

Our Lady of America: An Appeal to the Bishops of the United States of America

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Introduction

As an international student from Austria I am studying Theology at the Franciscan University of Steubenville after having finished a master's degree in Psychotherapy-Science at the Sigmund Freud University of Vienna. With this background I looked with great interest at the alleged apparitions of Our Lady of America, since I firmly believe that Our Lady's key message of "purity of heart" can have astounding mental health benefits not only for individuals but for entire nations.

For many years, the whole world has looked at America as a great exemplar of freedom, peace, and justice. The American dream is something even non-Americans dream of. The United States is the country of unimagined possibilities. One can easily imagine that even heaven has a special vocation for the USA, since everything that Americans do, the whole world tries to imitate.

Sadly enough, the concept of the American dream, freedom, peace, and justice have recently seemed to slowly fade away even for the Americans themselves. One makes a grave error if one looks to big political actions and decisions as reasons for the slow decay of a good, humanitarian and dignified society. Evil starts from within each individual heart, and it contaminates families, societies, states, countries, and, in the end, the whole world.

If one contemplates the goodness of the God who loves humanity, one can easily understand that God is going to send help and a remedy for the degeneration, disaster and war the world is currently facing. Undoubtedly, the United States of America is going to play a crucial role in the restoration of peace to the world, in a way differently than most men would imagine.

For centuries, Jesus has revealed himself to the world through Mary, often by sending her to many different apparition sites throughout the world to prepare for an era of peace. How can someone not imagine that God is also going to send Mary to the USA as a crucial missionary cornerstone in establishing peace to the world?

This phenomenon is exactly what one witnesses through studying the Marian apparitions of Rome City, Indiana, in which Mary appeared to Sr. Mary Ephrem Neuzil in 1954-1959. There, she revealed herself with the title, “Our Lady of America, the Immaculate Virgin,” and with her special mission of promoting purity of heart as a precondition to the indwelling of the Most Holy Trinity, the sanctification of families and the conversion of America in order to restore peace to the world.

After studying the apparitions of Our Lady of America it might be reasonable to believe that God has great plans for the Church of the United States of America and for all its citizens in general. It is possible that heaven might offer a remedy to the disasters, errors and heresies of our times, not only to the American’s but also to the whole world. It is possible that America plays a crucial role in restoring peace to the world. After a thorough study of the alleged messages it might be reasonable to believe that it is necessary to ask the Bishops of the United States of America to re-evaluate the Marian Apparitions of “Our Lady of America – Our Lady, The Immaculate Virgin, Patroness of America.”

Historical Background

“The devotion to Our Lady of America has its source in private revelations to Sister Mary Ephrem (baptized Mildred) Neuzil, who was born in 1916 and was professed, in 1933, in the Congregation of the Sisters of the Most Precious Blood of Jesus, which has its generalate

in Dayton, Ohio. She later became part of a contemplative branch of the same congregation.”¹

In 1938, Sister Mary Ephrem started having mystical experiences. She thought that they were typical to all religious and therefore, these experiences did not confuse or over-impress her. In 1948, her mystical encounters became more vivid. She experienced a mystical espousal with Christ. Her confessor suggested that she be cautious, even though there was no external hint that she would be different from any of the other religious sisters. In 1954, her supernatural experiences took on a specific program consisting of Marian apparitions and messages in which Mary presented herself as Our Lady of America – Our Lady, The Immaculate Virgin, Patroness of America. She also received visions from St. Joseph, St. Michael, St. Gabriel and Jesus himself. Sister Mary Ephrem (Mildred Neuzil) died in 2000.²

Her spiritual director was Monsignor Paul F. Leibold, Vicar General of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati, later Bishop of Evansville and Archbishop of Cincinnati. He approved the apparitions and the devotion as he also had a medal struck with the image of Our Lady of America, since Our Lady had wished this medal for the purity of heart and Christian families.³

The booklet version with the contents of the private revelation by Sister Mary Ephrem received the Nihil Obstat by Daniel Pilarczyk, S.T.D. and the Imprimatur of Archbishop Paul F. Leibold in 1963.⁴ Archbishop Raymond L. Burke, now Cardinal Burke issued a letter to the Bishops of the United States Conference in 2007, supporting the apparition with the following words: “What can be concluded canonically is that the devotion was both approved by Archbishop

¹ Raymond L. Burke, “Regarding Our Lady of America,” accessed April 14, 2022, <https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/library/regarding-our-lady-of-america-3661>.

