

The Five First Saturdays – One Hundred Years

According to what has been communicated to us by Venerable Lúcia dos Santos, eldest of the three seers of Fatima, this coming Wednesday is the hundredth anniversary of Our Lady's revelation to her of the devotion of the Five First Saturdays, given on 10 December 1925.

A letter of Sr Lúcia states that on that day, the Blessed Virgin and the Child Jesus had appeared to her in her cell in the convent of the Dorothean Sisters in Pontevedra (north-western Spain). The Sisters of St Dorothy had educated Lúcia, and she had become a postulant with them only a few weeks earlier, on 24 October 1925.

In the vision, Our Lady carried in her hand a heart surrounded by thorns, and the Child said to Lúcia, 'Have compassion on the Heart of your Most Holy Mother, covered with thorns with which ungrateful men pierce it at every moment, and there is no one to make an act of reparation to remove them.'

Our Lady then said, 'Look, my daughter, at my Heart surrounded by thorns, with which ungrateful men pierce me at every moment with blasphemies and ingratitude. You, at least, try to console me and announce that I promise to assist at the hour of death with all the graces necessary for the salvation of their souls, all those who, with the intention of making reparation to me, on the First Saturday of five successive months, go to confession, receive Holy Communion, say five decades of the Rosary, and keep me company for fifteen minutes, meditating on the fifteen mysteries of the Rosary.'

This promise parallels the famous 'Great Promise' of the Nine First Fridays, made by Our Lord to St Margaret Mary in the 1670s. In the saint's words: 'On Friday during Holy Communion, He said these words to His unworthy slave, if I mistake not: "I promise you in the excessive mercy of my Heart that its all-powerful love will grant to all those who receive Holy Communion on nine first Fridays of consecutive months the grace of final repentance; they will not die under my displeasure or without receiving their sacraments, my divine Heart making itself their assured refuge at the last moment."'

Regarding the First Saturdays – special devotion to Our Lady on Saturdays had existed in the Church for many centuries. The specific practice of making reparation to the Immaculate Heart on First Saturdays had arisen in Italy in the late 19th century, and the Church had enriched this with indulgences. With this providential preparation in view, we can recall the words of the Second Secret, revealed by Our Lady to the children in Fatima on 13 July 1917:

'The war is going to end: but if people do not cease offending God, a worse one will break out during the Pontificate of Pius XI. When you see a night illumined by an unknown light, know that this is the great sign given you by God that he is about to punish the world for its crimes, by means of war, famine, and persecutions of the Church and of the Holy Father. To prevent this, I shall come to ask for the consecration of Russia to my Immaculate Heart, and the Communion of reparation on the First Saturdays. If my requests are heeded, Russia will be converted, and there will be peace; if not, she will spread her errors throughout the world, causing wars and persecutions of the Church. The good will be martyred; the Holy Father will have much to suffer; various nations will be annihilated. In the end, my Immaculate Heart will triumph. The Holy Father will consecrate Russia to me, and she shall be converted, and a period

of peace will be granted to the world.’ (Quoted in Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *The Message of Fatima* (26 June 2000))

Our Lady’s revelation at Pontevedra in 1925 thus appears as the fulfilment of her words, ‘I shall come to ask for...the Communion of reparation on the First Saturdays.’ On 13 June 1929, Venerable Lúcia tells us, Mary appeared to her in the convent chapel in Tui and made the specific request of the consecration of Russia to her Immaculate Heart. We discussed this at length at the time of the Fatima centenary in 2017, showing how the consecration was fulfilled by St John Paul II, in union with the Bishops of the world, on 25 March 1984, leading to the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and the dissolution of the Soviet Union. We also recall the providential timing of St John Paul’s death in the evening of 2 April 2005 – First Saturday of the month, and Vigil of Divine Mercy Sunday.

The renewed Consecration of Russia made by Pope Francis and the Bishops on 25 March 2022 fulfilled Our Lady’s requirements even more clearly, removing all possible pretext for doubt. But amidst all the focus over the years by some on whether the consecration had been properly carried out, comparatively little mention was made of Our Lady’s *second* condition for peace and the conversion of Russia: the Communion of reparation on the First Saturdays. Perhaps this is part of why the promised conversion of Russia, while certainly real and true in the astounding collapse of communism in Russia and its notable re-opening to Christian faith, is nonetheless not yet as complete as we would hope.

Enumerating again the conditions of the Promise – each First Saturday of the month, for five successive months, we should devoutly:

1. Go to **Confession** (this can be within eight days before or after the First Saturday);
2. Receive **Holy Communion** in the state of grace;
3. Say **five decades of the Rosary** (including meditation on each mystery being prayed, though naturally we cannot avoid all involuntary distractions); and
4. Keep Our Lady company for **fifteen minutes, meditating on the fifteen mysteries of the Rosary**. This meditation is separate from the actual praying of the Rosary.
5. And we must fulfil the different parts of the devotion with **the intention of making reparation to the Immaculate Heart of Mary**. (We can simply make this intention at the beginning of the Five First Saturdays, but it is good to think of it every month.)

It is good for legionaries, and priests, to promote and implement this in their parishes. One helpful thing is providing materials for the fifteen-minute meditation on the Mysteries, which individuals may find harder. (I will give again to Senatus my resource of Scripture Meditations on the Joyful, Sorrowful and Glorious Mysteries. Rather than simply being ‘read through’, they should be prayerfully reflected upon ‘in Our Lady’s company’; each person can meditate on one, several, or all of the Mysteries. It is good to have a leader timing the meditation – wisely going a couple of minutes beyond fifteen, to pastorally pre-empt any scruples of anxious souls.)

So if we fulfil Mary’s requests we can have confidence of obtaining the promised graces at the hour of death and gaining heaven. In the coming time, we will reflect on how promises like those of the Five First Saturdays and the Nine First Fridays fit into the broader context of Catholic teaching on prayer, grace and salvation. But in particular, Our Lady’s promise obviously does not imply that someone can fulfil the Five First Saturdays then live a life of sin. Rather, perseveringly gaining the graces God offers in the Sacraments and prayer over these five months will confirm us on the path of a virtuous life, which will culminate in the grace of final perseverance at death.