

THURSDAY



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Fr David



Mary. What do we mean by “Mother of God”?

As Catholic Christians, we firmly believe in the incarnation of our Lord: Mary conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit. (Lk 1.26-38 and Mt 1.18-25) Through her, Jesus Christ—second person of the Holy Trinity, one-in-being (consubstantial) with the Father, and true God from true God—entered this world, taking on human flesh and a human soul. Jesus is true God and true man. In His person are united both a divine nature and a human nature.

Mary did not create the divine person of Jesus, who existed with the Father from all eternity. “In fact, the One whom she conceived as man by the Holy Spirit, who truly became her Son according to the flesh, was none other than the Father’s eternal Son, the second person of the Holy Trinity.

Sassoferrato’s Madonna and Child, c. 1641

Hence the Church confesses that Mary is truly ‘Mother of God’ (*Theotokos*)” (Catechism, No. 495). As S John wrote, “The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us, and we have seen His glory: The glory of an only Son coming from the Father filled with enduring love” (Jn 1:14).

For this reason, sometime in the early history of the Church, Mary was given the title “Mother of God.” S John Chrysostom (d. 407), for example, composed in his Eucharistic Prayer for the Mass an anthem in honor of her:

“It is truly just to proclaim you blessed, O Mother of God, who are most blessed, all pure and Mother of our God. We magnify you who are more honorable than the Cherubim and incomparably more glorious than the Seraphim. You who, without losing your virginity, gave birth to the Word of God. You who are truly the Mother of God.”

However, objection to the title “Mother of God” arose in the fifth century, due to confusion concerning the mystery of the incarnation. Nestorius, Bishop of Constantinople (428-431), incited a major controversy. He stated that Mary gave birth to Jesus Christ, a regular human person, period. To this human person was united the person of the Word of God (the divine Jesus). This union of two persons—the human Christ and the divine Word—was “sublime and unique” but merely accidental. The divine person dwelt in the human person “as in a temple.” Following his own reasoning, Nestorius asserted that the human Jesus died on the cross, not the divine Jesus. As such, Mary is not “Mother of God,” but simply “Mother of Christ”—the human Jesus. Sound confusing? It is, but the result is the splitting of Christ into two persons and the denial of the incarnation.

S Cyril, Bishop of Alexandria (d. 440) refuted Nestorius,

asserting, “It was not that an ordinary man was born first of the Holy Virgin, on whom afterwards the Word descended; what we say is that, being united with the flesh from the womb, (the Word) has undergone birth in the flesh, making the birth in the flesh His own...” This statement affirms the belief asserted in the first paragraph.

On June 22, 431, the Council of Ephesus convened to settle this argument. The Council declared,

