

FATIMA PILGRIMAGE MASS, SEPTEMBER 13th, 2010.

Is.66:10-14c; 2Cor.9:8-9; Mt.6:31-34.

“Do not worry....., for your heavenly Father knows all your needs” (cfr. Mt.6:34).

By way of establishing the *kingdom of God* on earth, Jesus came to call men (humankind) to faith in the God of this kingdom. Jesus’ mission on earth was to save humanity by calling it to faith in God, who is not only creator-God, who created the heavens and the earth, who called Abraham and his seed, blessed them and made them a nation, who led Israel out of bondage and led them to the land of promise etc. The God of Jesus Christ and the God of the kingdom, in whom Jesus came to call men to faith, was also a ***provident God***: *he knew the affliction of his people in Egypt, and at the proper time sent deliverance* (Ex.3:7ff.). *He went before them for forty years in the wilderness as a pillar of cloud by day and as a pillar of fire by night to provide them with food and water and to protect them* (Ex.16-17; 14:19-20). *He saw the misery and oppression of his people at the hands of the Philistines and sent them the Judges* (Judg.6:14 etc.). *Indeed, God knows people before they are formed in the womb, and even gives them names* (Jer.1:4; Is.49:1). *He has their names engraved in the palm of his hand; and his gaze is on them night and day* (Is.).

This ***provident God*** and the God of the kingdom, that Jesus came to establish, is the God who is revealed in the Scripture Readings of our worship today as *“the heavenly Father” of men (mankind) who knows all their needs* (Mt.6:32), *who is able to provide them with every blessing in abundance, so that they always have enough of everything* (2Cor.9:8), and who reveals to the whole world that *his hand is always with his servants* (Is.66:14c).

The mission of Jesus to establish the *kingdom of God* was to make men disciples and children of the kingdom of his Father, sowing in them the seed of ***faith in a heavenly Father and a provident God***.

This aspect of the mission of Jesus: belief in a ***provident God and a heavenly Father who is able to and does provide for the needs of his children***, however, did face tough challenges and resistance from his followers and audience, which Jesus illustrated clearly with the *parable of the sower*; and the source of the resistance was ***concern and worry about*** things of this world (Mt.13:22).

The *parable of the sower* mentions a category of seeds which fell among thorns, and which were choked by the thorns. Explaining what happened to this category of seeds, Jesus said: *“This is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing”* (Mt.13:22). The Gospel of Mark expands the causes of the failure of these seeds, adding *“the desire for other things”* (Mk.4:19); and the Gospel of Luke includes the *“pleasures of life”* (Lk.8:14). The *“cares and worries of life”*, then, do constitute obstacles to our acceptance of Jesus’ word of revelation of his Father and the God of the kingdom as a *provident God*. The cares and concerns of life can become veritable obstacles to our faith in God; and they can compromise badly our relationship with God, our religious life and our life of faith.

Significantly, it is not only for us: individual Christians and Christian communities, that the *“cares and concerns of life and of those things on which our lives depend”* constitute obstacles to faith in a *provident God*. They constitute veritable problems and obstacles to belief in God and his guidance

of creation and humanity for national governments and world organizations, including the United Nations.

The United Nations' Cairo Conference on Population did express great anxiety about the sustainability of human growth on the planet. It wondered, whether the world could continue to support the growth of human population at its current rate of increase, and suggested means of controlling, if not curbing (decreasing), human growth on the planet.

The Cairo Conference was, indeed, not a religious Conference; but the participants were certainly not all atheists. Nevertheless, the concerns of the Conference and their discussion did not reckon much with God and his provident care of creation, the work of his hands. The "*death of God*" thinking appears still to hold sway in our world; and, supported currently by the advances of technology, it appears or, at least, it threatens to put to flight any belief in the presence of a *provident God* in human life. The advances of science and technology are certainly in compliance with the instruction of God to man at creation to "*subdue the earth*" (Gen.1:28); and they have helped to improve upon the quality of human life and to diminish threats to the form and quality of human existence. But the pursuit of this vocation by man may not pretend to replace or render redundant the provident care of God for his creation.

Our gathering here in this place of pilgrimage to celebrate the apparition of the Blessed Virgin Mary to Lucia and her cousins with messages for the conversion, peace and survival of humanity and the world is a proof and a witness of God, who may, indeed, be a "*hidden God*" (Is.45:15), but who never abandons the work of his hands, any less than a *woman abandons her nursing child* (Is.49:15). It was God's promise, sent through the prophet Isaiah, that "*it shall be known that the hand of the Lord is with his servants*" (Is.66:14c). Through this presence of his hand with his servants, God proves himself righteous, "*scattering abroad, and giving to the poor*" (2Cor.9:9); and as we as *God's poor* and *his servants* enjoy his provident benefaction, let us strive to imitate the righteousness of God and of his kingdom, sharing his gifts to us.

May the Blessed Virgin Mary of Fatima spread out her mantle widely over us and our world, and grant that at her intercession, we may continue to live under the provident care of our God, "*for He is able to provide us with every blessing in abundance* (2Cor.9:8) !

Our Lady of Fatima, Our Lady of the holy Rosary, Pray for us and for our world!