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The Auxiliary Bishop of Braga asked the children to remember that, beside the hand offered on earth, there is also a hand in heaven, “close and loving”

The enclosure of the Shrine was packed again as it welcomed thousands of “messengers”, coming in huge majority from the country dioceses, who were taking part to the Children Pilgrimage to thank Jesus for the fact of having a Mother.

The theme of this year arose from the affirmation uttered by Pope Francis in Cova da Iria in 2017: “We have a Mother!”.

The auxiliary Bishop of Braga, D. Nuno Almeida, presided the pilgrimage, and, using very simple words he addressed the small pilgrims present in Fatima this Sunday despite the intense rain that poured down during all the celebrations, and established a parallelism between mothers and Our Lady to explain that Her love for humanity “is a close and merciful love”, just like the love a mother feels for her son, from the moment he is conceived and until he dies.

“She takes care with a motherly love of her Son’s brothers who, between perils and distresses, keep marching on earth towards the heavenly homeland,” said the prelate.

“Our Lady, a hundred years ago, appeared to the Little Shepherds, Lucia, Francisco and Jacinta, here in Fatima, to lead us all to God and she offered us the shelter of her cloak of light, mercy and compassion,” declared D. Nuno Almeida adding that “She remains close and accompanies us with her motherly love.”

For this reason, “when we pray the Ave Maria, let us be touched by her gentle caress and let her look turn ours to Jesus.”

The prelate requested the children to pray Our Lady and act as the little shepherds did who prayed the rosary every day for the conversion of men, and notably of “those who stand against the dignity of human life”, “those who pollute and destroy the environment”, “those who, in politics and business, are not honest”, or those “who, in sport, are cheating or showing violence” and those “who, in church, exercise hypocrisy and indifference,” declared the prelate explaining that Our Lady “carries all our prayers to Jesus.”

“We are trying to open our heart to Our Lady.” When we pray the Ave Maria in silence in our room; when we pray the rosary with our family, in our parish or association, we can be sure that Our Lady is with us and is happy when we speak to her and trust her.” The prelate invited the children to repeat: “I have a special place in Our Lady’s heart!”.

The prelate also asked them to say a prayer for all the mothers.

“We want, today and every day, to pray with love and gratitude for our mothers on earth who take care of us with tenderness, always accompany us, know what we miss and protect us. Tonight, once home, we will embrace and kiss our mothers and thank them for their love!”. And, as praying the rosary was one of the requests that Our Lady left to the shepherds, D. Nuno Almeida also encouraged the children to always keep this prayer in mind.

35 thousand Postcards Distributed by the Children

During the Eucharist, concelebrated by six bishops and 61 priests, a little play was organised and, during the Liturgy of the Word, a postman came four times to bring a card to the altar. In parallel, the children could drop the original postcards, with a drawing or a text on which they had been working in May, in one of the different letterboxes available in the Enclosure.

The pilgrimage thus recreated the idea of “the letters to Our Lady” as it exists in the Chapel of Shrine of Fatima and where each pilgrim can leave a message to Our Lady of the Rosary of Fatima.

For this reason, the present given to the children was also a postcard, addressed to each of them and which contained a card box oratory. The oratory is a reproduction of the Chapel and contains an image of Our Lady standing between the two official portraits of Saints Francisco and Jacinta Marto. On the back of the triptych, a message

from Our Lady to the children reminds the importance of prayer, underlining that "praying is talking with our Lord who is in Heaven, never forget to be with Him."

A Pilgrimage that Brings Together Children and Families

Besides the huge number of children coming from most of the Portuguese dioceses, including the Autonomous Regions, 25 groups coming from Poland, Spain, Italy, Germany and Ireland were participating, which made a total of 150 thousand pilgrims.

"You are a feast; you are a spectacle!"

At the end of the celebration, D. Antonio Marto, Bishop of the diocese of Leiria-Fátima, expressed the "great happiness" that he felt seeing all these children gathered around the "Heavenly Mother" like a "family".

"I would like to be able to greet each one of you, but as it is impossible, I embrace you all from here as a greeting, because each one of you has a special place in my heart", he declared.

The prelate asked all the children to repeat the sentence: "I have a special place in the heart of Our Lady, my mother."

D. Antonio congratulated the "little friends who stood in the rain, the cold, and did not let the party be spoiled! You are a feast; you are a spectacle!"

"Take the oratory with you and promise me that you will not forget to pray for the peace in the families and for the peace in the world", he asked again.

Finally, the president of the celebration, D. Nuno Almeida, asked for a round of applause for the bishop of the diocese of Leiria-Fátima, who has recently been appointed Cardinal by Pope Francis.

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