

FIRST FATIMA CONGRESS FOR LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

From August 26-31, the First Latin American and Caribbean Fatima Congress took place at the Schönstatt Shrine in Cabo Rojo, Puerto Rico. The Regional Meeting of the World Apostolate of Fatima had a full house composed of 50 delegates from Mexico (9), Curacao (2), Argentina (1), United States of America, Hispanic Apostolate (6), United States of America (its Executive Director, 1), Spain (1), Portugal (2), Puerto Rico (28). In addition, another 150 WAF members and pastoral agents of the Church participated as congressmen and congresswomen. At the welcoming ceremony, the Apostolic Nuncio offered a Message from the Holy Father, Benedict XVI, followed by Messages from the Pontifical Council for the Laity, by a letter from its President, Stanislaw Cardinal Rylko, a message from the Bishop of Leiria-Fatima H.E. Antonio Marto, the Bishop of Mayaguez, Puerto Rico, H.E. Ulises Casiano Vargas, present at all times and the International President of the WAF, Prof. Américo Pablo López-Ortiz. The International Treasurer, Mr. Jorge Gutierrez, attended as part of the Mexican Delegation.

The Diocese of Mayaguez, Puerto Rico has proclaimed 2009 as Year of the Laity to focus on the formation of lay people and families through the New Evangelization.

A beautiful Solemn Mass of inauguration took place at the Aula Magna at the Shrine of Shöenstatt, presided by the Apostolic Nuncio and concelebrated by the Bishop of Mayaguez and priests. The homilist was Monsignor Fernando Felices, the censor of the international magazine. The choir of the Parish of Our Lady of Fatima at Mayaguez inspired the faithful.

Some of the international speakers were: Fr. Martin Sadaba, from Spain, past Chaplain of the House of Pontevedra, who offered a beautiful conference entitled “The Immaculate Heart of Mary, Soul of the Message of Fatima”; Rev. Fr. Edgardo Acosta from Puerto Rico, with the urgent topic: “The continental mission and the discipleship”; Monsignor Fernando Felices from Puerto Rico, with the educational topic: “Elements of the Fatima charisma in a program for Catholic formation”; Fr. Rodolfo Escalante from Mexico, with the very spiritual topic “The sanctification of our daily duties”; Dr. José Ortiz Valladares, from Puerto Rico, with the interesting topic “ The communications media and the New Evangelization”; and Prof. Américo Pablo López Ortiz, who offered two conferences: “The New Evangelization and the Message of Fatima” and “The Spirituality of Fatima: John Paul II and the Third Millenium”.

Four Marian rallies were celebrated:

First night, 27th of August, Magistral Conference from the Vicar General of the Diocese of Leiria-Fatima, at Aguada, Puerto Rico, at the beautiful building of the Center of Spirituality “Mary Mother of Consolation” with 1,500 participants. The topic: “The experience of God’s love in the Message of Fatima” (being the experience of God’s love in the human heart core to the New Evangelization); as well as the Message prepared for this occasion from Stanislaw Cardinal Rylko, President of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, entitled: “ The New Evangelization and the role of the apostolic movements.” The Apostolic Nuncio, H.E. Josef Wesolowski and the Diocesan Bishop, Ulises Casiano, were present and accompanied the Congress.

Second night: 28th of August, Feast of Saint Augustine, patron saint of the Diocese of Leiria-Fatima: Proclamation of the decree erecting canonically the Shrine of Our Lady of Fatima at the Diocese of Mayaguez, Puerto Rico at the Augustinian Parish of St. Rose of Lima at San German, Puerto Rico. The Bishop of Fatima sent a special message to the Bishop of Mayaguez and the Congress, read by the Vicar General of the Diocese of Leiria-Fatima, Rev. Fr. Jorge Faría Guarda. Three thousand of the faithful attended. A beautiful procession and the Via Crucis of Fatima were the highlights. The Via Crucis is unique in the nearly 100 Shrines of Fatima around the world with cascades of water coming from the Grotto of Our Lady of Fatima, sound and light coordinated by a computerized system, offering the meditation of each Station of the Cross based on the Message of Fatima and its illustration in a monumental screen with inserts for the Fatima history.

