

Immaculate Heart of Mary – Refuge of Families

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Donald F. Fier, M.T.S.

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It is no secret to any serious Catholic that authentic family life is under attack on many fronts in countries throughout the world. In 1981, Pope John Paul II said that we are “at a moment of history in which the family is the object of numerous forces that seek to destroy it or in some way to deform it ...” (*Familiaris consortio*, n. 3) Since then the situation has only worsened and the consequences are apparent: high divorce rates, countless broken families, birth rates below the level of survival in many countries, commonplace cohabitation among unmarried couples, same-sex relationships, rampant abortion, and the list goes on. We live in an immoral age that can rightly be described as a “culture of death.” But we should not fear, for our Lady gave mankind the solution when she appeared in Fatima on June 13, 1917, with the assurance that “... my Immaculate Heart will be your refuge and the way that will lead you to God.”

God instituted the family as the very fabric of which societies are formed and entrusted to it the sacred mission of cooperating with Him in the work of creation. In his 1994 *Letter to Families*, Pope John Paul II emphasized that very point by stating that “the history of mankind, the history of salvation, passes by way of the family.” (n. 23) However, the concept of family and the family home must be rightly understood—in the way in which our Creator intended. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches: “The family home is rightly called ‘the domestic church,’ a community of grace and prayer, a school of human virtues and of Christian charity.” (n. 1666) As so beautifully put by Sister Lucia: “A home must be like a garden, where fresh rosebuds are opening, bringing to the world the freshness of innocence, a pure and trusting outlook on life, and the smile of innocent happy children.” (“*Calls*” from the *Message of Fatima*, p. 163)

At the final apparition in Fatima on October 13, 1917, when the great “miracle of the sun” occurred, it cannot be taken as mere coincidence that the Holy Family appeared: our Lady alongside St. Joseph who held in his arms the baby Jesus with a gesture of blessing for today’s world. Is this not a cry of alarm to mankind, a cry urging all peoples to embrace authentic family life as modeled by the Holy Family, a call for sanctification of the family? And it is precisely the Immaculate Heart of Mary that is the *refuge* for families, the way to God for all His children.

In the natural realm, a mother’s heart is representative of love in the family. It is no exaggeration to say that children have special affection, an innate trust, in the heart of their mother. She bears them, nurtures them, and comes to their aid in every need; indeed, a mother’s heart and the heart of her child are virtually one during the first months of life. The same intimate relationship existed between the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary from the very moment of her *fiat*: “Be it done to me according to Thy word.” (Luke 1:38) Mary conceived Jesus in her Immaculate Heart before she physically conceived Him in her womb. As Sister Lucia reflects, “It was in the Immaculate Heart that the Father placed His Son, as if in the first tabernacle.” (*Calls*, p. 136)

Mary is also our mother, the one mother God willed for all of mankind in the order of grace. Her Immaculate Heart became united to each of us at the foot of the Cross when she became the Mother of the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ: “We draw our life from ... the Immaculate Heart of Mary.” (*Calls*, p. 136) In a homily in Poland in 1997, Pope John Paul II taught that the “greatest concern of her

Immaculate Heart is the eternal salvation of all men and women.” And her heart is inseparable from the Sacred Heart of her divine Son, to Whom she continuously leads us. What further assurance do we need that the Immaculate Heart of Mary is the *refuge* of families—the means by which our Savior has chosen to lead us to Heaven?

Immaculate Heart of Mary, pray for our families!

At the 2009 May Day Rosary Procession at the Cathedral of St. Paul in St. Paul, Minnesota, Archbishop John C. Nienstedt blessed a new statue of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. This beautiful statue is an exact replica of the statue of the Immaculate Heart of Mary that is enshrined at the Cathedral of St. Catherine the Great in St. Petersburg, Russia, and which was venerated by Sister Lucia. The new statue will be used in all future Archdiocesan Rosary Processions, and after the October 2, 2009 Candlelight Family Rosary Procession at the Cathedral of St. Paul, the World Apostolate of Fatima is initiating a program where it will travel to parishes and schools throughout the state of Minnesota to promote Eucharistic Family Holy Hours. For more information on how you can schedule the statue to visit your parish or school, call Connie Schneider at 651-776-0363, or contact her by email at: connieschneider@earthlink.net.