

August 23, 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Thanks be to God that school is about to start this week! Our principals at St. Mary's Visitation and St. Stanislaus and all of our teachers, staff, and parents have been preparing to begin another year. There are obviously many adjustments that have been planned for given the current situation. However, we are so grateful that we can continue our mission of forming young hearts and minds in human, intellectual, and spiritual knowledge, virtues, and values in our excellent Catholic schools. Please keep in mind that at both schools we are getting very close to capacity and have a few places open for new students. Should we need to begin a waiting list for either school, our parishioners' families will receive priority on the list, of course. The fact that we are getting close to full in our schools this year is a good problem to have in spite of the fact that it is a result of the upheaval in our education system due the Covid-19 restrictions.

Just to note, at this point, the only in person activities and events that may be held on parish grounds, with the restrictions already in place, are Masses and religious services, regular school classes, religious education meetings and classes, and support group meetings such as AA. All other activities and events continue to be cancelled until we move into the next phase of the Covid-19 response.

Family catechesis for all students and families in our parishes is also beginning soon. Please see the bulletin, recent home mailings, or our parish websites for information. Please contact Tommy Shultz, our Director of Evangelization and Faith Formation with any questions. We are praying for a good start to the school year for all of our families who have children in our Catholic schools, public schools, or homeschooling. St. Thomas Aquinas, pray for us!

Over the last many weeks we have been considering whether time and history is moving toward the fulfillment of Christ's promises for the ultimate triumph of His Kingdom. We have reflected on Jesus' prophecies about a time of tribulation, a time of peace, and ultimately His second Coming in glory. The last few weeks we have been considering messages from the Blessed Virgin Mary from some of her recent visits to visionaries. Those that we mentioned have either been recognized as authentic or are close to being declared so. In recent weeks, we have focused on Our Lady's messages of Fatima, Medjugorie, and Akita.

This week we are considering how a Marian apparition, or any supernatural intervention from God, Mary, or the Saints, is judged to be authentic when given through the means of "private revelation." Over the next few weeks, we will look at more recent prophetic messages from current visionaries that have not been authenticated but relate to the current situation in the world. It is important to remember that we are not bound to believe in private revelation, however, we should judge all things by the reality that, if it brings us to deeper conversion in Christ and helps people to come closer to Christ and the Church, then the message is well worth reflection and application to our spiritual lives. There is also the reality that prophecy throughout the Bible and in the times after the Apostles is never meant to be a prophecy set in stone, but is meant to call us back to God and to change our lives so that calamities can be averted. The greatest calamity would be the loss of our salvation, not any other catastrophes. If any prophecy leads us to conform our lives better to Christ and focuses us on our salvation and the salvation of others in practical ways in our lives, then that prophetic word is more likely from the Holy Spirit. Jesus said "you will know them by their fruits." Matthew 7:16 It is in this spirit that the Church judges the authenticity of alleged prophetic messages from heaven given through seers or visionaries through whom God chooses to deliver those messages. More specifically, the process of discernment regarding prophetic messages through the means of private revelation is as follows:

"The Church is very careful when it comes to approving and recognizing Marian apparitions. In fact, for the benefit of the bishops, Church officials, and the faithful, the Vatican released a set of guidelines to the public on approving apparitions and other revelations. Within the document, the Church lays out three steps in discerning the authenticity of an apparition:

Firstly, the question of whether the apparition and revelations given during the appearance is positive or negative is addressed.

Positive apparitions follow general criteria such as:

- Holding great probability of factual content after thorough investigation
- Showing honesty of moral values, docility to Church authority, and capacity of returning to a normal regimen of the Faith.

On the contrary, negative apparitions show the following:

- Errors concerning the nature of the apparition
- Errors concerning God, Mary, the saints, and/or Church teaching
- Evidence of the apparition being directly aimed towards gaining some type of profit
- The presence of grave immoral acts that were committed at the time of the apparition
- Psychological complications regarding the witness of the apparition.

Secondly, if the apparition proves to be of a positive nature, the Church will go forward in allowing some type of public devotion to be celebrated.

Lastly, the authorities at hand decide what level of authenticity and supernatural character the apparition displays, keeping in mind the possible offspring of ideas that could come from it.

The document also notes that overall, the duty of approving apparitions first falls on the bishop of the diocese in which the apparition occurred. If the bishop has a hard time discerning the authenticity of the apparitions or revelations for any reason, the investigation can be passed up through Church authority. The Vatican can call for investigations to be had under its authority, however we usually only see this in cases of either urgency or strong contraried opinion. If the bishop approves an apparition, it is worthy of admiration and devotion and the site of the apparition is worthy of pilgrimage.

Having the Vatican recognize the existence of an apparition is an extra bonus to this, solidifying the presence of heavenly intervention. While the Vatican-acknowledged apparitions do tend to be more widely known and celebrated, their presence does not make bishop-approved apparitions any less significant or important". <https://media.ascensionpress.com/2020/05/30/the-ultimate-guide-to-marian-appearitions>.

Therefore, over the coming weeks, when we explore current prophetic messages that have not been authenticated by the Church, each person should use the above criteria in determining whether those prophetic messages should be considered as helpful in one's spiritual life.

As we have mentioned week after week, it is time to pray, especially the Rosary and the Chaplet of Divine Mercy, time to repent and come to Confession, time to come to Eucharist Adoration and Holy Mass if you are physically able, and time to fast and do penance and acts of charity for the conversion of others. As we have also been encouraging for the last five months, please remember that the grace of Christ that we receive in His Sacraments is our sure refuge during these days. We are all being called to find refuge in Confession and to Jesus present in the Holy Eucharist. Once again, included below, is the liturgical schedule with additional Confession times, Mass times, and adoration times. Weekday Mass times may be adjusted on special days so please remember to check the parish Mass intention section of the bulletin to confirm weekday Mass times. Please remember the Catholic precept to confess sins in the Sacrament of Penance and to receive Holy Communion at least once during or near the Easter Season. Confessions are done in a socially distanced way in the church or outside on the parish grounds. We have many extra confession times scheduled. If you are unable to come to church or someone is home-bound and in need of any of the Sacraments, please let us know and the priest or deacon will come to you!

In Mary, the Queen of Peace,

Fr. Derda, Fr. Steve, Deacon Russ and Deacon Ed