

Thousands of children in Fatima pray and dream for a better world

The Auxiliary Bishop of Porto presided over the Children's Pilgrimage. Among the messages he conveyed, he thanked the youngsters for "being a school of prayer" in the different contexts in which they live.

On the morning of 10 June, a huge colourful patch filled the Prayer Area of the Shrine of Fatima. Hats of all colours covered the heads and faces of more than 20,000 children who, as part of catechism groups or in the company of their families, took part in the Children's Pilgrimage.

"I feel small in this great Shrine, in this great pilgrimage in which we find ourselves," said Mgr. Roberto Rosmaninho Mariz, auxiliary bishop of Porto, who presided over the celebration.

On the steps of the Altar of the Enclosure, addressing specifically the youngest, he made sure that everyone recognised what had brought them to this place.

“Boys and girls, we’ve come here to a football pitch... No... We’ve come here to a beach... We’ve come here to a school. All of this has its place and is important, but we came here to a sacred place, to the Shrine of Our Lady of Fatima,” he said, and then summarised what brought them together at Cova da Iria: “we came here to pray.”

And so that there would be no doubt about what it means to pray, Mgr. Roberto Mariz made a small comparison. “When a friend asks to speak to each of us, is it better to speak to them close or far away? Surely that it’s better to speak close to the person who is our friend. And it’s happening here, someone who is very much our friend, someone who is a friend above all – Jesus – has asked us to talk to Him, to listen to Him and to dialogue with Him.”

The president of the celebration recalled that this was the request made at Fatima many years ago. “Who appeared to the three little shepherds?”, he asked. And when the audience answered “Mary, Our Lady”, Mgr. Roberto Mariz recalled that the Angel had appeared to the little shepherds before Her and asked them: “Pray with me”.

The Angel’s request, which sets the tone for this year’s Children’s Pilgrimage, led Mgr. Roberto Mariz to state that “there is no relationship with God without prayer, without praying”. He therefore thanked the children for “being a school of prayer in parishes, families and other educational realities”.

In a shorter and more informal homily than usual, Mgr. Roberto Mariz borrowed an expression he had heard recently: “practising dreamer”. “Praying in intimacy with God should help us dream the world as Our Lady asked,” he said. And he left the assembly with the challenge: “May we, through our faith, be dreamers of a new world, which we put into practice and which we build.”

No shortage of surprises

As usual, the Children’s Pilgrimage included a surprise. In keeping with this year’s theme, “a little book of prayers was distributed to help them pray,” described the rector of the Shrine of Fatima, Fr. Carlos Cabecinhas.

In the little book, children will find help to pray the Rosary, which Our Lady asked the Little Shepherds to pray. They will also find prayers created by other children, to pray in the morning, at night before going to bed, before meals and even when visiting someone who is ill. “All of this has just one aim: helping people pray. Let’s try to pray more and better,” invited the rector of the Shrine.



The distribution of the surprise was the culmination of a pilgrimage that began early. At 9:00 am, in the Chapel of the Apparitions, the children delivered flowers that they had brought with them and, at 9:30 am, in the Basilica of the Most Holy Trinity, they watched a re-enactment of the Apparitions of the Angel to the Little Shepherds by students from Colégio de S. Miguel. This was followed by the Rosary in the Chapel of the Apparitions and, from 11:00 am, Mass began in the Prayer Area. The celebration ended with the Farewell Procession.

The Children's Pilgrimage was attended by 80 priests, two bishops and 120,000 participants, 20,000 of whom were children.

In addition to the auxiliary bishop of Porto and the rector of the Shrine, the celebration also included Mgr. José Ornelas, bishop of Leiria-Fatima, Fr. José Batista, as commentator and animator of the assembly, and Fr. Francisco Pereira, as master of the liturgical celebration.

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