consists not in the preternatural gifts of visions, prophecies and wonders, but in heroic exercise of virtue. . . . We must not confound holiness with what can be and is, as a rule, an unmistakable sign of holiness, but not always sufficiently clear so as not to need the necessary supervision of religious authorities. On this point the teaching of the Church has never been equivocal. The man who turns back to events of dubious interpretation rather than accept the word of God, loves the world more than God. . . .

“We repeat that in order to be religious, it is necessary to be so in a proper fashion and as a matter of duty. In order to be good Catholics and devout people we must act with all the attention with which we act when applying ourselves to the most serious things in life. Incredulity is just as harmful to the sincere believer as credulity. True, it is not everyone who can form his own opinion on every point. But what are the bishops and the Pope for?

“It is a strange thing: no untrained person would dare to build a house by himself, tailor his own clothes, make himself a pair of shoes or cure himself of a sickness. Yet when it is a question of religious life, people reject all authority, refuse to place any trust in it, even distrust and disobey it with impunity. . . .

“During the undeniable return to God we

are now witnessing, the faithful must overcome their bias and return once more to sharing their feelings, their thoughts and their faith with the priest. . . . For the last ten years, while religious authorities have remained hesitant, the people have acted hastily and busied themselves with wonders which, to say the least, have not been verified. . . . Speaking honestly, we must admit that such events may be expressions of natural religious enthusiasm (religiosity). But they are not Christian events, and they give a dangerous pretext to those who are out to discover at all costs the infiltrations and survivals of paganism and superstition in Christianity, especially Catholicism. . . .

“Let Catholics hear the word of God which the Church, and the Church alone, preserves and repeats whole and incorrupt. Let them not run like sheep without a shepherd after other voices seeking to drown the voice of God if in truth they are opposed to the voice of the Church. We have Holy Scripture, we have Tradition, we have the Chief Shepherd and a hundred other shepherds next door to our homes. Why should we offer the spectacle of foolishness or unhealthy exaltation to those who oppose and despise us?”

Sensible people are not questioning the promises of the nine first Fridays, the five first Saturdays, or the Fatima peace promises (which last, however, are not quite clear to us). But to quote Msgr. Ottaviani again, they do deplore the acts of diso-

bedience in Italy in connection with "the so-called visions of Voltago, in France over the Espis and Bouxieres incidents which were allied to those in Hampsur-Sambre (Belgium), in Germany at Heroldsbach, and in the United States of America over the manifestations at Necedah, Wisconsin," to exclude other examples from other countries near and far.

* * *

Let us by all means be obedient children of Holy Mother Church. Let us *think with the Church*. One of the rules St. Ignatius lays down in his Spiritual Exercises for thinking with the Church is as follows: "To arrive at the truth in all things, we ought always to be ready to believe that what seems to us white is black, if the hierarchical Church so defines it; believing that between Christ our Lord the Bridegroom and the Church His Bride there is one and the same Spirit, who governs and directs us for the salvation of our souls, because our Holy Mother the Church is ruled and governed by the same Spirit and our Lord Who gave the Ten Commandments."

But it is not matters of Faith strictly so called but the practical decisions of the Church in moral and disciplinary matters that will often make heavy demands on the obedience and loyalty of the ordinary Catholic.

The conduct of a true Catholic is laid down clearly by St. Ignatius: "Laying aside all private judgment, we ought to hold our

mind prepared and prompt to obey in all things the true Spouse of Christ our Lord which is our Holy Mother, the hierarchical Church." It is the only possible conduct for one who believes in Christ and in the Church instituted by Him. "He who hears you, hears me; and he who rejects you, rejects me" (Luke 10:16).

The commands of the Church are, then, to be accepted and obeyed as if they were the commands of Christ Himself, whatever our views and feelings on the matter may be. In moral and disciplinary matters we are not asked to forswear these views and feelings, to call white what seems to us black.

We are not, properly speaking, in the realm of Faith where man's reason sees nothing, but in that of discipline, of temporal, social, and educational matters, where reason often plays a very important part, and where different opinions may be held, and the decisions of the Church may, possibly, not appear as the very best. We are simply asked to lay aside all private judgment of our own and accept the ruling of the Church in the spirit of obedience and of loyalty. Our obedience and submission must be full of confidence and of trust. The authority to which we submit and by which we allow ourselves to be led is the authority of the true Spouse of Christ our Lord and our Holy Mother, the hierarchical Church. It is the authority of the Vicar of Christ, of the *sweet Christ on earth*, as St. Catherine of Siena used to call Him.