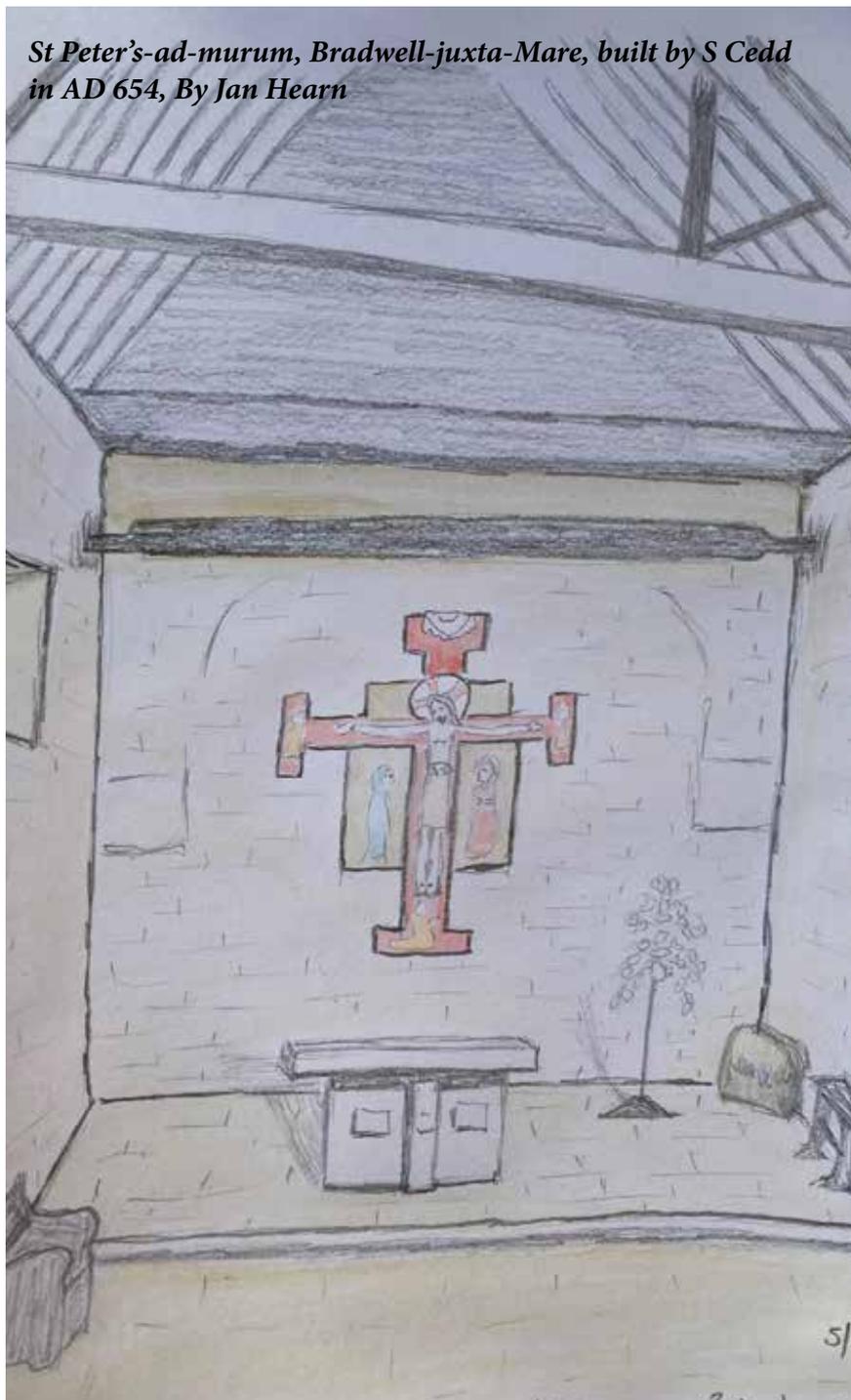
“If anyone does not confess that the Emmanuel is truly God and therefore that the holy Virgin is the Mother of God (since she begot according to the flesh the Word of God made flesh), let them be anathema.”

The Council officially recognized that Jesus is one person, with two natures—human and divine—united in a true union. Mary is not Mother of God the Father, or Mother of God the Holy Spirit; rather, she is *Mother of God the Son—Jesus Christ*.

The incarnation is indeed a profound mystery. The Church uses very precise—albeit philosophical—language to prevent confusion and error. Nevertheless, as we celebrate Mary’s month of May, we must ponder this great mystery of how our divine Savior entered this world, taking on our human flesh, to free us from sin. We must also ponder and emulate the great example of our Blessed Mother, who said, “I am the handmaid of the Lord; be it done unto me according to Thy word.” May we turn to her always as our own Mother, pleading, “Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen.”

Many thanks to Fr William Saunders for much of the information in this, as originally published in The Arlington Catholic Herald.

*St Peter's-ad-murum, Bradwell-juxta-Mare, built by S Cedd
in AD 654, By Jan Hearn*



Expositio Lectionis Dominicae



Fr Tomas

Christ's first gift

The month of May is devoted to the Blessed Virgin Mary. There are many Marian feasts in May, on both the universal and local calendars. Our Lady of Oviedo – 2 May (Spain), of Jasna Gora – 3 (Poland), of Aparecida – 11 (Brazil), of Fatima – 13 (Portugal), to the 31st of May, when we celebrate, in the traditional calendar, the Queenship of Mary.