² Sister Mary Ephrem, “Booklet of messages of Our Lady of America,” downloaded April 14, 2022, <https://www.ourladyofamerica.org/wordpress/devotionals/diary-of-messages>. 1.

³ Raymond L. Burke, “Regarding Our Lady of America.”

⁴ Sister Mary Ephrem, “Booklet of messages of Our Lady of America.” 1.

Leibold and, what is more, was actively promoted by him. In addition, over the years, other Bishops have approved the devotion and have participated in public devotion to the Mother of God, under the title of Our Lady of America.”⁵

In other words, even though Archbishop Leibold did not make a formal public statement, he nonetheless approved and promoted the apparitions. Other Bishops approved the authenticity of the Devotion to Our Lady of America with him. Public devotion was clearly permitted, which is also testified by their own participation.

On May 7th, 2020, Bishop Kevin C. Rhoades, Bishop of the Diocese of Fort Wayne – South Bend, Indiana, where some of the apparitions took place, issued a statement regarding the Devotion to Our Lady of America together with five other Bishops. They appointed a commission consisting of theological and canonical experts who were instructed to evaluate the alleged apparitions. In their statement, the Bishops outline five key findings. These key findings are as follows:

(1) Sister Neuzil is described as an honest, psychologically sound, morally upright, devout and virtuous religious. Despite her imperfections, her being the perpetrator of a hoax is unlikely given her good character. (2) The commission describes numerous spiritual fruits, conversions, spiritual refreshment and even physical healing at the apparition site in Rome City. (3) In the messages, St. Joseph is called a co-redeemer. The commission explains that this has never been expressed as Catholic doctrine and therefore has to be called an error. (4) Sister Neuzil’s mystical experiences are described as subjective inner religious experiences rather than objective external visions. (5) Therefore, the commission does not want to talk about an objective private revelation, since Sister Neuzil’s own imagination and intellect seem to have been constitutively involved. The commission does not want to classify the apparitions of Our Lady of America of the same type as Guadalupe, Fatima and Lourdes.⁶

⁵ Raymond L. Burke, “Regarding Our Lady of America.”

⁶ “Statement Regarding the Devotion to Our Lady of America,” Diocese of Fort Wayne – South Bend, downloaded April 1, 2022,

“Based on these findings, Bishop Rhoades came to the conclusion that ‘the visions and revelations themselves cannot be said to be of supernatural origin in the sense of objective occurrences (*non constat de supernaturalitate*); thus further, I cannot approve or support public devotion or cult.’ The bishops of the other five dioceses have read and also accept these findings and conclusions.”⁷

The Bishops also explain, that: “while Our Lady of Guadalupe is recognized as the Patroness of North, Central, and South America, Our Lady is the specific Patroness of the United States of America under her title as the Immaculate Virgin. As such, the faithful may indeed pray to Our Lady, the Immaculate Virgin, as the Patroness of America. At the same time, such private devotion should in no way imply approval or acceptance of purported revelations, visions, or locutions to attributed to Sister Mary Ephrem (Mildred) Neuzil other than as her own subjective inner religious experiences.”⁸

These are the latest official Church statements regarding Our Lady of America. The Bishops statement does not prohibit private devotion among the faithful. This means that the faithful can pray to Our Lady of America and visit the apparition site in Rome City, Indiana on their own accord as long as this private devotion does in no way imply approval or acceptance of Sister Mary Ephrem Neuzil’s mystical experiences and alleged messages.

Non constat de supernaturalitate means that the devotion is neither approved nor condemned by the Church – the supernatural character of the apparitions cannot be affirmed at this moment. *Non constat* leaves open the possibility of further investigation so that the Church may fully approve or condemn the Devotion to Our Lady of America.

To the faithful, the decision of the Bishops may seem confusing, since an official public devotion is not permitted but a private devotion is.

<https://www.scribd.com/document/499742124/Statement-of-Pertinent-Ordinaries-Regarding-Our-Lady-of-America-May-7-2020-pdf>.

⁷ “Statement Regarding the Devotion to Our Lady of America 3.

⁸ *Ibid.* 5.

That is why the persons responsible in Rome City are frequently asked: “What does it mean to be a Private Devotion of the Faithful?”⁹ There seems to be a theological confusion since the status “non constat de supernaturalitate” is given and on the other hand private devotion is encouraged. Saying that one can have a private devotion based on heavenly messages to a religious Sister and at the same time declaring that these messages as not approved and not accepted is confusing.

Jesus’ words, “A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a rotten tree bear good fruit” (Mt 7:18) are a major criterion for discerning the validity of an alleged apparition. The Bishops confirm many good fruits at the apparition site in Rome City, including even some physical healings. If the messages are wrong and the tree is bad, why then permit private devotion? From the viewpoint of theological consistency and clarity the confusion of the faithful is very understandable.

