SANTUÁRIO DE FÁTIMA
SHRINE OF FATIMA

02 april, 2008

Reverend Fr. Virgilio Antunes named Rector of the Shrine of Fatima



Fr. Virgilio Antunes has been named by the Most Rev. António Marto, Bishop of Leiria-Fatima, Rector of the Shrine of Fatima. Since Msgr. Luciano Guerra has terminated his mandate as Rector of the Shrine of Fatima on February 13, 2008, Bishop António Marto presented to the National Council of the Shrine of Fatima the name of Fr. Virgilio Antunes for new Rector and this name was approved on April 2, 2008, by the Plenary Assembly of the Bishops Conference of Portugal. The new Rector, named by the Bishop of Leiria-Fatima for a mandate of five years, will take charge at the beginning of the coming pastoral year. Currently, Fr. Antunes is a University Professor, Judge of the Ecclesiastical Tribunal, Episcopal Delegate for the Permanent Diaconate, member of the College of Consultants and Chaplain of the Shrine of Fatima, where he is in charge of the Departments of Pilgrim Services and Lodging Services.



In an interview, with the Shrine's spokesman, Fr. Virgílio Antunes spoke about his appointment for the new position and his connection with Fatima and Our Lady of Fatima. 1. What did you feel when Bishop António Marto invited you to accept the position of new Rector of the Shrine of Fatima? Fr. Antunes – First, with some apprehension. It is a new job, with a new burden of wide responsibility, which reserves for me, certainly, several surprises. Second, with serenity. More than an invitation, what the Diocesan Bishop asked of me was to take on a mission, as it is the case with all the jobs we take on in the Church. I knew he had pondered the situation, had consulted key people of the Diocese and had made a decision which he naturally asked me to accept. I was not left with any other alternative but to accept, as, otherwise, I had done in other circumstances involving former bishops. 2. As someone who belongs to the Diocese of Leiria-Fatima and was born in a parish near Fatima, what is your personal connection, in devotional terms, with this Marian Shrine? Fr. Virgílio Antunes – From infancy, Fatima is part of my life. I got used to see the Shrine as a natural part of the Church and the Diocese. It is part of those realities whose existence one doesn't question or argue about. I started coming to the Shrine particularly in the context of children's catechesis. We would come on foot and visit all the sites, specially the Little Chapel and Valinhos. We would pray the Rosary and make the Stations of the Cross. Then we would have a snack and return home also on foot. Regarding my personal devotion, I was granted the grace of having it handed down to me from a very early age and of seeing the Seminary continue to promote it. I would have difficulty in imagining myself in any other way, without this dimension of the Christian faith, which, in a very human way, gets us closer to Christ. 3. You are Chaplain of the Shrine of Fatima since 2005. What was your first impression of this institution, after arriving here, in what regards its operation, services, organization? Had you previously worked here, before being named Shrine Chaplain and Director of the Departments of Lodging and Pilgrim Services? Fr. Virgílio Antunes – Before arriving here, in September 2005, I knew little of how the Shrine operated. It was a knowledge from the outside, acquired in my regular visits: the crowds of anniversary pilgrimages, the tranquility and serenity of some of the sites… Regarding its organization, almost

nothing, excepting one or other little occasional detail, when I would take part in an encounter, congress or spiritual retreat. At the request of the Rector, I was already, for some years now, collaborating in the anniversary pilgrimages, as commentator in the celebrations. When I arrived, I was surprised by the existing complexity, but, above all, by the rigor and responsibility with which each of the departments executes the respective tasks. 4. How was it to work with Msgr. Luciano Guerra and what impression do you have of him and of the work by him accomplished? Fr. Virgílio Antunes – I think that it was the best schooling and the best preparation for the coming work. I admire a lot his work capacity, method, ponderation and rigor. As we all know, the Shrine of Fatima was born of a divine initiative in favor of mankind, but a large part of what it is today is due to the initiative of Msgr. Guerra, his perseverance and capacity for overcoming difficulties and controversies. He leaves the Shrine equipped with the infrastructures needed for its mission, capable of receiving Our Lady's pilgrims in the best conditions; leaves it with the adequate and functional organizational structure; and still with a prayerful and festive atmosphere, which is what captivates millions of people both in Portugal and abroad. 5. After taking charge of your new position, since you already know the pastoral work and the organization of the institution, what will your priorities be? To continue the work already being done or to engage in developing new projects? Fr. Virgílio Antunes – The Shrine commemorated last year the 90th anniversary of the apparitions of Our Lady and, therefore, of its origins. The history doesn't begin, then, with the change of rectors. On the other hand, the Church and her institutions work often at a rhythm different from the one found in the institutions of civil society. Our first task, in order to be faithful, is to pay attention to the signs of the times and to God Who speaks in and through them. My first preoccupation will always be to know and love Our Lady more and more, as well as Her message of conversion addressed to today's mankind. That demands that we concentrate on the essential and that everything in Fatima be at the service of that goal. It is clear, then, that we'll look for continuity, in faithfulness to the gift of God entrusted here to us through Mary. That doesn't mean, of course, that we don't reflect constantly and widely on possible new courses of action. At this time I want to ask Our Lady to look after us, after me, and after this Shrine, so that we always put into practice Her message.
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