In the Litany of Loreto, in many places recited continuously with the Rosary, she is invoked under 13 regal titles: Queen of Angels, of Patriarchs, of Prophets, of Apostles, of Martyrs, of Confessors, of Virgins, of All Saints, Conceived without Original Sin, Assumed into Heaven, of the Holy Rosary, of families, of peace.

Her image never eclipses the image of Christ, nor should she be understood as an additional object of faith set apart from Christ. It is from Christ and from Him alone that we receive this image as a gift, as the unfolding of all that His teaching and calling means. And so let us ask ourselves, what is the strength of this image, what help does it give us?

What this image gives us first of all is the image of a woman. Christ's first gift to us, the first and most profound revelation

of His teaching and call is given to us in the image of a woman. Being the icon of the Church, she is the image of our full humanity so that when God looks at his creation, he also sees a feminine face of the world. Women bring into the world a holiness and joy without which the ultimate reality would never be complete. The Blessed Virgin is the climax, the personification, and the affirmation of the ultimate destiny of all creation: that God may finally be all in all, and will fill all things with himself. This world, understood as the receptacle of God's glory, is necessarily feminine.

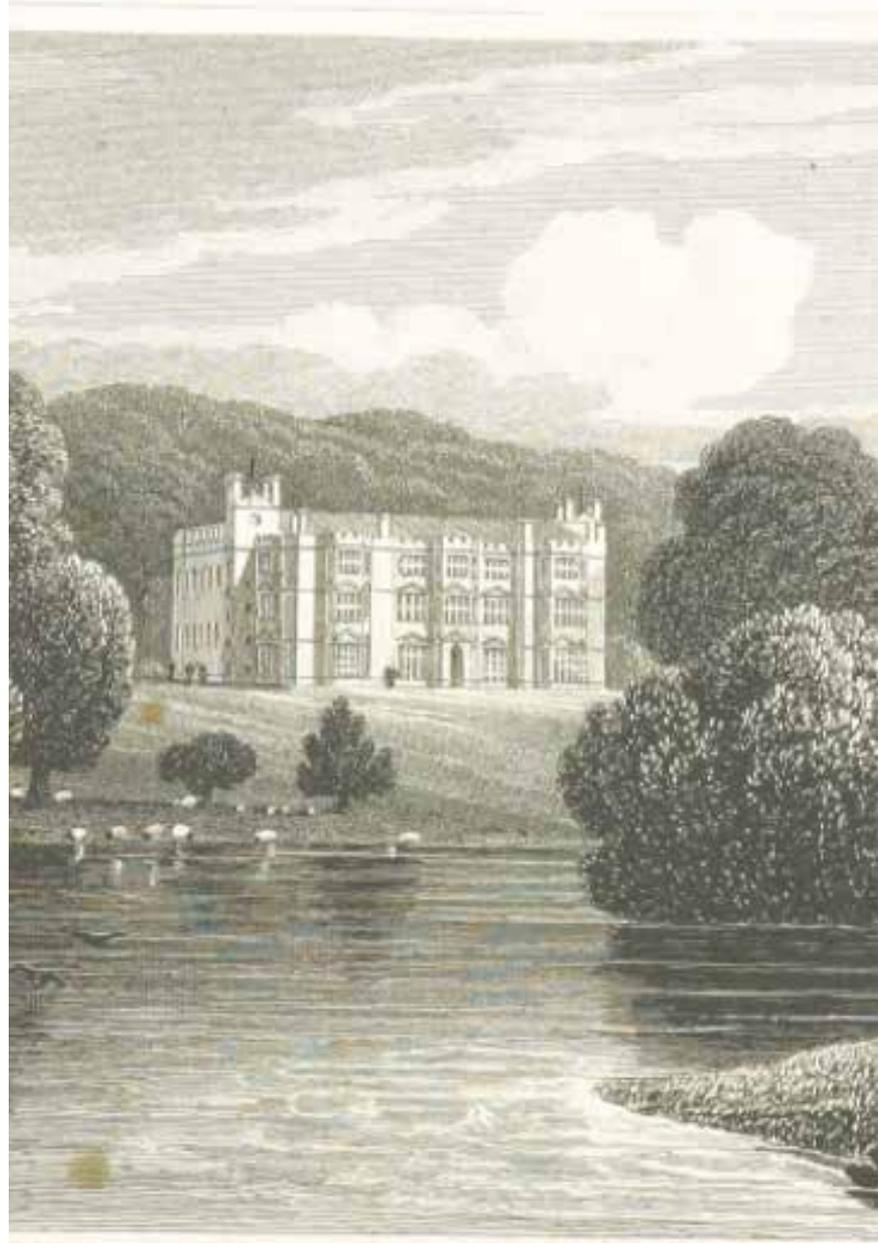
Nevertheless, the world has become in many respects hopelessly male, governed by pride and aggression, where all has been reduced to power and violence. Our world today is also masculine in the sense that it concentrates on categories, structures, institutions, tangible expressions – and much less on the poetry of the world, the invisible grace making the world what it is. This masculine approach is also visible in formal theology which gives our faith a formal structure, but that structure would be deficient without the feminine element of beauty and spirituality. At the heart of that beauty and spirituality, as its ultimate expression, movement and perfection, we find Mary. Rather than being the object of our prayers, she is their very expression she embodies the Church as a living prayer. It is this combination of spirituality and beauty, for which the world is longing today.