In the following pages, I intend to go through some of the key points of the alleged messages to Sister Mary Ephrem and discuss them in view of the Bishops’ Commission’s key findings.

St. Joseph the Co-Redeemer

The Bishop’s commission statement asserts that “much of what is expressed [in the messages of Our Lady of America] does not contain any doctrinal error. However, there is a claim regarding Saint Joseph which has never been expressed as Catholic doctrine and must be seen as an error, namely, that he was a ‘co-redeemer’ with Christ for the salvation of the world.”¹⁰

With all respect to the Bishop’s commission, the statement about the alleged erroneous messages on St. Joseph must be declared as itself erroneous. The concept of co-redemption is official Church doctrine with its basis in Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition.

⁹ “Canonical History and Current Status,” Our Lady of America, accessed April 20, 2022, <https://www.ourladyofamerica.org/wordpress/canonical-history-and-current-status>.

¹⁰ “Statement Regarding the Devotion to Our Lady of America.” 3.

St. Paul writes in Colossians 1:24: “Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ on behalf of his body, which is the church.” What does St. Paul mean when he states that there is something lacking in the afflictions of Christ? Objectively, Christ’s work of redemption was absolutely perfect, efficacious, and complete. His death on the Cross would have been able to save the world a million times if men would accept it. Jesus acquired graces for humanity through His death in an absolute generous and unimaginable gratuitous way. So, then, what is lacking? St. Paul also says that he is “filling up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ on behalf of his body, which is the church.” ‘On behalf of the Church’ indicates that there is still something lacking in regard to the distribution of graces to the Church, but not in the acquisition of graces.

The Church distinguishes between objective and subjective redemption. Objective redemption refers to the acquisition of grace for all humanity. Subjective redemption refers to the distribution of graces obtained by objective redemption. The Church participates only in subjective redemption that is to say in the distribution of grace.¹¹

Pope Benedict XVI incorporates this doctrine of salvific suffering in a homily he delivered in Fatima on May 13th, 2010, in which he said to the sick, “You will be redeemers with the Redeemer, just as you are sons in the Son.”¹² If one can be a “redeemer with the Redeemer” as Pope Benedict XVI teaches, then clearly all suffering Christians who unite their sufferings with Christ’s can be called co-redeemers. If an average Christian can be called a redeemer with the Redeemer, then it

¹¹ Bertrand de Margerie, “Mary Co-redemptrix in the Light of Patristics,” accessed April 21, 2022, <https://www.motherofallpeoples.com/post/mary-co-redemptrix-in-the-light-of-patristics>

¹² Benedict XVI, Homily of his Holiness in Esplanade of the Shrine of Our Lady of Fatima (May 13, 2010), accessed April 21, 2022, https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2010/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20100513_fatima.html.

is more than appropriate to call Mary the redemptrix with the Redeemer and to call St. Joseph a co-redeemer as well.

Pope Benedict XVI is absolutely consistent with the Church's Magisterium of previous popes especially when it comes to the Church's doctrine on Mary's co-redemptive role in salvation history. If one takes away Mary's co-redemption, one takes it away from all Saints and Christians in general. That is to say that nobody would be capable of helping Jesus in His main mission of saving souls. That is why the latest Church's Magisterium on the Co-Redemptrix shall be presented briefly:

Pope Pius IX more generally begins the papal references to Mary's Coredemptive role in *Ineffabilis Deus* (1854), when he refers to Mary as the 'parentum Reparatricem' ("Reparatrix [secondary restorer] of parents") in reference to Adam and Eve in the teachings of the Church Fathers.¹³

Pope Leo XIII (1878-1903) later teaches in his Encyclical Letter *Jucunda Semper Expectatione* about the co-suffering of Mary, stating that Mary died with Jesus in her heart.¹⁴

The term "Co-redemptrix" itself appeared on a magisterial level during the papacy of St. Pius X (1903-1914) and was since used by succeeding Popes.¹⁵

¹³ Mark Miravalle, *Mary: Coredemptrix Mediatrix Advocate* (Santa Barbara: Queenship Publishing, 1993), 14.

¹⁴ Leo XIII, encyclical *Jucunda Semper Expectatione* on the Rosary (September 8, 1894), par. 3, accessed April 21, 2022, https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_1-xiii_enc_08091894_jucunda-semper-expectatione.html.

