

PENANCE AND PRAYER

**Our Lady of Fatima
Planes de Renderos,
May 15, 1977**

My dear sisters and brothers.

Today the Church, a Pilgrim People, meets the Church of heaven that descends in this magnificent vision and makes this such a beautiful afternoon here on the heights of Los Planes de Renderos.

The more than 400 palms, decorated in a style so typical of this area, are a sign of a Church that moves forward with the symbol of martyrdom. In the Liturgy, palms symbolize martyrdom, but they also symbolize victory. Christ says that the victory that overcomes the world is our faith. In the vision from the book of Revelation, Mary comes out to meet this Pilgrim Church that is willing to accept martyrdom and suffering and tells us that she is a sign for those courageous individuals who do not betray their faith and if need be are willing, like people here in this place, to accept martyrdom.

The Second Vatican Council states that not everyone will have the honor of offering, in a physical way, their blood, or handing over their life for the faith (a). God, however, asks everyone who believes in him to have that spirit of martyrdom. In other words, everyone should be willing to die for their faith even though the Lord does not grant them this honor. If we are so disposed, then when our time comes to give an accounting of our lives, we can say: *Lord, I was willing to give my life for you.* In fact, you have given your life to God because this offering of one's life does not only occur when one is killed for the faith. To give one's life and to have this spirit of martyrdom means that one is faithful to one's obligations, to prayer, to the honest fulfillment of one's duties. In the fulfillment of our every day obligations we are like the mother who with no great emotional display, with the simplicity of motherly martyrdom, gives birth, nourishes, and cares for her children. This is indeed the meaning of giving one's life. This afternoon, this spirit of handing over one's life is the meaning of our procession with palms. Let all of us reflect on the meaning of our lives at this time. Let us hand over our lives to God and become holy and be faithful to our obligations. This is the invitation that the Virgin, who comes down from heaven, extends to the world.

Sixty years ago today, the Virgin appeared in Fatima in the beautiful form represented by this statue that we will carry in procession: hands folded, a rosary on her arm, dressed in white --- so beautiful that the little children could not find adequate words to express what they had seen. She had to be beautiful, the most beautiful, for she had *found favor with God* (Luke 1:30), and she gave us two words: penitence and prayer. These words are a summary of the Fatima message and we, today, want to embrace this message during the present situation in which we are living: penitence and prayer. They are most necessary at this time

when, as the Bible says: *the dragon stood before the woman about to give birth, to devour her child when she gave birth* (b). This woman is the Virgin. This woman is the Church.

The Church and the Virgin are like the two rays that shine forth from God's heart. This story of Mary is the story of the Church and vice versa. Mary and the Church are inseparable. Mary's beauty belongs to the Church's beauty. The problems of the Church pertain to Mary's life. As a mother identifies with her children, so too Mary, as mother of the Church moves through the world with a like heart. The Church lifts up her voice and prays the *Magnificat* (c), which we have just been reminded of in the Gospel: *My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord... the Mighty One has done great things for me* (d). Mary is able to say these words and the Church also knows how to pray these words. It is a song of faith and hope in God.

My sisters and brothers, I tell you that at this time it is wonderful to be Catholic. Let us not be afflicted but happy. Let us clothe ourselves in the spirit of courage and give ourselves to God. As we have seen in the book of Revelation, the less we place our trust in the things of this world, the greater will be God's protection. The invalid woman is the Church and Mary, but her weakness, illness, humility and smallness becomes the strength of God who protects and saves her from the dragon. She is brought to the triumph that was proclaimed in the book of Revelation: *they conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony* (e). Yes, the Lord is our hope.

Penance

What Mary desires, in order to identify more closely with us and for us to identify more closely with her, is the realization of these two words. Jesus began to preach the Gospel with the word *penitence* and that word is also the essence of the Church's preaching: *Do penance! Be converted! Leave behind your evil ways!* (f) How appropriate at this time to go out on all the highways of our nation, to travel the roads where there is so much hatred, calumny and vengeance, --- so many perverse hearts --- and tell people: *be converted!*