It is the authority of our Bishop, who in the words of St. Ignatius of Antioch, holds the place of God and is the shepherd whom all must obey, and without whom nothing can be done.

Nor, to be true Catholics, is it enough to obey the Church when she commands under penalty of sin. We must feel with her in every matter of some moment, defend all that she stands for, and constantly side with our ecclesiastical superiors and leaders. That is why St. Ignatius adds: "To praise all the precepts of the Church, keeping our minds ready to seek reasons for defending her, and in no way impugning her."

Readiness of mind to defend every measure of the ecclesiastical authority, and horror of any semblance of opposition to it, is the hallmark of true Catholicity. (Ambruzzi, *The Spiritual Exercises*.)

* * *

Now I am wondering about Fatima.

Wonder no longer. "Devotion to Our Lady of the Rosary of Fatima has been indulged and approved by papal authority. Temples in her honor are rising in many parts of the Christian world. The great national pilgrimages which take place at Fatima on the thirteenth of every month from May to October, and the almost miraculous growth of the Rosary and Immaculate Heart Crusade now sweeping the United States, will hasten the triumph of Mary's Immaculate Heart, after the present

tribulation of the nations, and sanctify the country.”

You do not have to believe the revelations of Fatima. They are private revelations. However many may believe and be convinced of private apparitions and revelations, even if the whole Church should do so, as in the case of the apparitions of Lourdes, the fact remains that this is not a part of the teaching God gave His Church when He founded it. These private revelations never become a part of the Catholic faith; and the Church, being the guardian and organ of public revelation only, never imposes upon us the obligation of believing private revelations. But she has the right of passing judgment upon them lest the faithful believe error and be deceived. When private revelations are approved by the Church, such approbation merely signifies that they may be published, as in the case of Fatima, for the instruction of the faithful, as being of a kind that may be piously believed according to the rules of prudence and the authority and testimonies upon which they rest. They are not an object of Catholic faith.

In practice, however, even many of the saints and doctors of the Church have believed in such visions and revelations. St. Gregory the Great, for instance, uses them to confirm the Church's teachings that prayers and Masses help the suffering souls.

Hence, it is quite all right to believe all of what Our Lady of Fatima said. Indeed, it would be well for all of us to become more and more Fatima-conscious and to do what Our Lady urges us to do. "I am the Lady of the Rosary," she said, "and I have come to warn the faithful to amend their lives and ask pardon for their sins. They must not continue to offend Our Lord who has been so deeply offended. They must say the Rosary. — Pray, pray much, and make sacrifices for sinners. Many souls go to hell because there are none to make sacrifices and pray for them."

You will be in good company indeed if you acclaim to the highest heavens Our Lady of Fatima. You will be in the company of Popes, bishops, priests, religious, laity. Here are a few extracts taken from the radio address delivered by His Holiness Pope Pius XII at the close of the silver jubilee of Fatima, October 31, 1942 (the address was published in the *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, official organ of the Holy See, in November 1942):

"More than once in this year of graces, you have gone in devout pilgrimage to the holy mount of Fatima, bearing with you the hearts of all believing Portugal, to lay at the feet of your Virgin Patroness, in the oasis breathing forth the perfume of faith and piety, the filial tribute of your perfect love. . . . We . . . unite Ourselves with you with all affection of Our heart, to praise and thank the Lord . . . to thank Him especially for the graces of her by

whose hands the divine munificence pours forth on you these torrents of grace. . . . Already in 1934 Our predecessor Pius XI of immortal memory (in the Apostolic Letter *Ex officiosis litteris*) bore witness to the extraordinary benefit with which the Virgin Mother of God had favored your country. . . . That you have shown yourselves grateful during this year We know well. Most pleasing to heaven must have been the official acts of homage; more moving still the sacrifices of little children, the sincere penance and prayer of the humble Gratitude for the past is a pledge of confidence for the future. . . . But in order that this confidence be not presumptuous . . . we must listen to the maternal counsel which she gave at the marriage feast of Cana, and do all that she says. She tells us all to do penance, to amend our lives and flee from sin, which is the principal cause of the awful chastisement with which Eternal Justice punishes the world . . . and by constant prayer—especially the daily Rosary—as well as by such sacrifices as zeal inspires, to win for sinful souls the life of grace and life eternal. . . . Happy is the people whose Lord is God and whose Queen is the Mother of God!”

But why go on? We have yet to find a Catholic who has any doubt about the wonders of Fatima. Nor is your quite legitimate query a doubt. You are merely wondering.

Wonder no longer. But read all you can about Fatima. Above all find out what she wants you to do—and do it. Our Lady of Fatima, pray for us!

• MARY •
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