¹⁵ Arthur Burton Calkins, "The Mystery of Mary Coredemptrix in the Papal Magisterium," in *Mary Co-redemptrix Doctrinal Issues Today*, ed. Mark Miravalle (Goleta: Queenship Publishing, 2002), 31.

Pope Benedict XV (1914-1922) again confirms the doctrine on Mary's coredemptive role and adds to it a new greater clarity.¹⁶

Pope Pius XI (1922-1939) again continues to refer to Mary on various occasions under the title Co-redemptrix and clearly establishes the just invocation of her under this title.¹⁷

Pope Pius XII (1939-1958) made many contributions in distributing Marian truth around the globe. Not only did he define the dogma of Mary's assumption into heaven, but he also promoted much study and discussion of Mary's role in salvation history, especially regarding her roles as Co-redemptrix and Mediatrix.¹⁸

“The Second Vatican Council, under the pontificates of *John XXIII* (1958-1962) and *Paul VI* (1963-1978) gave conciliar strength and confirmation to the consistent ordinary Magisterial teachings of the modern popes regarding the co-redemptive role of Mary.”¹⁹

In the Dogmatic Constitution of the Second Vatican Council *Lumen Gentium*, chapter 8 is dedicated to Mary. Paragraph 58 clearly teaches the doctrine on Mary's Co-Redemption even though the term “Co-Redemptrix” was omitted for ecumenical reasons.²⁰

Pope John Paul II (1978-2005) used the term Co-redemptrix at least six times in published statements and his public references to Mary's role as Co-redemptrix are far more numerous.²¹

The Catholic Church's doctrine on Co-redemption is clearly represented in this list of Papal magisterial teachings. To demonstrate the evidence of Co-redemption from Scripture, the Church Fathers, Liturgy, the Saints and Mystics would exceed the scope of this essay.

¹⁶ Miravalle, *Mary: Coredemptrix Mediatrix Advocate*, 16.

¹⁷ Miravalle, *Mary: Coredemptrix Mediatrix Advocate*, 18.

¹⁸ Calkins, “The Mystery of Mary Coredemptrix in the Papal Magisterium,” 35-36.

¹⁹ Miravalle, *Mary: Coredemptrix Mediatrix Advocate*, 19.

²⁰ Vatican Council II, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* on the Church (November 21, 1964), §58, Vatican Web Archive, accessed April 21, 2022, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html.

²¹ Calkins, “The Mystery of Mary Coredemptrix in the Papal Magisterium,” 41.

One could still object that this does not prove that St. Joseph's role as a co-redeemer was ever expressed as Catholic doctrine. The Bishop's commission statement on Our Lady of America claims that "St. Joseph the co-redeemer" was never a Catholic doctrine and must be seen as an error.

Once again, if all suffering Christians can be called "redeemers with the Redeemer," than more so St. Joseph. Nevertheless, there is more to that. Pope Pius XI writes about St. Joseph: "Where the mystery is deepest it is there precisely that the mission is highest and that a more brilliant cortège of virtues is required with their corresponding echo of merits. It was a unique and sublime mission, that of guarding the Son of God, the King of the world, that of protecting the virginity of Mary, that of entering into participation in the mystery hidden from the eyes of ages and so to cooperate in the Incarnation and the Redemption."²²

Pope Pius XI makes it very clear to call St. Joseph a cooperator in the incarnation and redemption. How Saints cooperate in the redemption of souls was laid out above, but how is it possible that St. Joseph even cooperated in the incarnation of Christ?

Msgr. Calkins explains in an interview, that since Mary was legally married to Joseph when the Annunciation happened, Jesus was the fruit of their spiritual union. Mary gave Jesus his body and therefore belongs to the hypostatic order. She played a specific role so that the hypostatic union could take place – Jesus being true man and true God. Since the spiritual union between Mary and Joseph was so profound and the sacred base in which Jesus could incarnate, also Joseph participates in the hypostatic order and therefore cooperates in the incarnation.²³ In other words, this wonderful teaching explains that St. Joseph has a mission in the mystery of the hypostatic union and in the

²² Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *The Mother of the saviour and our interior life* (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Company, 1949), 333.

²³ Arthur Burton Calkins, "Mariology Without Apology - 17. Our Lady of America: Present Status Analysis," interview by Dr. Mark Miravalle. *Mariology without Apology*, accessed April 22, 2022, video 27:00, <https://www.mothersofallpeoples.com/mariology-without-apology>.

mystery of Christ's incarnation and redemption. It is very clear however that St. Joseph plays an absolutely secondary role in relation to Mary and an absolutely tertiary role in relation to Jesus. Nonetheless, Jesus the God-man and Mary the Queen of heaven owed obedience to St. Joseph, the head of the holy family, reflecting the outstanding and exceptional role St. Joseph plays in salvation history.

