

During this fourth and final full week, we'll be focusing on the example and words of another great teacher of Marian consecration: St. Pope John Paul II. "The most Marian Pope," as he's been called, profoundly deepened the Church's understanding of Marian consecration. Building on the work of the Second Vatican Council, he provides us with a thoroughly biblical treatment of Marian consecration — which he also calls "entrustment" — and homes in on the idea that it's Mary's role to lead us into the mystery of Christ's redeeming love and self-consecration to the Father.

DAY 22: Mary's Gift of Mercy

In 1917, while World War I raged, the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared to three shepherd children in Fatima, Portugal. She told them that the war would end but if people didn't convert, a worse war would follow and Russia would spread its errors throughout the world, causing more wars, martyrs, and persecutions of the Church. To prevent this, Mary asked that the Holy Father consecrate Russia to her Immaculate Heart and for people to make five consecutive "First Saturday" communions of reparation. In the end, she said, her Immaculate Heart would triumph.

It's interesting that Mary mentioned Russia. At the time, this was cause for confusion: Russia? Holy Russia? What errors would this devoutly Christian country spread throughout the world? And how could such a poor Russia exercise so much influence? (At this point in history, the Soviet revolution was in its infancy; the communist, atheist, totalitarian regime had not yet been established.)

After Mary gave her prophesy about Russia, the children saw a vision involving a "bishop dressed in white," who they understood to be the Pope. With great distress, they saw that he would suffer much and then be shot and killed. The children described what they saw only to Church authorities, who decided not to disclose it to the public. This became known as the last "secret" of Fatima.

Now, the very first apparition of Our Lady of Fatima happened on May 13, 1917, at 5 p.m. Exactly 64 years later, May 13, 1981, at 5 p.m., a small, open-air jeep rode out into St. Peter's Square, carrying Pope John Paul II, who warmly greeted pilgrims gathered in the square. At one point, the jeep stopped so the Pope could take a little girl into his arms. After he gave her back to her jubilant parents, the jeep continued on its way through the sea of waving, cheering pilgrims. Suddenly, a gunman fired two shots at the Pope from close range. The first bullet grazed his elbow. The second struck him in the abdomen and ricocheted inside him, shredding intestines and piercing his colon. Miraculously, the bullet missed the main abdominal artery by one tenth of an inch. Had it been struck or even grazed, John Paul would have bled to death on the way to the hospital. Realizing this blessing, the Pope stated that "One hand fired, and another guided the bullet."

What hand guided the bullet? John Paul believes it was the hand of Our Lady of Fatima (the May 13th anniversary was not lost on him). In fact, after the shooting, he asked for the envelope containing the last secret of Fatima, the one about the "bishop dressed in white." Then, with Fatima much on his mind, he thought to consecrate the world to Mary's Immaculate Heart as soon as possible, and he began composing an act of entrustment, which he solemnly prayed less than a month later. Even before this, within a week of the shooting, he repeated his own personal consecration to Mary in a recorded address to the pilgrims gathered in St. Peter's Square: "To you, Mary, I repeat: *Totus tuus ego sum.*"

On March 25, 1984, in St. Peter's Square, before the official statue of Our Lady of Fatima that had been flown in for the occasion, John Paul made a more solemn entrustment of the world to Mary's Immaculate Heart. He concluded the prayer with the following words:

Let there be revealed, once more, in the history of the world the infinite saving power of the redemption: the power of *merciful Love!* May it put a stop to evil! May it transform consciences! May your Immaculate Heart reveal for all the *light of Hope!*

After learning of the Pope's solemn entrustment, Sr. Lucia, the lone survivor of the three Fatima seers, declared that it fully satisfied Our Lady's original request. Five years later, the horrific, Soviet, totalitarian regime that had terrorized millions of people suddenly came to an end.

That victory won, the Pope didn't rest. What he once called the "century of tears" was far from over. To confront the ongoing evil and injustice in the world, he forcefully proclaimed, with growing frequency, the saving power of God's "*merciful Love.*" His efforts to promote this message culminated in the establishment of the universal Feast of Divine Mercy Sunday in 2000 and a solemn Act of Entrustment of the world to Divine Mercy in 2002. Three years after this entrustment, the great Marian Pope, the great Mercy Pope, died on a first Saturday and the vigil of Divine Mercy Sunday. Mary had saved his life at the dawn of his pontificate so that, through him, her divine Son could lead the Church to the victory of Mercy and the triumph of her Immaculate Heart.

Today's Prayer:

Come, Holy Spirit, living in Mary.

Have mercy on us and on the whole world!