

FATIMA – MONTICHIARI

Punti di contatto ed elementi comuni

The similarities between Fatima and Montichiari are indicated by Our Lady herself. We can summarize them in three elements.

1) The third appearance of an announced cycle

There are three interconnected apparitions, according to the Virgin Mary herself: Fatima, Ghiaie di Bonate, and Montichiari. It is a small cycle within the greater cycle of Marian apparitions of the last two centuries. The significant Marian apparitions began before Fatima, I would say in 1831 in Rue du Bac (Paris) to Saint Catherine Labouré (the Miraculous Medal).

In the "recent times," the special and constant presence of the Blessed Virgin Mary is prophesied, as preached by the great French saint, St. Louis-Marie Grignon de Montfort. He maintains that the closer we get to the Parousia (the second coming of Christ), the more constant the Virgin Mary's presence will be in the apparitions.

The Madonna herself explained the connection among these three apparitions to Pierina Gilli: *"In Fatima, I spread the devotion of the consecration to my Heart. In Bonate, I tried to instill it in the Christian family. Here in Montichiari, instead, I desire that the devotion, already mentioned as the Mystical Rose, united with the devotion to my Heart, be deepened in religious institutes, so that religious souls may draw abundant graces from my maternal Heart. With this apparition for the sanctification of religious souls, I conclude the cycle of apparitions."* (December 7, 1947, Montichiari Cathedral)

In Montichiari, we talk about the religious life and the need for religious souls within institutes to attract abundant graces for the entire Church.

Let us therefore ask ourselves what religious life is, and why it is so important.

Religious people are those who wish to live Christianity radically, and for this reason they take vows (poverty, chastity, and obedience). It is a sort of "enclave" within the Church, a select group with a specific mission and function.

Religious life must show everyone the right direction to take and the right life to live. It is like a road sign: it indicates where to go, which path to take, and what precautions to take along the way.

After the great season of martyrs, in the early decades of the Church's life, the era of the Desert Fathers arose. They were men (but also women) who left everything and went to live in caves, in great penance and a life of constant prayer. They were people who devoted themselves to perfection, not because they were better than others, but because they understood that Christianity is an absolute.

Monasticism arose as the absolutization and perfection of the spiritual life. The desert monks were great ascetics, and in this way they showed everyone that to be a Christian, one must mortify oneself, conquer one's passions, and open one's heart to divine grace.

Early monasticism had no immediate or visible purpose. Religious orders that arose with specific missions (for the poor, serving in hospitals, schools, etc.) all appeared in the second millennium. The monks of the first millennium, however, had the sole duty of penance and prayer. They were born for this reason, with no other purpose, and for this reason they professed vows and declared their desire to live in poverty, chastity, and without a will of their own.

Monks are not priests, just as, for example, Saint Francis, at the beginning of the second millennium, was not a priest. Many canonized religious saints are not priests; just think of all the women. How many saints among the Franciscans, Benedictines, Cistercians, Carmelites, and Visitandines!

Religious are "sequestered" people, who have no particular function, and are, in fact, useless in the eyes of the world. They live only for God, to give glory to Him.

Their lives are a splendid example of gratuitous love. They live only for the Lord. For this reason, the devil hates religious, friars, and nuns, and does everything he can to destroy their institutes, cause them to collapse and close. Without religious, the Church cannot move forward, or rather, it moves forward only with difficulty. Father Divo Barsotti writes about this: *"The world's most appalling misery is its contempt for religious life. Humanity can rise again from the abyss of death into which it has fallen only with a marvellous flourishing of vocations to religious life. Religious life must once again appear to the Christian*

people as the highest, fullest, most living life. We must witness a flow of immense multitudes seeking God to serve Him and give themselves to Him totally. Like an escape from the world. Something mad, yet like a marvellous light that enraptures and draws souls and hearts to itself. The world can become young again only with such a movement” (Diary, October 15, 1945).

Without religious life, the very vitality of the Church cools.

For this reason, Our Lady in Montichiari, after having spoken for everyone in Fatima and for the family in Bonate, appeals to religious to live their charism to the full, for the good of the entire Church and the entire world. She implores them to return to the original charism of the Founder, speaks of the betrayal of vocation (the Judas priests), and also speaks of impurity as a sin and a grave temptation for priests and consecrated persons (she had already spoken of this in La Salette in the secret message).

Thus, full consecration to the Virgin Mary takes place in three stages: consecration to the Immaculate Heart (Fatima), through the offering of sacrifices; consecration and purification of the family (Ghiaie di Bonate); renewal of religious life (Montichiari).