Citing the *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, Calkins writes about John Paul II that he “did not explicitly teach that Saint Joseph was a co-redeemer, [nonetheless] he certainly laid the groundwork for such an understanding. Even more, of all the popes, he was the first to make the most definite declarations in this regard by stating that Joseph was involved with Mary in the same salvific event; indeed, the Latin can even be translated that he was ‘inserted’ into this event. Thus, by virtue of his being the head of the Holy Family Joseph was inserted into the hypostatic order.”²⁴

Calkins continues to show how Prosper Lambertini (who later became Pope Benedict XIV (1675-1758)) recognized Joseph belonging to the hypostatic order. Lambertini himself got this teaching from the great Jesuit theologian Francisco Suarez (1548-1617).²⁵ Also “Leo XIII, Pius XI and John Paul II clearly speak of Saint Joseph’s participation in the Redemption of the human race, even if they do not employ the term ‘Co-Redeemer.’”²⁶

St. Peter Julian Eymard (1811-1868) writes the following about St. Joseph’s sorrows: “From the day the aged Simeon had predicted Christ’s Passion, never a moment elapsed when that Passion was not present to the mind of Saint Joseph. The Scriptures showed it to him in figure, while Jesus spoke to him of it continually. For Jesus loved

²⁴ Arthur Burton Calkins, “Some Comments on the Statement Regarding the Devotion to Our Lady of America of May 7, 2020 By Bishop Kevin C. Rhoades and Five Other Ordinaries,” downloaded April 1, 2022, <https://www.scribd.com/document/499744810/Monsignor-Arthur-Calkins-Response-to-the-Bishops-Concerning-Our-Lady-of-America>. 11.

²⁵ Ibid. 12.

²⁶ Ibid. 13.

His father too much to deprive him of the grace of suffering the Passion with Him and of sharing beforehand in its merits. [...] Further, Saint Joseph foresaw Mary's tears and misery. He would have desired to stay by her side, and he must have begged Jesus to be allowed to remain on earth that he might climb Calvary and sustain Mary. Poor Saint Joseph! He had to submit to death and leave behind him Jesus and Mary: Jesus to be crucified and abandoned by His people; Mary to suffer alone, unassisted. How his love for them was crucified! All this is very true. It was only right that Saint Joseph should not be deprived of suffering, a grace granted to all the saints. He was to have a fuller chalice of pain than all the rest because our Lord loved him more than all of them except Mary."²⁷

Clearly, if, after Mary, St. Joseph participated most in the Passion of Christ, he rightfully deserves to be called a co-redeemer.

Cardinal Alexis Henry Lépiciér, O.S.M. (1863-1936) is another great figure in the field of Josephology. In his major work "Tractatus de Sancto Ioseph" he thoroughly explains the co-redemptive mission of St. Joseph. Lépiciér dedicated this work to Pope Saint Pius X, who endorsed the book with his apostolic blessing.²⁸

Cardinal Lépiciér's position on Saint Joseph's active collaboration in the work of Redemption, namely his role as Co-redeemer, was subsequently upheld by other authors. The most sustained and carefully argued treatment of this topic was done by the late Opus Dei numerary, Don Joaquín Ferrer Arellano. [...] In these works he follows the indications of Saint Josemaria Escrivá de Balaguer (1902-1975).²⁹

²⁷ Saint Peter Julian Eymard, *Month of St. Joseph* (New York: Eymard League, 1948) 82-85.

²⁸ Alexio Henrico M. Lepicier, *Tractatus de Sancto Ioseph, Sponso Beatissimae Virginis Mariae* (Romae: Buona Stampa, 1933).

²⁹ Calkins, "Some Comments on the Statement Regarding the Devotion to Our Lady of America of May 7, 2020 By Bishop Kevin C. Rhoades and Five Other Ordinaries." 17.

One should note that aside from the remarks made by St. John Paul II, all of these sources are dated prior to the apparitions of St. Joseph to Sister Mary Ephrem Neuzil. It must be noted also that Sister Neuzil did not have any higher education in theology or specifically in Josephology. This is a fact that can contribute to the authenticity of the alleged messages to Sister Neuzil. The Bishop's commission statement claims that the co-redemptive mission of St. Joseph is not a part of Catholic doctrine. With all respect, the Bishops are incorrect. They did not consider the numerous magisterial discussions on St. Joseph, nor did they take into account the last 150 years of development in the field of Josephology.