In the end, no rational explanation of the world can triumph. The world needs the victorious humility of the Church as personified in Mary. For behind all the rational structures and logical categories, we have a conscious desire for the ultimate synthesis of the world. This is what the Church, and she alone, can offer to the world.

The image of the Virgin Mary, the Virgin Mother, stands against our pragmatic understanding of the world and indicts it by her presence alone: the image of infinite humility and purity, yet filled with beauty and strength; the image of pure love. We do need this feminine balance in the Church, and in the world. In the image of the Virgin Mary we find what has almost completely been lost in our too rational world: compassion, humility, care, trust, tender-heartedness. We call her our Lady and the Queen of heaven and earth, and yet she calls herself “the handmaid of the Lord”. She is the New Eve because of God’s request that she answered, “I am the servant of the Lord, be it done to me according to his word.” At that moment, she transcended our human alienation from God. She is not out to teach or prove anything, yet her presence alone, in its light and joy, takes away the anxiety of our problems. She does not speak with authority, but has a very own mission to fulfil in the world. It is a mission derived from the authority of her Son – we can understand it as her sub-mission to the will of God.

In Mary, we see the qualities of humility, beauty, obedience and total self-giving that triumph in the new creation: this is why she is the Queen, crowned by Divine glory. On Mount Athos in Greece, the great monastic centre of the Orthodox East, no woman is admitted. Yet, the whole mountain is considered to be the particular possession of the Mother of God, her very own “Royal Peculiar”.

In Mary, we have received a gift from God and we can share it with the world, thirsty and hungry, in joy and beauty. She is the secret joy of all that the Church does in this world. She continues to reveal to us that which we are losing every day, the ultimate beauty and mystery. And without beauty and mystery in life, pretty much everything loses its meaning.



ENGLEFIELD HOUSE.

BERKSHIRE

READING INTO HISTORY

John Dearing



RECUSANT READING

Following the Reformation many, particularly among the aristocracy, continued to observe the old faith and such “recusant” families were especially prevalent in this part of the world, occupying some of the large country houses around Reading. Two of these in particular, Mapledurham and Stonor, continue to belong to Roman Catholic families to the present day. Another was Sir Francis Englefield (1520-96) of Englefield House, near Theale, who also held Whitley Park in what is now Reading. His nephew, another Francis, later acquired Whiteknights Park, the present home of Reading University.