If all this is done and lived to the fullest, nothing else will be needed.

2) Atonement (the reparation for sins)

The second clear element linking Fatima to the Mystical Rose is the theme of reparation for sins.

In the first apparition at Fatima, on May 13, 1917, the Blessed Virgin asked the shepherd children if they would like to offer sacrifices for the remission of sins and the conversion of poor sinners. The children enthusiastically responded yes, and from that moment, reparation for sins became their life. They began to willingly offer all the pains and hardships that befell them, to which they soon added sacrifices and voluntary penances.

They were also driven to this realization and mission by the terrifying vision of Hell they suddenly saw on July 13th, during the third apparition. Sinners go to Hell. Today, no one says this anymore, but the three shepherd children saw it. They needed no arguments or convincing: they saw with their own eyes sinners falling into eternal Hell.

Jacinta was shocked. When she was admitted to the children's room at the hospital in Lisbon, she complained when she saw some of the other children's mothers dressed inappropriately, according to the fashions of the time. To those who observed that the child's judgment was exaggerated, she simply commented: "If they knew..." As if to say: if they too had seen Hell and where sinners go, perhaps they would not take the issue of dress and decency so lightly.

In Montichiari, the theme of atonement is revisited very clearly. In the first apparition, the Blessed Virgin, dressed in purple, weeps. And above all, the seer sees her with three heavy swords thrust into her flesh. Most Holy Mary almost lacks the strength to speak, and says only three words: "Prayer, sacrifice, penance." She doesn't smile; she is sad. Why? It's simple: because there is sin in the world. Prayer is no longer enough. We must unite, Our Lady says, our suffering to our prayers, offering our small trials and small sorrows to the great trial of Christ on the cross, to the infinite suffering of the sacrificed Lamb.

On November 22, 1947, Pierina Gilli asked the Virgin: "What must we do to carry out your order to pray and do penance?" Our Lady was silent for a few minutes, then answered: "*Penance, that is, daily accepting all the little crosses, even work, as a sign of penance.*"

So what must we do? Must we suffer? No: we must love. Those who love suffer, and those who suffer love.

3) The Communion of Reparation

The third element that we find identical in Fatima and Montichiari is the Holy Communion of reparation.

At Fatima, before Mary Most Holy, the angel appeared. He gave Holy Communion to the three shepherd children. But first, he taught a prayer that is entirely focused on the reparation of sins: "Most Holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, I adore you profoundly, and I offer you the most precious Body, Blood, and soul and divinity of Jesus Christ (...) in reparation for the outrages, sacrileges, and indifference by which He Himself is offended."

In the third apparition, the Blessed Virgin said she would return to ask for the consecration of Russia for the reparation of sins through the practice of the five first Saturdays of the month, which duly occurred eight years later, on December 10, 1925, when she appeared to Lucia in Pontevedra.

The practice of the five first Saturdays consists of confession, Communion, the recitation of the rosary, and the contemplation of the Mysteries for at least a quarter of an hour.

The purpose of this practice is reparation for sins. Furthermore, the Blessed Virgin promises assistance at the moment of death to those who observe the five first Saturdays: *"I promise to assist them at the hour of death with all the graces necessary for salvation."*

In Montichiari, the spirit of reparation underlies all the apparitions; it is, as it were, their soul, their source of inspiration. Resuming the practice of the first five Saturdays, She speaks of a "Communion of Reparation" to be received once a year on a specific day, October 13th.

"My divine Son has sent me again to ask for the worldwide unification of the Communion of Reparation. And let this happen on October 13th" (Apparition on the day of Corpus Christi, 1966).

This connection with Fatima is evident. Even October 13th is no coincidence: it is the day of the last apparition at Fatima, the one with the phenomenon of the sun.

In this vision at Fontanelle on the feast of Corpus Christi, the Blessed Virgin points out a field of wheat to the seer: *"How I wish this wheat would become Eucharistic bread, in many Eucharistic communions. I wish this wheat, transformed into many hosts, would arrive in Rome and reach Fatima by October 13th."* And again: *"Try to have some wheat delivered to our beloved son Pope Paul and tell him that he has been blessed by our visit. It is wheat from his land of Brescia, and let him say what my divine son desires, and also for Fatima" (August 6, 1966).*

The Communion of Reparation on October 13th is called "worldwide" because the crisis is worldwide. *"The world is falling into ruin,"* Our Lady Mystical Rose told Pierina in 1968. *"The Church has never been so plunged into apocalyptic darkness."*

Instituting this practice, Our Lady clarified: *"May this holy initiative, which must begin this year for the first time but will be repeated continually, be spread throughout the world. Priests and faithful who participate in this Eucharistic practice are assured of an abundance of my graces."*

What does this Communion of reparation consist of? Why, by receiving Communion, do we collaborate with Christ in the reparation of sins? And how is this solidarity with the world of sinners achieved?