Mary's Immaculate Conception and the Call for Purity of Heart

One of the main messages of Our Lady of America to Sister Mary Ephrem is the call for purity of heart. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus says: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Mt 6:8). One reason, if not the most evident reason for so many heresies and falsehoods in this world is an unclean heart. One cannot arrive at truth and see God (who is truth) if one does not progress in purifying one's heart.

Through Hollywood and the film and music industry, America plays a big role in the sexualization of the world. Therefore, the call for pure hearts needs to be strongly emphasized throughout the whole country, and the call for conversion and penance must focus primarily on the purification of the heart. This truth is why Our Lady is anxiously concerned with the inner life of man. With her Immaculate Conception she is the perfect teacher of a pure heart.

The official visits of Our Lady to Sister Mary Ephrem began on the eve of the feast of the North American Martyrs, September 25th, 1956. She gave Sister Mary Ephrem the following message: "I am pleased, my child, with the love and honor my children in America give to me, especially through my glorious and unique privilege of the Immaculate Conception. I promise to reward their love by working through the power of my Son's Heart and my Immaculate Heart miracles of grace

among them. I do not promise miracles of the body, but of the soul. I am Our Lady of America. I desire that my children honor me, especially by the purity of their lives. I wish it [America] to be the country dedicated to my purity. The wonders I will work will be the wonders of the Soul. They must have faith and believe firmly in my love for them. I desire that they be children of my Pure Heart.”³⁰

Our Lady is offering her Immaculate Heart as a last resort and remedy for the tribulations and disasters that are about to come, as she has done in the Lourdes and Fatima apparitions. The message of Our Lady of America stands in line with this tradition. In a message given on September 27th, 1956, she says: “I come to you, O children of America, as a last resort. I plead with you to listen to my voice. Cleanse your souls in the Precious Blood of My Son. Live in His Heart, and take me in that I may teach you to live great purity of heart which is so pleasing to God. Be my army of chaste soldiers, ready to fight to the death to preserve the purity of your souls. I am the Immaculate One, Patroness of your land. Be my faithful children as I have been your faithful Mother.”³¹

Every authentic Marian apparition utters warnings to mankind if her pleadings are not taken seriously. As a good Mother, Mary always wants to avert the worst, and help mankind to establish peace in order to save as many souls as possible. In January 1957, she speaks in a serious but motherly manner: “The hour grows late. My Son’s patience will not last forever. Help me hold back His anger, which is about to descend on sinful and ungrateful men. Suffering and anguish, such as never before experienced, is about to overtake mankind. It is the darkest hour. But if men will come to me, my Immaculate Heart will make it bright again with mercy which my Son will rain down through my hands. Help me save those who will not save themselves. Help me bring once again the sunshine of God’s peace upon the world. My daughter, will my children in America listen to my pleadings and

³⁰ Sister Mary Ephrem, “Booklet of messages of Our Lady of America.” 5-7.

³¹ Sister Mary Ephrem, “Booklet of messages of Our Lady of America.” 8.

console my Immaculate Heart? Will my loyal sons carry out my desires and thus help me bring the peace of Christ once again to mankind?”³²

This message stands perfectly in line with the great Marian apparition in Fatima 1917, in which Our Lady promises the Triumph of her Immaculate Heart and a period of peace to the world. The Catholic doctrine of Mary as Mediatrix of all Graces and as Co-Redemptrix is clear in this message. She speaks of “mercy which her Son will rain down through her hands” (Mediatrix of all Graces) and she requests “help to save those who will not save themselves” which is a clear remark to our co-redemptive role in salvation history but in specific to her own role as Co-Redemptrix. As in the Fatima messages one can clearly see how God has appointed Mary in bringing about Christ’s peace to the world. Because of America’s central role in world economics, politics, and in many public and social trends, the proclamation of this message of world peace is crucial to the children of America.

The message from January 1957 also lines up perfectly with the Protoevangelium in Gen 3:15 which is the basis for the dogma on Mary’s Immaculate Conception and leads to the Church’s doctrines on Mediatrix of all Graces and Co-Redemptrix. The Protoevangelium proclaims Our Lady’s Triumph: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; They will strike at your head, while you strike at their heel” (Gen3:15). God places enmity between the woman and the serpent. The Hebrew word for enmity is *'êbâ* and means absolute opposition. This absolute opposition is only possible if Mary was immaculately conceived and never even venially cooperated with the serpent. This is also the reason why “the woman” in Gen 3:15 cannot refer to Eve, as she did cooperate with the serpent. The enmity between the woman and the serpent is a parallel enmity between the offspring of the woman and the offspring of the serpent. The seed of the woman is Jesus, and the seed of the serpent is sin. Immediately after God establishes this enmity, the first thing that happens in Gen 3:15 is that the woman participates in crushing the

³² Ibid. 9-10.

head of the serpent. It follows that baptized Christians who love Mary and consecrate themselves to her also become her offspring and cooperator (co-redeemer) in crushing the serpent's head. This shows how Mary's Immaculate Conception leads to her role as Co-Redemptrix. Together with her Son and absolutely depending on Him and absolutely secondary to Him, she crushes the head of the Serpent and brings about the Triumph and Peace to the world.

