

The Montichiari Message in relation to the Doctrine and Tradition of the Church

by Father Florian Rodero

Below is the transcript of Father Florian's conference speech, a working outline that the author may revise and add to.

It's difficult to describe all the aspects of Marian devotion, both traditional and new, in Our Lady's messages to Pierina. To learn more, we must refer to the volume of her *Diaries* edited by Riccardo Caniato, which is currently the essential book for a more complete understanding of all Pierina's proposals regarding Marian devotion in her various conversations with Our Lady.

Some preliminary notes

We won't delve into dogmatic questions because apparitions don't normally have this purpose (in fact, the category of apparition isn't part of dogmatics), although Lourdes could be considered an exception. However, obviously, apparitions must be examined through the prism of harmony and conformity with dogma.

This is not the time to elaborate on the history of Mary's apparitions, but it would be interesting to recall that since the fourth century, there have been accounts of apparitions and a particular devotion to the image of Mary, specifically with reference to virginity and devotion. Therefore, it can be argued that the apparitions of Our Lady in Montichiari are a link in the river of apparitions of Our Lady throughout the Church's millennia-long history, and allow us to recall Marian presence at decisive moments in the history of the Church and the world. It will be enough to recall the apparition of Our Lady of Guadalupe at a critical moment in the evangelization of Latin America, or the apparitions of Lourdes and Fatima, at a critical moment for the world and the Church.

The apparitions of Montichiari are part of the so-called sensitive apparitions: ocular vision (not imaginative, intellectual).

1. We must distinguish between the requests that Our Lady makes to the seer (for example, forming a cross on the floor with her tongue) as a particular and obviously strange form of devotion or obedience (we recall a similar request of Mary to Bernardette Soubirous, the seer of Lourdes) and, on the other hand, Mary's proposals through the apparitions with the devotional requests addressed to the faithful which, in fact, are those that are of most interest because they enter into the message that Our Lady wants to transmit through the seer: apparitions and revelations..
2. A sound and solid theology offers these devotions proposed in the apparitions a more credible basis of truth than a simple, at times misleading, public devotion insufficiently supported by a true and authentic popular devotion that avoids easily becoming the fuel for mistaken forms of mass devotion, a crowd unable to distinguish because it lacks the criteria to distinguish the chaff from the wheat, sentiment from an exercise of reason: what is known as "Southern" devotion, which allows sentiment to prevail over solid analysis that can withstand the potential criticisms of those who already struggle to understand the demands of faith. In this context, the words of the theologian Suarez can suggest a way of understanding what I mean: "Pity without truth is deficient and truth without pity is empty," with the risk of ending up in a maximalist Mariology or, conversely, a minimalist Mariology. It would be a matter of harmonizing theology with popular manifestations and a necessary verification that satisfies both tendencies.

3. On the one hand, it is necessary to analyze how theology fits into devotions, specifically Marian ones, and it is also justified to be able to offer solid support to these manifestations, at times requested and proposed by the Madonna herself in the various apparitions, particularly when they are manifestations not only of a strictly personal nature but when a way of approaching a specific Marian devotion is involved.

The most important devotional implications of Mary's apparitions as the "Mystical Rose" can be summarized in the image Mary herself chose to present herself visibly, not only to Pierina, but to the entire world. Precisely because this is not a reductive, local apparition, but rather one of universal significance, it is necessary to offer theological support. This support is justified if we consider the manner in which Our Lady herself chose to present herself with the three roses, the meaning of which the Madonna herself will explain so as not to misunderstand the profound significance of the three roses, which encapsulate the message of the Mystical Rose.

Thus, the three roses with different colors relate to a healthy and profound spirituality and theological reflection: the white rose indicates prayer; prayer enters the dimension of transcendence; we recall the Transfiguration of Jesus...