Father Divo Barsotti comes to our aid with his doctrine of reparation: *"Even if we gave health to the sick and a home to all men, we would have accomplished nothing. The greatest charity is supernatural charity, which unites men to God. What is greater than taking on the burden of sin and imploring mercy for all? When you care for a sick person or assist an elderly person, you remain distinct from them. However, if you offer to pay for another person, you truly become "one" with that person. In reparation, you identify with the one who has sinned. More than any other act, this achieves unity. A unity so intimate that not even God can break it; it is the example of Moses who says: Either save this people or blot me out from the book of life."*

This is what the Lord Jesus experienced in Gethsemane, and it is the highest act of the Passion: taking upon himself universal sin. In this act, Jesus asks for participation; indeed, he exhorts Peter, James, and John to remain with Him, to stay awake, to join him in prayer.

This spirituality was deeply felt in the past; just think of the holy Curate of Ars. He understood his priesthood as paying for all, and his union with Jesus meant sacrificing himself and doing penance for his parishioners, so that their sins would be erased. St. John Vianney "paid" for them because he wanted them all to be saved in Heaven.

This is also the essence of Eastern Christian spirituality and Russian monasticism.

Cardinal Angelo Comastri writes about this: *"True love leads to such a fusion of spirit that one suffers the same pains and enjoys the same joys, as if one were a single person, and above all, it aims to demand the sufferings of the other. One can refuse to share the pleasures, but not the pains of the beloved."*

This is true love. This is the spirituality of Montichiari

In Montichiari, this circle closes (Fatima, Bonate, Montichiari), and thus the true effectiveness and action of the Church, especially in this time, is proclaimed. It is a century of social horrors and disorientation, and the Church is called to atone for sins.

If the Church's preaching is entirely focused on social issues, it distracts the faithful from its true purpose and fails to address the true need.

The Virgin said in Fontanelle (May 13, 1966): *"The world is falling to ruin. I have once again obtained mercy, and for this reason Jesus sent me to Montichiari. To save humanity, prayer, sacrifice, and penance are needed."*

The Marian message

According to Montfort, the Marian apparitions of these times prepare the Parousia, the second coming of the Lord Jesus. We are experiencing this.

In the Gospel, in the apostolic letters of the New Testament, there are very few social humanitarian actions—there is only the collection organized by Saint Paul in the Second Letter to the Corinthians, but even that was occasional. These works are certainly necessary; those who love help the needy; there is no need for constant apparitions of the Virgin to remind us of this. The message of the Most Holy Mary in the apparitions of these times, urgent, is the request for humanity's return to God (La Salette), and the apparitions urge us to live an ever greater love for humanity, asking that sins be atoned for through penance. It is clear that the need in this time is greater; the gravity of the situation requires a different, new, more powerful action: the reparation of sins.

This is the Church's hour of Gethsemane, and therefore people are needed for atonement, for the reparation of sins, with Christ and in Christ. This is the greatest love. And everyone can experience it: it is not something for specialists or heroes.

Emblematic for us is the episode of the paralytic lowered from the roof, to whom the Lord says: "Son, your sins are forgiven." At first, Jesus does not heal his body, but only his soul. This means that the healing of the soul takes precedence.

Now, if I do not perform visible works but dedicate myself solely to this, can I say I am useless in the Church? If I atone, with my penance and with my offered suffering—things no one sees—am I therefore less important in God's eyes?

No, on the contrary, I am more important. Mary Magdalene, after the Lord's resurrection, did not go into the world to preach, but withdrew to live penance. The shepherd children of Fatima, Pierina Gilli, obeying the Virgin Mary, lived the ministry of reparation for sins. They felt united with the sinful men of their time; they atoned and paid for them.

Men today are truly lost, because they have become atheists (in fact), and the language of many is blasphemy. But I am them; I must not separate myself from them, I must not detach myself. If I want to live the spirituality of Fatima and Montichiari, if I want to obey the Virgin Mary, I will carry the burden of my generation and dedicate myself, from now on, until death, to the reparation of sins and the salvation of the world.

This power has been given to us. Which is the power of the cross. Now more than ever: "In hoc signo vinces." (*"With this sign you will win"*)

Father Serafino Tognetti