In the context of Gen 3:15 one can easily understand why Our Lady of America in her message to Sister Mary Ephrem in January 1957 pleads with the children of America to help her bring about peace to the world. From a political perspective, as well as from a biblical and magisterial perspective, it makes absolute sense to call America to conversion, purification of heart and a participation in Mary's co-redeeming mission.

In a vision Our Lady wished that a medal for purity may be produced. Archbishop Leibold followed Our Lady's desire and decreed the manufacturing of this Medallion. "The one side bears the image of Our Lady of America and around it the words, 'By your Holy and Immaculate Conception, O Mary, deliver us from evil.' The Coat of Arms of the Christian Family is on the other side of the medal. The Divine Indwelling is represented by the Triangle and the Eye on the red shield of the Precious Blood, through which sanctifying grace was made possible to fallen man. The sanctification of the family through imitation of the Holy Family is represented by the Cross and the two lilies, on each of which is depicted a burning heart. The flaming sword is a symbol of Divine Love so necessary to attain union with God, while the rosary indicates a most profitable means of drawing closer to the Holy Family, through devout meditation on the various Mysteries. The scroll above bears the inscription, 'Gloria Patri et Filio et Spiritu Sancto' and the one below, 'Jesus, Maria, Joseph.' These aspirations are simply explanations of the whole theme and are also acts of praise to the Trinity and the Holy Family. This medallion is to be worn with great faith and fervent devotion to Our Lady for the grace of intense

purity of heart and the particular love of the Holy Virgin and her Divine Son.”³³

“My Immaculate Heart desires with great desire to see the kingdom of Jesus my Son established in all hearts. Now I have pleaded with my children to open their hearts to Him, but most are cold and indifferent.”³⁴

The Indwelling of the Most Holy Trinity

It is a logical consequence that if one purifies one own’s heart that God delights in descending into that heart. Scripture makes this fact clear. “Jesus answered and said to him, whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him” (Jn 14:23). “Do you not know that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy that person; for the temple of God, which you are, is holy” (1 Cor 3:16-17).

If one studies the messages of Our Lady of America one can see how Mary deeply desires that God may dwell in the hearts and souls of man. This stands in continuity with the Church’s mystical tradition on the teachings on union with God. The Church Fathers and Doctors have expounded this field as well as many Saints and Mystics. Mary wants to refresh these teachings in the minds of her children since it has the potential to renew the face of the Church and the whole world. It is a profound call to holiness of life.

Our Lady spoke again to Sister Mary Ephrem Neuzil on November 8th, 1954, saying, “It is the wish of my Son that fathers and mothers strive to imitate me and my chaste spouse in our holy life at Nazareth. We practiced the simple virtues of family life, Jesus our Son being the center of all our love and activity. The Holy Trinity dwelt with us in a manner far surpassing anything that can ever be imagined. [...] The Divine Trinity will dwell in your midst only if you are faithful in

³³ Sister Mary Ephrem, “Booklet of messages of Our Lady of America.” 23.

³⁴ Ibid. 11.

practicing the virtues of our life at Nazareth. Then, you also, my children, you also will become another paradise.”³⁵

On the days of November 22nd and 23rd, Sister Mary Ephrem experienced a corporeal apparition so vivid that she was able to describe the appearance of Our Lady in great detail. Our Lady showed herself as the Immaculate Tabernacle of the Indwelling God. This reveals the true identity of Mary, full of grace through a perfect union with God. “Then above her head appeared a scroll on which were written letters of gold the words: ‘All the glory of the King’s daughter is within.’ Though it did not appear that her lips moved, yet I heard these words quite plainly: ‘I am Our Lady of the Divine Indwelling, handmaid of Him Who dwells within.’ She seemed suffused in a soft glow of light that appeared to come from within her.”³⁶

This vision suggests that Mary wants humanity to imitate her profound union with the Holy Trinity. The journey of entering into a full union with God started at baptism and is progressed with every reception of a holy sacrament, with a good prayer-life and by practicing the virtues of the holy family. Mary shows the way of sanctification and how the world can become a place of divine peace.

