

Saintly Devotion to Fatima: St. John Paul II, Pius XII and Fulton Sheen

Holy lives highlight the Marian message.

[Joseph Pronechen](#) May 12, 2017



Pope John Paul II visits the Fatima shrine in Portugal on May 13, 2000. (photo: L'Osservatore Romano)

Fatima's centennial — May 13 — highlights the ardent devotion to the apparitions and our Blessed Mother by several saints, blessed and venerables in the last century, chief among them Venerables Pius XII and Fulton Sheen and St. John Paul II.

“Fatima owes its present popularity in the Church very largely to the interest and encouragement of Pope Pius XII.” So wrote Servant of God Father John Hardon in 1952. The Holy Father’s background proved this was no surprise. As Eugenio Pacelli, he was consecrated bishop in the Sistine Chapel by Pope Benedict XV — on May 13, 1917, the very day our Blessed Mother first appeared to the children at Fatima.

Just a year after being elected pope, Pius XII approved the Fatima apparitions in 1940. He was the first Holy Father to refer to Fatima in a papal document. *L’Osservatore Romano* reported what he wrote that June 29:

“Let the faithful, when reciting the Rosary so strongly recommended by Our Lady of Fatima, not omit to address an invocation to the Blessed Virgin in favor of missionary vocations.”

In 1942, with the Fatima jubilee coming to a close, Pius XII consecrated the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. He also extended the feast and Mass of the Immaculate Heart of Mary to the Church universal. In 1946, he had Mary crowned at Fatima, too.

Pius XII and the ‘Miracle of the Sun’

Then, on Nov. 1, 1950, he declared the dogma of the Assumption — with a link to Fatima’s famed “Miracle of the

Sun."

"I have seen the 'Miracle of the Sun.' This is the pure truth," Pius XII wrote of events that began just prior to proclaiming the dogma. Pius XII saw the "Miracle of the Sun" four times, describing the events in a handwritten message displayed at a Vatican exhibit in November 2008, according to Zenit news service. The Holy Father wrote that, at 4pm on Oct. 30, 1950, during his usual walk in the Vatican Gardens, "I was awestruck by a phenomenon that before now I had never seen."

"The sun, which was still quite high, looked like a pale, opaque sphere, entirely surrounded by a luminous circle," he recalled, and he could look at it "without the slightest bother. There was a very light little cloud in front of it."

The Holy Father said the sun "moved outward slightly, either spinning, or moving from left to right and vice versa."

Pius XII related how he saw the same miracle again on Oct. 31 and Nov. 1, "the day of the definition of the dogma of the Assumption, and then again Nov. 8, and after that, no more." He took it as a divine sign endorsing the dogma's proclamation.

Pius XII also spoke with Servant of God Lucia dos Santos and told her to write out the messages Mary gave to her. He

was the first pope to see them.

In honor of the Oct. 13, 1951, celebration at Fatima, Pius himself told pilgrim listeners over the radio, "The Virgin Mother's insistence on the recitation of the family Rosary was meant to teach us that the secret of peace in family life lies in imitating the virtues of the Holy Family."

He also honored Our Lady by declaring the first ever Marian Year for 1954-55.

Bishop Sheen

One of the bishops at Fatima on that Oct. 13, 1951, anniversary was Venerable Fulton Sheen. During a show on Fatima as part of his popular *Life Is Worth Living* television series, he described the apparition's necessary impact on Oct. 13 by saying, "The event itself might almost be called the birthday of the modern world because it was on that day the forces of good and evil seemed to reach their peak."

During the show, Bishop Sheen pointed out he was wearing the pectoral cross worn by Bishop Eugenio Pacelli (the future Pope Pius XII) when he was nearly assassinated by communists while he was nuncio in Germany. Bishop Sheen described how the rattled assassin lost his gun, which Bishop Pacelli then handed back to him fearlessly. Pius XII would become a foe of the communism Our Lady warned of

at Fatima, the television-savvy bishop explained.

Participating in that 1951 Fatima anniversary with 1 million pilgrims praying all night in the rain, Bishop Sheen envisioned the hammer and sickle of communism "changing its figure and symbolism and becoming as the Book of the Apocalypse said, 'the moon under the Lady's feet.' This is the way to peace."

In his 1952 book *The World's First Love*, Bishop Sheen wrote of the hopefulness of the Fatima message: "I believe that the Blessed Virgin chose to be known as 'Our Lady of Fatima' as a pledge and a sign of hope."

Fatima Pope

Of course, St. John Paul II had a foremost connection to Fatima. His attempted assassination came on May 13, 1981, and he attributed his survival to the miraculous intercession of Our Lady of Fatima.

The following year on May 13, on the 65th anniversary of Our Lady's first apparition, he traveled to the shrine in Portugal to thank her and to give a stirring homily about Fatima. "If the Church has accepted the message of Fatima, it is, above all, because that message contains *a truth and a call* whose basic content is *the truth and the call of the Gospel itself*," John Paul II said. "The message of Fatima is, in its basic nucleus, a call to *conversion and repentance*, as in the

Gospel."

At the same time, the saintly Pope did not sugarcoat words as he stressed the message's importance. "The call to repentance is a motherly one, and at the same time, it is strong and decisive. The love that 'rejoices in the truth' (1 Corinthians 13:6) is capable of being clear-cut and firm. The call to repentance is linked, as always, *with a call to prayer*. In harmony with the tradition of many centuries, the Lady of the message indicates the Rosary, which can rightly be defined as 'Mary's prayer': the prayer in which she feels particularly united with us. She herself prays with us."

John Paul II made clear, "In the light of a mother's love, we understand the whole message of the Lady of Fatima," because she desires "everyone's salvation."

Fatima Disciples

Fatima was important to others whose cause for canonization is open. Servant of God Gwen Coniker and her husband, Jerome, spent two years in Fatima, Portugal, growing in Marian devotion, after which they founded the Apostolate for Family Consecration and Catholic Family Land in Bloomingdale, Ohio. John Paul II named them one of 20 couples to advise the [Pontifical Council for the Family](#). Pope Benedict XVI then declared the apostolate "a private international association of the faithful of pontifical right."

And everything began with the Conikers' love of Fatima.

St. Josemaría Escrivá, the founder of Opus Dei who was canonized in 2002, visited Fatima often. In May 1967, the 50th anniversary year of Fatima, as the Church faced a difficult time, he prayed "unceasingly for a solution to the problems, with special recourse to Our Lady's intercession," according to a biography.

In one of his writings on Fatima dating to 1947, Jesuit Father John Hardon wrote that "we can safely look upon Fatima as destined to become the crowning glory of the Blessed Virgin in modern times."

At a key conference he gave on Fatima decades later, Father Hardon emphasized the same message of repentance as St. John Paul II, and he reminded those gathered that Our Lady came to turn hearts back to God, as she told the servants at Cana — "Do whatever he tells you to do."

"I believe that Fatima is especially the sign in our age of the moral miracles that God wants to work in a proud, self-preoccupied, pleasure-intoxicated mankind," Father Hardon said in a magazine interview. "Miracles are being worked. I tell people to expect miracles. And the most important kind of miracles you should ask God to work are through Our Lady's intercession."

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