Luis Cardinal Aponte Martínez of Puerto Rico attended as well as the Bishop of Mayaguez that presided accompanied by the Bishop of Ponce, H.E. Félix Lázaro, and many priests. It was followed by a buffet and folkloric show by the “trovadores” of Puerto Rico, who delighted the audience improvising songs in honor of Our Lady of Fatima.

Third night: 29th of August, Solemn Mass at the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Purification at Mayaguez, Puerto Rico, with consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary and offering of flowers, as well as the prayers for Life and Peace, reception for the delegates and beautiful choir concert offered the best liturgical music composed in Puerto Rico for Our Lady, including the Salve Regina originated by a musician of the XIX century for this same Church of Mayaguez. A reception followed accompanied by a visit to the Museum of the Cathedral. One thousand of the faithful attended. The Bishop of Fajardo intended to concelebrate but could not arrive on time due to problems in the route.

Fourth afternoon: 30th of August, Magistral Conference by the Bishop of Leiria-Fatima, H.E Mgr. Antonio Marto, read by his Vicar General, entitled “The beauty of the Trinitarian face of God in the Message of Fatima.” Solemn Mass and Closing of the Congress at the Shrine of Our Lady of Fatima, Diocese of Ponce, where the Second Replica in the world of the Chapel of the Apparitions was built (First one is that of Washington, New Jersey, USA). The Bishop of Ponce presided, accompanied by the Bishop of Mayaguez and many priests and deacons. A beautiful procession was organized with the presentation of flags of all the Nations of Latin-America and the Caribbean with the Pilgrim Statue of Our Lady of Fatima accompanied by the Catholic Scouting Movement and our Congress participants. The closing of the Congress took place at the Second Replica of the Chapel of the Apparitions authorized by Bishop Seraphim “to serve as site for dispensing the graces of the Shrine of Fatima to pilgrims coming from Latin America and the Caribbean.” An offering of flowers was made to Mother Dominga’s tomb, a portorican nun founder of the Dominican Sisters of Our Lady of the Rosary of Fatima, a congregation of sisters of pontifical right. Mother Dominga Guzman, O. P. is now at the process of beatification. Five thousands of the faithful attended.

The prayers for Life and Peace were made to introduce people to the Worldwide Day of Prayer for Life and Peace to be held in October all over the world.

The Congress was highly covered by the media: Radio broadcasting, Catholic TV, Catholic newspapers already published a supplement of 8 pages in color. Mike LaCorte, Executive Director of the WAF-USA, filmed all the events and will edit them for EWTN.

A medical doctor attending the Congress, who was Protestant, converted to Catholicism after experiencing the role of Our Lady in salvation. The beautiful testimony was offered during one of the sessions of participation and discussion of issues. The programs of the Apostolate were discussed in groups with important suggestions and conclusions of each of the five groups.

The Congress produced very important concrete achievements:

1. The media group of volunteers will translate the international magazine to Spanish: THE MESSENGER OF THE W.A.F., as well as SOUL magazine, for free. Mike LaCorte participated in this group as well as the International President of the WAF and Editor of THE MESSENGER OF THE W.A.F.
2. The Vicar General of the Diocese of Leiria-Fatima confirmed the conviction and previous declarations of the WAF President that the Message of Pontevedra and Tuy constitute an essential part of the Message of Fatima and that both of them were approved as the complementary apparitions to those at the Cova da Iria by the Bishop of Leiria-Fatima.
3. Our brothers and sisters of the Latin American & Caribbean were so happy and highly spirited by the Congress as they expressed it verbally and in written, that they have so clear now the ways to implement the New Evangelization in the continent using the Message of Fatima as the most excellent means to achieve it. Beginning in 2010 and for the next 10 years, this will be the most important task of the Catholic Church! Seven programs of the WAF must be implemented as to fulfill our mission in Latin America and the Caribbean.

In Christ and Mary Queen, I want to give thanks to the Good Lord, Our Mother Mary and the brothers and sisters who shared so much during these days of spiritual retreat and apostolic endeavour that will live forever in Christ's heart. A memory book with all the works of the Congress will be published in the next four months and will be available to all. Grace and Mercy!

In Christ and Mary Queen,
Prof. Americo Pablo Lopez Ortiz
International President WAF