In a message given on February 11th, 1958, Our Lady revealed, “My Immaculate Heart will win in the end, and the Spirit of Christ will dwell in the hearts of men.”³⁷ This sounds very much like the apparitions in Fatima (1917) and additionally explains how the prophesied period of peace is going to be realized. It is the Spirit of Christ who will dwell in the hearts of men. Humanity will experience life as being permeated by a strong eucharistic atmosphere since the great majority of people will live in union with God which will establish divine peace that is coming from within each heart. It is the divine presence within the soul that will sanctify an individual, families, societies, nations and the whole world.

³⁵ Sister Mary Ephrem, “Booklet of messages of Our Lady of America.” 5.

³⁶ Sister Mary Ephrem, “Booklet of messages of Our Lady of America.” 15.

³⁷ *Ibid.* 15.

The vision of Our Lady as the Immaculate Tabernacle of the Indwelling God is clearly an objective, external and corporeal apparition. Therefore, the Bishops commission in regard to point 4 and 5 of their statement should investigate how it is possible that a visionary's imagination and intellect could not be constitutively involved in an apparition. Did God not constitutively use the imagination and intellect of Juan Diego (Guadalupe), Lucia, Jacinta and Francisco (Fatima), and Bernadette (Lourdes)? How can someone experience a vision without one's imagination and intellect?

What is received is always received according to the capacity of the receiver. It begs the question of which criteria the Bishops commission judged Sister Neuzil's visions as not objective and external? Since when is the type of a vision constitutive for the validity of a private revelation?³⁸

Conclusion

According to Sister Neuzil, "Our Lady promised that greater miracles than those granted at Lourdes and Fatima would be granted here in America, the United States in particular, if we would do as she desires. Our Lady, moreover, often emphasized her desire that the Shrine in Washington, D.C., be made a place of special pilgrimage. She wishes to be honored there as Our Lady of America, the Immaculate Virgin."³⁹ On November 15th, 1956, Our Lady made her desire more specific. She requested that her statue be solemnly carried in procession to the Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C.⁴⁰ In this way, America shall honor her as Our Lady of America, the Immaculate Virgin, and new graces would be released to the United States, thereby blessing the rest of the world.

The Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C., already houses 80 Marian statues from all over the world: Our Lady of Antipolo (Philippines); Our Lady of Bistrica (Bosnia and Herzegovina); Our Lady of Brezje (Slovenia); Our Lady of Hungary;

³⁸ Calkins, "Some Comments on the Statement Regarding the Devotion to Our Lady of America of May 7, 2020 By Bishop Kevin C. Rhoades and Five Other Ordinaries." 18.

³⁹ Sister Mary Ephrem, "Booklet of messages of Our Lady of America." 6-7.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 9.

Our Lady of La Vang (Vietnam); Our Lady of Lebanon; Our Lady of Marizell (Austria); Our Mother of Africa, and many more.⁴¹

Adding the statue of Our Lady of America, the Immaculate Virgin, to this great collection should not be viewed as a practical or theological hurdle, because her Immaculate Conception and perpetual virginity are already established Church Dogma. The Church of America would lose nothing in following Mary's desire by placing the statue of Our Lady of America in Washington D.C.'s Shrine. The worst that could happen is nothing. The best that could happen are miracles of the soul and of purity of heart, greater than those granted at Lourdes and Fatima.

When the commander, Naaman in 2 Kings 5:1-19 was asked by the prophet Elisha to wash himself seven times in the Jordan river to be healed from leprosy, he initially refused to obey the prophet by saying: "Are not the rivers of Damascus, the Abana and the Pharpar, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be cleansed?" (2 Kings 5:12). His servants then came and reasoned, "My father, if the prophet told you to do something extraordinary, would you not do it? All the more since he told you, 'Wash, and be clean?'" (2 Kings 5:13).

Something similar could be reasoned with the Church of America: "If Our Lady told you to do something extraordinary, would you not do it? All the more since she only told you, 'Honor me in a special way as Our Lady of America, the Immaculate Virgin at the Shrine in Washington, D.C.?'"

I urgently request the Bishops of the United States of America, for the sake of peace – peace within souls, peace within families, peace in societies throughout the world, and for the sake of intense purity of hearts – to begin a re-investigation of the devotion to Our Lady of America, the Immaculate Virgin.

⁴¹ "Marian Statues," National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, accessed April 22, 2022, <https://www.nationalshrine.org/interactive-map>.