

Pope officialises pilgrimage to Fatima on the Centennial

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Pope Francis will be in Fatima from the 12th to the 13th of May 2017 “in pilgrimage to the Shrine of Our Lady of Fatima”.

The information was officialised this morning to the Shrine of Our Lady of the Rosary of Fatima by the Vatican, which announced through the Press Room that “on the occasion of the centennial of the Apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Cova da Iria, and acknowledging the invitation of the President of the Republic of Portugal and of the Portuguese bishops, His Holiness Pope Francis will go on pilgrimage to the Shrine of Our Lady of Fatima from the 12th to the 13th of May 2017”.

For the bishop of Leiria-Fatima, it is a moment of “great joy” because, during the centennial, through the presence of the Holy Father “we are united to the whole universal church”

“Whenever the Pope pilgrims as the universal pastor, it is the whole church that pilgrims with him”, and therefore, “on this occasion I want to express the joy and gladness that the official announcement of this pilgrimage of the Holy Father brings to the Portuguese people and to the whole Church in Portugal”.

“The Pope wants to make himself a pilgrim among the pilgrims of Fatima and this is a cause of great joy” says bishop António Marto in a message given to the Press Room of the Shrine of Fatima.

The prelate underlines also the “responsibility” of the Shrine for “it’s not about receiving the Holy Father only as a pilgrim and pastor but receiving the message that he will be bringing”

Therefore, he concludes, “one has to profit from this pilgrimage for the renewal of faith”.

The rector of the Shrine of Fatima also underlined “the great joy” with the confirmation of these two dates of Francis’ visit to Cova da Iria.

“It’s a great joy because we know that these days will be of a pilgrimage marked by this festivity that is the centennial, and on the other hand, because it marks the presence of a Pope amongst us and a very loved Pope such as Pope Francis”, states the rector in a declaration to the Press Room of the Shrine.

Fr. Carlos Cabecinhas reminds that this satisfaction is accompanied by a sense of “responsibility for us to conveniently prepare ourselves through prayer”.

“What is requested from us is the availability to listen to the teachings of the Holy Father” pointed out the Rector underlining that “Francis always has a prophetic word”.

The program of the Pope’s visit to Cova da Iria will be announced in due time.

On the 7th of September, last year, during the meeting of the Portuguese bishops with the Pope on the ad limina visit, Francis showed a “deep desire” to visit Fatima, by stating: “tengo ganas de ir a Fátima (I want to go to Fatima)”. And he had already said it as well, in private, to the bishop of the diocese of Leiria-Fatima, in April 2015, that “if God gives [me] life and health” he would be in Cova da Iria to celebrate the centennial of the apparitions of Fatima.

Francis will be the fourth chief of the Catholic Church to visit Fatima after Paul VI (1967), John Paul II (1982, 1991 and 2000) and Benedict XVI (2010)

The international trips of the Popes are something new that started from the second half of the twentieth century, with the pontificate of Paul VI (1897-1978), who during the last session of the Vatican II Council announced the intention of offering a Golden Rose to Our Lady of the Rosary of Fatima.

Since then, Portugal entered in the apostolic visits route right on the fifth trip of this Italian pontiff, on the 13th of May 1967, on the 50th anniversary of the Marian apparitions, recognized by the Catholic Church, in Cova da Iria.

Fatima transforms itself in the main engine of the five pontifical trips, after Pius XII had already consecrated the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, on the 31st of October 1942, in the middle of the Second World War.

Paul VI wanted to personally come to Fatima on the 13th of May 1967, having decided that the plane that brought him from Rome would land in Monte Real, and that he would

be hosted in the then diocese of Leiria (Leiria-Fatima today).

John Paul II – whom on the 13th of May 1981 had been hit by a bullet in Saint Peter's Square, on an attempt on his life – came to Cova da Iria a year after, thanking publicly the intercession of Our Lady of Fatima in his recovery.

In May 1982, on the anniversary of that first attempt on his life, Karol wojtyla (1920-2005) arrived at Fatima to "thank the Divine Providence in this place which the mother of God chose in such a particular way".

The polish Pope came back in Portugal nine years later: on the 10th of May 1991, John Paul II celebrated Mass in the Restelo Stadium and travelled afterwards to Azores and Madeira, before coming in the Shrine of Fatima, on the 12th and 13th of May.

During four days, Saint John Paul II delivered 12 interventions and still sent a letter, from Cova da Iria, to the catholic bishops of Europe, who were preparing a special assembly of the synod of the bishops, dedicated to the Old Continent.

On the 12th and 13th of May 2000, already with a fragile health, John Paul II came back to Portugal to preside to the beatification of the little shepherds Francisco and Jacinta Marto. In the same occasion, the announcement of the publication of the third part of the so-called "Secret of Fatima" was made.

Benedict XVI visited Portugal from the 11th to the 14th of May 2010, to mark the tenth anniversary of the beatification of Francisco and Jacinta Marto, passing in Lisbon, Fatima and Porto.

In 2017 will be the turn of Francisco. As it was with Paul VI, he will concentrate his visit exclusively in Cova da Iria, where on the 13th of May the then patriarch-cardinal of Lisbon, bishop Jose Policarpo, consecrated the pontificate of the Argentinian pope to the Virgin Mary.

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