The red rose, the spirit of sacrifice: the color of immolation, of martyrdom, of offering one's life just as Jesus sacrificed himself for us to the last drop of blood, a spirit of sacrifice to repair the offenses committed by consecrated persons who live in mortal sin. The yellow rose, the spirit of penance: repentance; that is, an exercise in change, a spirit of transformation and reparation for the offenses committed by priests who betray their vocation, and also to achieve sanctification and transformation, conversion, metanoia in a positive sense...

On the one hand, the colors of the three roses have to do with asceticism and even mysticism; but at the same time, they also relate to fully theological concepts such as transcendence, immolation, Eucharistic sacrifice, offering of life, sin, repentance, and forgiveness.

To conclude: the three roses have no aesthetic value... (Oh, how beautiful!).

These three roses are an invitation to pray for the transformation and sanctification of priests and of consecrated life in general.

Devotional expressions, therefore, must be "watered" with theology in general: dogmatics, ecclesiology, treatises on grace, the theological virtues... and more specifically in the study of spirituality, because devotional expressions of Marian pastoral care fully enter into this aspect of theology.

Certainly, dogmatics defines apparitions negatively because they can be risky since they are not necessary for Revelation. In fundamental theology, they are placed on the lowest level and obviously also considered a theological place. For this reason, it seems to me that our relationship is appropriate because it is rightly a question of finding a justification for the event of the Mystical Rose.

Everything I am saying is illuminated by the words of Pope Saint Paul VI in the Apostolic Exhortation "Marialis Cultus" (16):

We now wish, following some indications of the conciliar doctrine on Mary and the Church, to explore a particular aspect of the relationship between Mary and the Liturgy: namely, Mary as a model of the spiritual attitude with which the Church celebrates and lives the divine mysteries. The Blessed Virgin's exemplarity in this field derives from the fact that she is recognized as the Church's most excellent model in the order of faith, charity, and perfect union with Christ,⁴³ that is, of that interior disposition with which the Church, a beloved bride, closely associated with her Lord, invokes him and, through him, offers worship to the eternal Father.⁴

Manifestations or declarations and their theological meaning

I cannot list here all the aspects, modalities and nuances of the Mystical Rose phenomenon:

A word about the expression “Mystical Rose”: *The form of prayer of which we speak was appropriately given the name of Rosary, as if to express at the same time the scent of roses and the grace of the crowns. This name, while very well suited to signify a devotion to honor She who, rightly, is hailed as the "Mystical Rose" of Paradise, and, encircled by a crown of stars, is venerated as Queen of the universe, also seems to symbolize the wish for the joys and celestial garlands offered by Mary to her devotees. (Leo XIII, *Fidentem piumque animum*).*

The Mystical Rose. The Montichiari message often recalls the importance of the solemnity of the Immaculate Conception as one of the principal Marian truths, in harmony with the Mystical Rose. The feast of the Immaculate Conception is celebrated very solemnly within the context of devotion to the Mystical Rose.

The Eucharist with its charge of reparation must be strongly linked to the great and widespread cult of the devotion of reparation, and was praised by Pope Paul VI himself as a frequent way developed in the locality of Montichiari praising it: "Because a great number of people are gathered in the Cathedral of Montichiari for a sacred Eucharistic function of reparation" (*Diari*, p. 485).

Maternal beauty is a characteristic Pierina the Mystical Rose describes, and is generally richly delineated in the Litany of Loreto itself: "Our Lady demonstrated great maternal tenderness," Pierina describes her in one of her apparitions, and this way of presenting Our Lady was so sanctified and good that Pierina wanted to flee. "However, her maternal tenderness was so sweet," she repeats, "that all fear vanished." (*Diari*, p. 98).

Mary's pain, so present in the history of Mariology: Our Lady of Sorrows. With Mary's suffering, which also caused Pierina so much pain, Mary wanted to comfort her with Mary's own suffering, and this suffering is represented in the meaning—we might say theological—of the three roses.