Left, a drawing of Englefield House, in Views of the Seats of Noblemen and Gentlemen in England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland by John Preston Neale (1824)

Conditions worsened after the papal bull of 1570 which declared Elizabeth I a heretic and in effect invited her subjects to depose her. The propagation of Roman Catholicism was seen as a form of treason. Despite this Jesuit missionaries such as Edmund Campion are known to have made extensive tours of the Thames Valley area, using Stonor as a base. A little closer to Reading, Ufton Court, the home of Francis Perkins, became a safe-house for the missionary-priests. Thomas Vachell of Coley Park was yet another recusant, although his Reading home was regranted to Protestant relations and he moved to Ipsden.

Feelings towards the old faith hardly improved with the accession of James I and the Gunpowder Plot. William Alexander who then occupied Caversham Court was said to have been implicated on the fringes of the affair, while the Brownes who succeeded the Alexanders were related by marriage to Robert Catesby. The Alexanders lost their patronage of Caversham Parish Church following the Plot.

Conditions eased under Charles I via his marriage treaty with his Catholic wife, Henrietta Maria. However, matters deteriorated under the Commonwealth and improved little under Charles II despite his marriage to another Catholic Princess. In 1676 when lists were made of recusants in the Thames Valley, only 0.1% of Reading's population was so identified, compared with 22% at Ufton Nervet. The activities of James II provoked further reaction and Romanists were left at the end of the century as the group benefiting least from the greater religious toleration that resulted from the 1688 Revolution. Catholic involvement in the Jacobite rebellions further delayed easing of the penal laws, although the Vicars Apostolic appointed by



Edmund Campion, in a 1631 print.

the Pope seem to have been able to move fairly freely. In 1741 Bishop Richard Challoner visited Whiteknights and recorded that there was at that time “a large congregation of 300 Catholics in the neighbourhood of Reading”. This must have been based on a broad definition of Reading, as an official return of 1767 recorded 28 Catholics in the town.

Later in the 18th century, with the Jacobite threat passed, a more tolerant attitude prevailed and in 1778 the first Catholic Relief Act removed some of the penal laws in return for Catholics denouncing Stuart claims to the throne and denying any civil jurisdiction on the part of the Pope. A second Act of 1791 reopened the professions

to Roman Catholics and gave legal existence to registered Catholic places of worship, provided clergy took an oath of allegiance.

Catholic advances in England received a further impetus from the anti-clericalism of the French Revolution, which led to a mass exodus of French priests. Those who found their way to Reading were housed in Finch's Buildings in Hosier Street and then from 1796 the town's grandest coaching inn, the King's Arms, Castle Hill was requisitioned by the government as a hostel for 340 of them. The inn's assembly room was used as a chapel, accommodating 400 worshippers.

Finch's Buildings developed into a mission centre served by some four or five priests, led by Fr. François Longuet. They gave French lessons and with their earnings saved sufficient funds to acquire a plot of land near the Forbury, where in 1812 the Chapel of the Resurrection was consecrated. The chapel is said to have served a congregation of around 170 comprising the few native Catholics in the town, along with converts, French émigrés and Italian traders. In 1817 Longuet was robbed and murdered in Tilehurst on his way back from Pangbourne. He was buried in the Chapel with his remains being removed to the new St James's church in 1841. After a gap of three years he was succeeded as priest at the chapel by Fr. Francis Bowland who served until 1837.

In 1829 came the Catholic Emancipation Act, mainly designed to avert civil war in Ireland but with consequences also for England. Roman Catholics could now once more sit in Parliament and occupy most offices of state, provided they denied the Pope any non-spiritual jurisdiction. The Prime Minister at the time was another