The Church repudiates violence. The Church could never approve the crimes that have been committed this past week. Yet she does not hate the one who fires a gun, or kidnaps, or kills. With love, we say: *Be converted!* My sisters and brothers, who could tell me that this Gospel word, spoken with all the tenderness and love from the Virgin's lips, would not be heard in those places where so many criminals are hidden, where so many calumnies are being plotted, in those corners of darkness and hell: *Be converted. Do not plant seeds of hatred! No more killing of our sisters and brothers! Be converted, for these perverse roads lead to hell and the Virgin wants you in heaven.*

How beautiful was the death of Father Navarro. When that woman raised his head from the pool of blood, she asked him: *What hurts you, Father?* He said: *What pains me is the sin they have committed against me, but I forgive those who have killed me. What pains me now is my sins and I ask God to forgive me.* Father began to pray with those lips that had been disfigured by bullets. He died praying and asking for forgiveness. This is penitence. Let us follow this example and if there is someone who unfortunately doubts the Church, someone who believes in the calumnies and curses the priests who are daily devoured by false accusations, then I say you my sisters and brothers, *Be converted!* This afternoon the Virgin begs you: *Be converted!* May we be converted from the sins of our heart. I have my own sins like every one of you. Who among us is not a sinner. Let us ask the Lord for

forgiveness. Let us be converted and no longer walk in our evil ways. The Virgin calls us to do this and also calls us to pray.

Prayer

The Virgin knows the power of prayer. This afternoon is a beautiful afternoon and a beautiful afternoon of prayer. The flowers pray, the palms pray, the hands that placed these beautiful flower petals in the palms pray. Those who walk in this procession in honor of the Virgin, singing and praying and even though we have been distracted by the children running about, yet even this is prayer. Perhaps we have come here because of some folklore or tradition, but looking at this church and the seriousness of the moment, we are indeed a people at prayer. May we never cease to pray. May we lift up our hearts to God and ask for his grace and his mercy. My sisters and brothers, I have confidence in these times because there are many people who are praying. As long as people pray, I am not afflicted. I speak to the Lord in the intimacy of the Mass, like all the priests do, and I say: *Lord, look not on our sins, but on the faith of your Church*. The faith of the Church is seen in the old woman praying her rosary, in sick persons who feel useless but offer their suffering to God, in the husband who is concerned about sustaining his family and is honorable and faithful to his home, in the religious women who sanctify their own vocation, in the priest, the seminarian, the child and each person who lives their vocation as Church. The Church is made up of everyone: in as much as we pray and sanctify ourselves, then we become this power in the world, this power that has come down from God, because this power of prayer is derived from God.

My sisters and brothers, this is the Virgin's message. I am happy to have been able to interpret this message with my poor words. I hope that this message will resound in everyone's heart. Let us become a Church of penitence and prayer. Let us become the Church that the Virgin wants us to be, for in this way she will identify herself with us and we will not be alone. At this moment I love to hear the words of the Virgin when she appeared in this land of America, in Tepeyac, Mexico and spoke to the native American who represented our whole race and said: *I am your mother and I am here with you!* What warmth and power!

These little children who are here with us this afternoon, if something should happen to them, to whom would they run? Would they not look for their mothers? They know they their mothers will protect them. We are like these crippled children for we are living in the midst of a situation that we have no idea how it will be resolved. This situation is one of hatred that has come from the hearts of evil people and we ask the Virgin that they might be converted. In this hour of affliction we hear the voice of the Virgin who says: *I am your mother and I am here with you!* Let us run to her and take refuge in her. As the representative of this Archdiocese, this afternoon I place the diocese at the feet of the Virgin and ask that she protect us. I am sure that she is protecting us, loving us and will not abandon us. My sisters and brothers, let us have great confidence in our Lady and may this homage that we offer to her this afternoon, bring us even greater protection.

We celebrate this Eucharist at the feet of the Virgin and she in turn offers our prayer to God. God never rejects anything that is presented to him by the Virgin's hands. The angel said to Mary: *you have found favor with God* (g), and so anything that she asks of God is given to her. She will present to God this body and blood that is offered through the mediation of her priests. She who is the mother of bishops, priests, religious and all the

faithful will present to the Lord this Blood of Christ *that is shed for you and for all* (h) and it will be changed into a well-spring of peace, tranquillity, harmony and reconciliation that our country so desperately needs.

Margin References: (a) LG 42: (b) Rv 12,4: (c) Lk 1,46-55: (d) Lk 1,49: (e) Rv 12,10: (f) Mk 1,15: (g) Lk 1,28: (h) Lk 22,20.