

Announcement of Cardinal Sodano

At the conclusion of the Mass of Beatification of the Fatima children by Pope John Paul II

May 13, 2000 . Fatima, Portugal

Brothers and Sisters in the Lord!

At the conclusion of this solemn celebration, I feel bound to offer to our beloved Holy Father John Paul II, on behalf of all present, heartfelt good wishes for his approaching Eightieth Birthday and to thank him for his significant pastoral ministry for the good of all God's Holy Church.

On the solemn occasion of his visit to Fatima, His Holiness has directed me to make an announcement to you. As you know, the purpose of his visit to Fatima has been to beatify the two "little shepherds". Nevertheless he also wishes his pilgrimage to be a renewed gesture of gratitude to Our Lady for her protection during these years of his papacy. This protection seems also to be linked to the so-called "third part" of the secret of Fatima.

That text contains a prophetic vision similar to those found in Sacred Scripture, which do not describe with photographic clarity the details of future events, but rather synthesize and condense against a unified background events spread out over time in a succession and a duration which are not specified. As a result, the text must be interpreted **in a symbolic key**.

The vision of Fatima concerns above all the war waged by atheist systems against the Church and Christians, and it describes the immense suffering endured by the witnesses to the faith in the last century of the second millennium. It is an interminable *Way of the Cross* led by the Popes of the twentieth century.

According to the interpretation of the "little shepherds", which was also recently confirmed by Sister Lucia, the "Bishop clothed in white" who prays for all the faithful is the Pope. As he makes his way with great effort towards the Cross amid the corpses of those who were martyred (Bishops, priests, men and women religious and many lay persons), he too falls to the ground, apparently dead, under a burst of gunfire.

After the assassination attempt of 13 May 1981, it appeared evident to His Holiness that it was "a motherly hand which guided the bullet's path", enabling the "dying Pope" to halt "at the threshold of death" (Pope