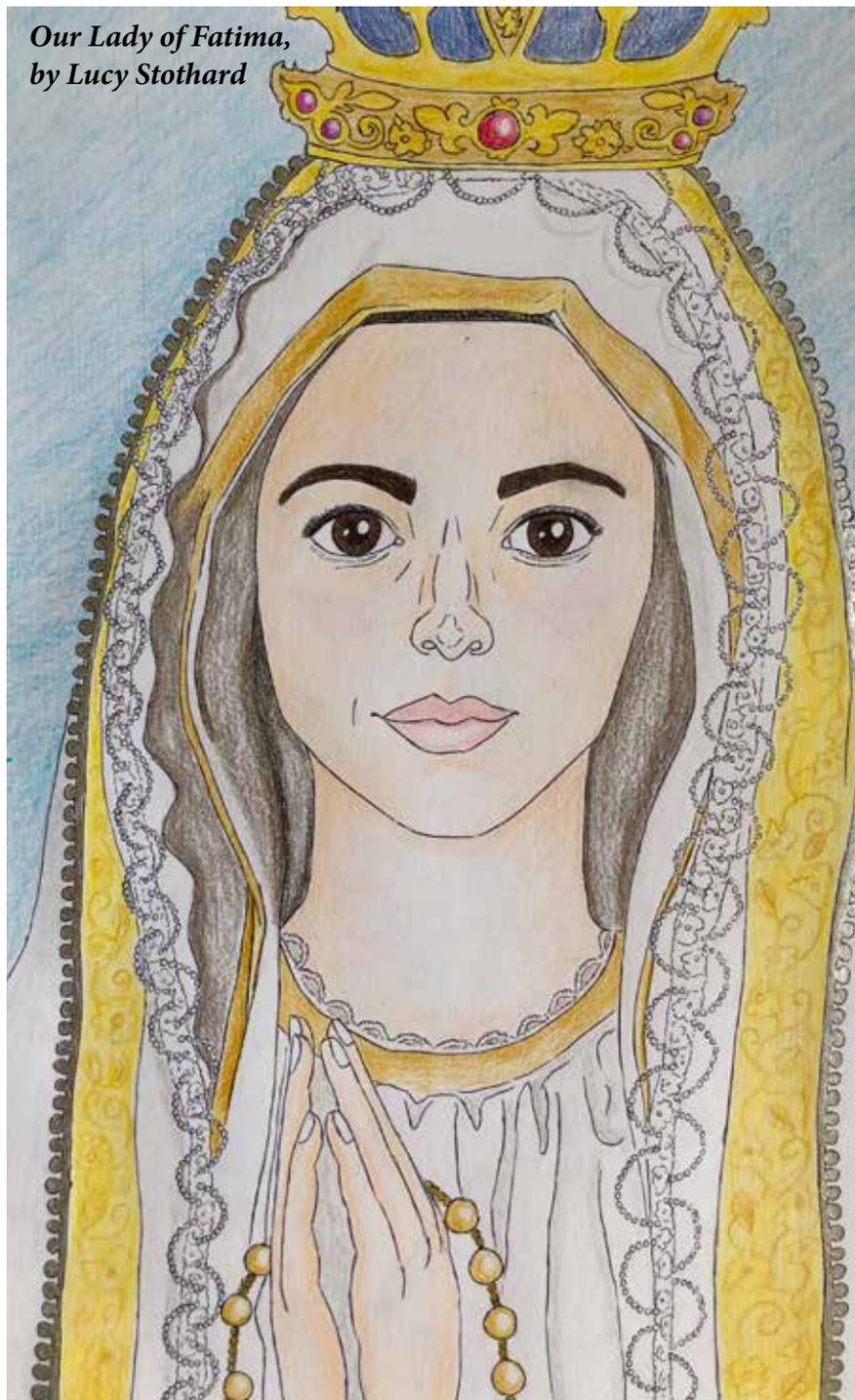


The interior of S James's church before 1925 when alterations changed Pugin's original design (Reading Museum no. 1997.150.180)

man with local connections, the Duke of Wellington whose country seat, Stratfield Saye was seven miles outside Reading. An early consequence of the legislation was the election in 1831 of the Catholic Sir Robert Throckmorton as MP for Berkshire.

Further reading: Thames Valley Papists by Tony Hadland, 1992; Reformation, Revolution and Rebirth by John and Lindsay Mullaney, 2012.