Another constant in Pierina's diary is the memory of Mary's motherhood. And it couldn't be otherwise, since this is the most frequent insistence throughout the entire Mariology of the Church's Magisterium from the first centuries until the solemn proclamation of St. Paul VI:

Pope Paul VI solemnly proclaimed Mary's title as "Mother of the Church" on November 21, 1964, during the third session of the Second Vatican Council, at the time of the promulgation of the dogmatic constitution *Lumen Gentium*. This title, though deeply rooted in Christian faith, was made official by Paul VI with these words: "*Mariam Sanctissimam declaramus Matrem Ecclesiae*," meaning: "We declare Mary Most Holy Mother of the Church."

Here is what the Mystical Rose says: “Yes...I am Mary...Mystical Rose...Mystical Body, Mother of the Church.” And she adds: “I am Mary, mediator of Graces,” which is a consequence of the doctrine of **Mary's mediation**:

Indeed, Mary's mediation is closely linked to her motherhood; it possesses a specifically maternal character, which distinguishes it from that of other creatures who, in various and always subordinate ways, participate in the unique mediation of Christ, while hers also remains a shared mediation. Indeed, if "no creature can ever be placed on a par with the Incarnate Word and Redeemer," at the

same time "the unique mediation of the Redeemer does not exclude, but rather inspires in creatures a manifold cooperation, participated in by a single source"; and thus "the one goodness of God is truly diffused in various ways in creatures." The teaching of the Second Vatican Council presents the truth about Mary's mediation as a participation in this unique source, which is the mediation of Christ himself. Indeed, we read: "The Church does not hesitate to openly acknowledge this subordinate role of Mary, she constantly experiences it, and she recommends it to the love of the faithful, so that, sustained by this maternal help, they may be more intimately united with the Mediator and Savior." This function is, at the same time, special and extraordinary. It flows from her divine motherhood and can be understood and lived in faith only on the basis of the full truth of this motherhood. Since Mary, by virtue of divine election, is the Mother of the Son consubstantial with the Father and a "generous companion" in the work of redemption, "she was a mother to us in the order of grace."⁹⁹ This function constitutes a real dimension of her presence in the salvific mystery of Christ and the Church. (John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater*, n.38).

And so on, up to Pope Benedict XVI, who, together with the great theologian Von Balthasar, called Mary "the first Church."

The frequent and persistent affirmation of motherhood is in harmony with the broader and more widespread history of theology, and in particular with the apparitions: from the apparition of Guadalupe with the beautiful and tender expression of her divine motherhood, "I am the Mother of Him for whom we live"; and the affirmation of a personal and ecclesial motherhood: "Mary, my Mother, is also your Mother, and she has tender affection for souls" (Jesus to Pierina Gilli on June 12, 1953). This ecclesial motherhood was already formulated by Augustine, who considered Mary as the mother of the members of Christ.

Even the Second Vatican Council, after a great debate on the role of Mary, left aside the title "Mediator" as a possible dogma.

Mediator. In the apparition of October 22, 1947, Mary "assumed the attitude of a very superior Lady...; and said: I have placed myself as Mediator between men, particularly religious souls, and my Divine Son, who, tired of the constant offenses he received, wanted to exercise his justice."

In the apparition of February 27, 1952, Jesus appears, and it is Jesus himself who calls Mary: "Mother of all souls, the Mediator of graces and of my Mercy," and he will repeat this, reaffirming the title of Mediator (October 24, 1952).

Let us return to the Petrine Magisterium:

*And who would ever consider excessive and blame the great trust placed in the help and protection of the Virgin? Certainly all agree that the name and function of perfect Mediator are appropriate only to Christ, because he alone, God and man at once, reconciled the human race with the supreme Father: "There is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all" (1 Tim 2:5, 6). But if "nothing prevents," as the Angelic Doctor teaches, "someone else from being called, in certain respects, mediator between God and men, insofar as he cooperates dispositively and ministerially in the union of man with God," as are the angels, saints, prophets, and priests of the Old and New Testaments, without a doubt this title of glory is even more fitting for the most exalted Virgin. Indeed, no one can imagine another creature who has accomplished or is about to accomplish a work similar to hers in the reconciliation of men with God. In fact, it was she who for men, turned to eternal ruin, gave birth to the Savior, when at the announcement of the mystery of peace, brought by the Angel to the earth, she gave her admirable assent, "in the name of the whole human race". She is the one "from whom Jesus was born", his true Mother, and therefore worthy and great "Mediator to the Mediator" (Leo XIII, *Fidentem piumque animum*).*

