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Fatima Background

For what particular reason did the Blessed Mother choose Portugal as the sounding board for her message to the world in 1917? One may ponder this question, since the country was plagued with apathy, indifference, illiteracy. Apparently, it was a land of people who did not appreciate spiritual things -- a people who had left the moribund Church of their fathers -- a people whose hearts were far from God.

Indeed, there was spiritual desolation. And the poverty of the rural population was enough to drive them to the brink of despair.

But it had not always been that way. At one time the Christian faith was a reality in their lives. They believed; they loved; they prayed. They, married in the Church, christened their children, observed its rites, went to Mass and Benediction, and kept the fasts. It was prayer that took their minds off the hardships of their toil and daily tasks; it softened the privations imposed on them by their poverty. In church they beheld beauty, and light, and heard sacred music. They found consolation and resignation.

Then came the revolution of 1910. King Carlos of Portugal and his son had been slain in the streets of Lisbon in 1908; and in 1910 the young King Manuel and his mother had been exiled. A republic had then been proclaimed and, largely through Masonic influence, the persecution of Christianity with its utter destruction as an aim, had immediately begun.

The Concordat existing between Portugal and the Vatican since 1886 was abolished, and as had already been done in Germany, Italy and France since the late 1870's; religious teaching in the schools was banned; nuns and priests exiled; all Church property was confiscated; and the majority of churches were closed. Anyone in any walk of life, professing his Christian religion was marked, and denied advancement and promotion in either army, government offices, universities, or in any grade of the teaching profession.

Due to the lack of priests, the population of entire regions of Portugal was deprived of religious comfort. Children could not be baptized; marriages, funerals, seldom could be celebrated with religious ceremony. Mass could be said only at long intervals when a few courageous priests, faithful to their vocation, traveled long distances from one village to another to administer the Sacraments.

It was the family recitation of the Rosary alone that remained to the peasantry as a link between the persecuted people and Heaven. Through the Rosary they prayed and persevered, and hoped for deliverance. For the great mass of atheistic scholars, the smart set, the high and the mighty, the worldly wise -- it must have been very embarrassing in 1917 to find the Blessed Mother suddenly in their land -- snubbing them, in a way, and preferring to visit with three little children in the outlying and poor mountain district of Fatima.

And it was the three little children -- not the high and the mighty of the land -- who called the nation back to God and to Christian living, and ultimately to bring Salazar to head a Christian government.

Incidentally, how much of the Faith would you have kept and practiced in that anti-Christian atmosphere? A good answer to that query is a second question: What use are you making of the means at your disposal right now?

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PRAYERS - Deceased: mother of Nicholas Neier of Dillon; grandmother of Bill Schmitz of Fisher; father of Prof. Alvin Ryan; brother-in-law of Fr. Wm. Havey, CSC. Ill; mother of Don McDonald of Breen-Phillips; friend of Ray Terlizzi of Dillon; Bob Haley, '37.