Our Lady of Fatima,
by Lucy Stothard



THE HOLY ONES

*Some reflections on a
Saint of the month.*

Lucy Stothard



A Visitor from Heaven

Our Lady of Fatima

Sunday 13th May was a fairly normal day in early 20th Century Europe. In Rome, Eugenio Pacelli, who would one day be known as Pope Pius XII, was consecrated Archbishop by Pope Benedict XV. In Barcelona, Real Madrid beat Getxo 2-1 in the Copa del Rey final. Somewhere in the Northwest of England, Mrs Percival grieved the death of her husband, Charles, the previous summer in France and wondered how she was going to feed her children that week. And in the countryside surrounding an obscure village in Portugal, three children went to pasture their sheep.

The children's names were Lucia de Jesus dos Santos, Francisco Marto and Jacinta Marto and, if the events of the previous year were anything to go by, they ought not to have been surprised at what happened that Sunday. In spring 1916, the children were out in the fields and were playing a game with pebbles when they saw, 'a light whiter than snow in the form of a young man', who identified himself as the Guardian of Portugal. The Angel appeared to the children three times that year. He taught them how to pray in a manner which was pleasing to the hearts

of Jesus and Mary, which he said had designs of mercy on them, and how to offer up their sufferings for the conversion of the world and the end of war.

The angelic apparitions were to prepare the children for the signal grace which they were to receive the following summer: a visit from the Queen of Heaven herself. On 13th May, the children, having had lunch, were praying their rosaries,

Fearing that a storm
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were about to take the
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The Lady urged the
children not to be afraid.

although in a rather truncated fashion, saying only the first few words of each prayer. The day was brilliantly clear, and they were surprised by what appeared like lightning. Fearing that a storm was brewing, they were about to take the sheep home when a lady dressed in a white mantle with a gold trim appeared, 'shining brighter than the sun.' The

Lady urged the children not to be afraid. When they asked where she was from, she replied, 'I come from Heaven.'

The Lady told the children that she would appear to them on the thirteenth day of each month for the next six months. When they asked her whether or not they would go to Heaven, she assured them that they would, but that Francisco would

have many rosaries to say first. Before she departed, the Lady opened her hands and the children found themselves bathed in divine light, whereupon they fell to their knees and said: “Oh, Holy Trinity, we adore You. My God, my God, I love You in the Blessed Sacrament.”

True to her word, the Lady continued to appear to the children over the months that followed. She revealed that war is God’s chastisement on the world for sin and warned them that, if people did not return to God in prayer and repentance, Russia would arise and spread her errors of atheism and materialism throughout the world (the Russian revolution would occur in November of that year). She showed them a horrifying vision of hell but revealed that God wished to establish in the world devotion to her Immaculate Heart, assuring them that, in this way, many sinners would be saved. She also admonished the children to say their Rosaries in full daily, and encouraged the wearing of the Brown Scapular of Mount Carmel.

The children, upon relaying what they had seen to their adult relatives, were called liars and even beaten, but refused to rescind their testimonies. Then, on 13th October 1917, the Holy Family appeared to a crowd of people who had gathered at Fatima in response to the children’s visions, in an apparition now known as the Miracle of the Sun.

The apparitions have since been declared “worthy of belief” by the Holy See and Fatima receives thousands of pilgrims each year. Of the three shepherd children, only Lucia would survive to adulthood, living her life as an enclosed Carmelite nun.

Jacinta and Francisco were canonised by Pope Francis in May 2017, while Lucia currently holds the status of ‘Servant of God.’

Our Lady of Fatima, pray for us.



The Guest bit

Fr Barry Orford

Back to basics: Bishops

When the Pandemic recedes, the Church of England will face one of its biggest challenges, and therefore biggest opportunities, in recent times. It needs to find humility, and learn afresh what the Church is here to be. Vital to that will be rediscovering what purpose bishops should be serving.

It was inevitable that the House of Bishops should be strongly criticized for going beyond what the law required in their response to the first lockdown. In fairness to them, however, they can never please everyone, and this was a situation none could have anticipated.

