

March 12, 2017

#### Heart of the World XIV

Like the heart in the body, the very center and life-moving force of the Church is the Eucharist. All of the other Sacraments and the whole life of Grace and the Church in the world flow from it and lead back to it.

2017 commemorates 100 years since the apparitions of the Blessed Mother to Lucia, Jacinta, and Francisco at Fatima. In this column, we have been discussing how an Angel appeared to them three times in order to prepare them to meet Our Lady. One of the most important things he desired to teach them was the practice of Reverence (or Piety).

This Gift of the Holy Spirit precedes any interaction (prayer) with God and denotes an interior attitude that is also expressed outwardly. The Angel was able to *appear* to bow, kneel, prostrate, etc. but could not actually do so. Angels do not have bodies. The fact that we can worship with our bodies is a source of wonder and amazement to them. (cf. Lk, 15:10; Eph 3:10; Heb 2)

However, Angels, who perceive reality with perfect clarity, have a lot to teach us about Reverence. We become tired, or sore, or sick, or injured and get distracted by the gift of our bodies from what we can do with them.

In light of this, we have been discussing how this virtue of Reverence (or Piety) has been undermined by things like faddish changes to the Sacred Spaces of our churches. For the last couple of weeks we have considered how something like the demise of Altar Rails has contributed to a cavalier and unconsidered attitude and behavior in the presence of God as an example of this.

The very worst offenders and examples of this type of attitude are we priests. As the saying goes: familiarity breeds contempt. This is not to imply that no one ever before was inappropriately casual in the Presence of the Lord in the Sanctuary. However, a literally built in check has been removed and it is that much easier now.

The result of all of this is a kind of erosion of Holy Ground. I frequently notice that children have little or no sense that "Church" is anything special. They do not genuflect or bow. They do not kneel to pray. They do not pay attention to what is going on. They do eat snacks and play with toys or on some electronic device. They get up to go to the bathroom during Mass, sometimes even during the Eucharistic Prayer, without any awareness of what is happening. Honestly, I see adults do this too.

The Holy Angel of Fatima has a lot to teach us. Do we need to be stilted and stoic, silent and coldly ignoring one another? No, certainly not. However, Catholic churches are not social meeting places where we focus on each other. They are a piece of Heaven on earth where we gather together to meet the Lord.

*Fr. Michael*