We are speaking of a title that dates back a long time, dating back to the 5th and 6th centuries with Romanos the Melodist, the first to use the title "Mediator." Later, Saint Bernard insisted

on the same concept of Mediator. The revelations to Pierina, therefore, are in harmony with the tradition of the Church.

Consecration. Consecration has been considered a form of devotion to Our Lady since ancient times. From Saint John of Damascus to Saint Louis-Marie Grignon de Montfort, who laid a solid foundation for this form of devotion.

Consecration remains, to this day, one of the most widespread forms of dedication and veneration to Mary in the Church.

After the apparitions, Pierina frequently offers to be faithful or to give herself in order to give herself to Mary. We find a very beautiful text that demonstrates how one can offer oneself totally to Mary Most Holy (Montfortian entrustment), which is collected in the document of the Apostolic Penitentiary (Pius XI) (June 29, 1924).

Let us remember all the consecrations made by the pontiffs, and in particular Saint John Paul II to Our Lady of Fatima.

Invocations: *refugium peccatorum*. Another form of devotion that Mary herself proposes is a strong, yet equally trusting, invocation: this was particularly experienced by the seer. This is why she proposes a day dedicated to reparation: the 13th of the month. For this reason, there is a constant invitation to conversion. But not only the conversion of consecrated souls, but of the entire world. This conversion is in harmony with the particular one at Fatima, where Our Lady asks the shepherds for prayer and sacrifice: this is how Pierina also wanted to offer herself. Because, in Pierina's words: it is a way of "sanctifying the entire world and conversion." This is the reason why she saw the bleeding crucifix. And the constant supplication of Sister Maria Crocifissa: "Pray," she said to Pierina, "My merciful Jesus; forgive our sins.

Intercession. Another aspect that characterizes Our Lady, which comes from the early Middle Ages, is her power of intercession. When Pierina writes: "What transformation she can bring about with her grace. Oh yes, she is truly powerful toward God." This way of addressing Mary was already known in the early Middle Ages and, obviously, used in confident and powerful invocations: Mary is "omnipotent supplicant."

Devotions. No very specific, so-called "Southern" devotions are required. Although perhaps the water that springs from Fontanelle (literally, "little fountains") is part of this more popular form of devotion. (On the other hand, it is a constant in other apparitions, such as Lourdes and Collevaenza.) However, Fontanelle are referred to when speaking of the healing water, that is, the water of grace, where the sick who come into contact with the healing water from Fontanelle are particularly "cleansed."

No very original devotions, so to speak, are required (although certainly, as happens with all apparitions, some believers are raised to expectation or spectacular miracles, the result of a certain hysteria, or even irrationality, where rare forms of exaggerated devotion prevail, frequently creating confusion).

Pierina's priestly dimension. Certainly, a language, if not entirely unique, is addressed personally to Pierina in the words: "I have chosen you as my priest." Obviously, this unusual language must be understood in reference to the **common baptismal priesthood**. In the Middle Ages, Mary was depicted dressed in priestly liturgical vestments, a style that, however, did not enjoy lasting success in the history of Marian devotion.

For Pierina, it was certainly a way of considering that her life was and must be a sacrifice.

Hell. Our Lady showed hell to the shepherd children of Fatima, as she did to other saints... She showed Pierina both the devil, which is already a way of showing hell, and the hell of religious souls consecrated to God. Mary is the opposite of hell. Mary is the opposite of the devil as the personification of hell.