Nonetheless, it has released an explosion of anger and frustration against the Church's leadership which had

been building up for some time. As a result, we are in territory where the historic relationship between bishops, their clergy and their people is seriously threatened.

The contributory factors are familiar: complaints from clergy that their bishops have no time for them; mounting

Whatever means we employ for making episcopal appointments, they must have at their heart the conviction that a bishop is to be above all someone whose priorities are prayer, sacramental worship, the pastoral care of their clergy, learning, and absolute dedication to helping parishes flourish.

wrath with ever-increasing diocesan management posts with high-flown titles while churches are deprived of priests; frustration in parishes at being treated like financial cattle whose role is to be milked relentlessly for diocesan funds; suspicion at how those funds are being used; rage at the way parishes are falling victim to schemes for “rationalization” hatched by diocesan officials, and so on.

However, as I have spoken and corresponded with priests and lay people something more has become apparent. Not only are they disillusioned with many of their bishops, they no longer trust them. They are frequently not

convinced that all diocesan bishops have the interests of the faithful at heart.

To mention but one sensitive issue, those who are working as parish priests frequently do not believe that their Fathers/Mothers in God are actively upholding the parish as the most important unit in the Church's outreach – hence the episcopal willingness to keep parishes without priests, to threaten with closure churches deemed to be “failing”, and to pressurize churches into suspending services on the pretext of keeping people safe from COVID-19. Behind this discontent is a rising conviction that bishops, with honourable exceptions, are management people rather than spiritual leaders.

Under Justin Welby, we have seen the creation of a bench of bishops cut mostly from the same cloth – frequently evangelical, unfamiliar with the Anglican tradition's emphasis on liturgical and sacramental worship, and often hazy about its distinctive approach to theology and spirituality. As a colleague remarked to me, “In the Church of England today, the ordained ministry has ceased to be a vocation and become a career structure.” Looking at the present episcopate, the pattern of advancement becomes depressingly familiar.

How much responsibility for this lies with the Crown Nominations Commission? With them, finding candidates for the episcopate seems to have become a matter of box-ticking, and selecting individuals from approved lists of safe names. Are serious scholars or theologians ever put forward for nomination?

No doubt the CNC will claim that it is committed to

genuine discernment in selecting bishops. I therefore ask the CNC, when are its deliberations attended and assisted by experienced guides in the Ignatian principles of Spiritual Discernment? A rhetorical question, because what the CNC means by discernment appears to be managerial and political calculation with a dusting of piety.

If priests and parishes are to recover confidence in their diocesan bishops, then episcopal material must change, which means the process of electing bishops must be changed, along with the expectations the Church has of its bishops.

Whatever means we employ for making episcopal appointments, they must have at their heart the conviction that a bishop is to be above all someone whose priorities are prayer, sacramental worship, the pastoral care of their clergy, learning, and absolute dedication to helping parishes flourish under hard-working priests. It is not enough for such ideals to be recited at episcopal consecrations, only for new bishops immediately to become functionaries of the present Church Managerial.

There are those who would fit this bill, but they are unlikely to feature on lists of individuals deemed acceptable for episcopal election, and if made suffragans are rarely appointed as diocesans. Some might see what I am saying as unfair to our bishops and the CNC, and an absurdly idealistic view of what contemporary bishops should be. Nonetheless, I am undoubtedly not alone in thinking our present ways of appointing bishops are flawed by fatal misconceptions of the episcopal office. We

need leaders who will act as true shepherds to their clergy and people.

The dissatisfaction of priests and parishes with the present leadership is a fact. If the Pandemic does not goad us into a return to basics, then the outlook is indeed bleak. The future does not lie with streamed services, or maintaining the Institution, or inflated schemes for mission. It lies with the greatest possession we have, parishes served by dedicated priests.

Fundamental to renewal will be the restoration to us of bishops committed to supporting and inspiring those parishes, as well as being desperately needed spiritual leaders and teachers. It is time for us to raise our voices and demand the reforms which will bring us such leadership.

The Revd Dr Barry A. Orford is a retired priest and an Emeritus Fellow of St Cross College, Oxford.