Recurring requests also appear in other apparitions. In the wake of other Marian apparitions, the Madonna's requests in Montichiari are in harmony. Some of these requests:

- *Praise and prayer to Mary are a means to foster vocations.* In the apparition of July 13, 1947: "I promise those religious institutes or congregations that honor me the most, will be protected by me, will have a greater flourishing of vocations, fewer betrayed vocations, fewer souls who offend the Lord with grave sin, and great holiness in God's ministers... I desire that the 13th of each month be a Marian day, for which special prayers of preparation for 12 days are promised."

- And she insists on the *sanctity of consecrated souls*. This is Our Lady's desire, which is in harmony with the words of Pope Pius XII:

And since priests can be called, in a very special way, children of Mary, they cannot help but nourish an ardent devotion towards the Virgin, invoke her with trust, and frequently implore her powerful protection. Every day, therefore, as the Church herself recommends, they will recite the Holy Rosary, which, by also proposing for our meditation the mysteries of the Redeemer, leads us "to Jesus through Mary." (Pius XII, Menti nostrae, Apostolic Exhortation 1950)

Yes, be vigilant, beloved sons, for priestly chastity is exposed to many dangers, both from the dissoluteness of morals, from the temptations of vice that are so frequent and insidious, and finally from that excessive freedom that is increasingly insinuating itself into relations between the two sexes and that is attempting to penetrate even the exercise of the sacred ministry. "Watch and pray" (Mk 14:38), remembering that your hands touch the holiest things, and that you are consecrated to God and must serve Him alone. The very habit you wear warns you that you must not live for the world, but for God. Therefore, work with ardor and alacrity, trusting in the protection of the Virgin Mother of God, to always keep yourselves "clean, pure, chaste, as befits Ministers of Christ and dispensers of the mysteries of God." (Pius XII, Menti nostrae).

Jean Galot, a renowned theologian, states that "the priest can gain much from his contact with Mary. Nor can the priest neglect the response to Jesus' ever-present words: 'Behold your mother.' Following the example of the beloved disciple, the priest must take Mary with him; that is, make a place for her in his heart and in his life. By praying to her and offering her filial affection, he will be able to better realize the ideal of the priesthood, to be a priest who increasingly resembles the one high priest, born of the Virgin Mary."

- *Mary frequently and clearly manifests the human feelings of her heart in her apparitions* (even in the apparition at La Salette, Our Lady wept on Melanie's knees).

- *The seer's sufferings are a frequent request.* We recall that in the apparitions at Fatima, Our Lady refers to Francis and says that he must still make many sacrifices to enter heaven. In Montichiari, in the apparition of September 6, 1947, Our Lady asks Pierina if she is willing to offer her life as a sacrifice for the spread of the Mystical Rose.

There are other requests from Our Lady in the Brescia area that involve specific manifestations, such as reciting the *Miserere* with open arms. We find a new formulation, as a personal manifestation of "making a vow" as an expression of "uniformity with God's will";

the "transformation" that can be achieved in souls "with the help of her grace." And regarding the efficacy of Mary's intercession with God, Pierina states: "Oh yes, it is truly powerful"... and here we seem to hear an echo of the ancient invocation to Mary in the Middle Ages: Mary is "the omnipotent supplicant."

- A renewed insistence of Our Lady to resort to *prayer; sacrifice and penance* to stop the punishment of atheism", as she had already requested of the three shepherd children of Fatima.

- Our Lady has always presented herself as a channel whose mission is to let the water of grace flow, the *mediator who distributes the water of divine grace*.

Even at Fontanelle fountain, as in Lourdes, mud initially flows, as if it were a "*sacramental sign*": the first water from the spring has the concrete meaning of the healing of sins, and later, already clear, it transforms into a sign of grace, manifested particularly in the healing of the sick.

- *The sacrifices of a soul are never wasted*: the pain offered, united with the suffering of Christ, never falls on deaf ears.

Conclusion

The apparitions of the Mystical Rose with her messages offer a rich summary of an authentic spiritual Mariology.