
May 13 at the Shrine of Our Lady of Fatima with no pilgrims. Fr. Cabecinhas (rector): "Pilgrimage occurs not only on foot, but also with mind and soul"

For the first time in its history, the Shrine of Our Lady of Fatima celebrated May 13 with no pilgrims. Religious services are held in an enclosed esplanade in accordance with health regulations established by the Government prohibiting attendance by the faithful. This was a very difficult decision, said the Rector, Father **Carlos Manuel Pedrosa Cabecinhas**, "taken with a strong sense of pastoral responsibility in virtue of the health crisis that hit Portugal and the rest of the world." **How does the present situation affect the feast of Our Lady of Fatima?** As Christians we are called to discern the signs of the times, and the present moment requires us to interpret the faith through the lenses of a greater good that is everyone's health. *Although physically separated, we are all here spiritually, united as Church with Mary, in an intense way, with our hearts full of faith.* In fact, we have decided to follow the traditional program with the Rosary prayer, the procession of candles, the International Mass, the celebration for the sick and the Farewell procession, presided over by Cardinal António Augusto dos Santos Marto, Bishop of the Diocese of Leiria-Fatima. The enclosure of the Shrine is empty but not deserted. Pilgrims are absent but present more than ever in all the celebrations.



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It's a message of hope, affirming that evil will not have the last word, that however mighty darkness and adversity may be, God and Our Lady, who is Mother, will never abandon us. This is a great comfort to humanity direly tested by the pandemic. It is also a message of salvation, as when Our Lady of the Rosary appeared before the three Little Shepherds, offering them the Light of God. In the apparition of June 1917, Mary told Lucia that her Immaculate Heart would be her sanctuary and the path that would lead her to God. This is a certainty that we have today and forever. How did the Shrine experience the lockdown period? It was a sad time since we could not welcome the pilgrims that are the Shrine's major raison d'être. Thousands of people come here to find consolation and peace. In order to make up for this inconvenience for the month of May, so important for us, we decided to offer a spiritual itinerary from the 4th to the 13th, whereby the faithful were invited to light a candle daily on the windowsills of their homes, a symbol of the Light that is Fatima, for each one of us

and for the whole of humankind.

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that is, by undertaking an inner pilgrimage in search of truth, regeneration and care, in the encounter with ourselves and with Our Queen of Heaven, proceeding onward with the power of hope. **How did the pilgrims react to this situation?** In Portugal, congregation Masses were suspended on March 13th. The Shrine promptly responded to the lockdown by initiating a broadcast programme, transmitted via various media channels, from the traditional ones to social networks, with four daily services, from Monday to Sunday, to bring Fatima to the homes of the faithful who could no longer be physically present at Cova da Iria, nor participate in its liturgies. The response was very positive and most of all supportive. The pilgrims of Fatima displayed extraordinary civic and spiritual maturity, welcoming all our proposals for reflection and prayer. Such a great participation from across the world, albeit at a distance, has been an important encouragement for us. **The Shrine is due to resume activity in the coming days....** *We are looking forward to that moment with great optimism and above all with a deep hope that the large multitudes of pilgrims who witnessed this site as the Altar of the World will return to Fatima.* As of Monday, May 18, the places of worship will be again accessible for prayer, albeit subject to all due restrictions and measures to limit the spread of the virus. Celebrations with the presence of the faithful will resume at the end of the Pentecost week. This month we will not be permitted to peregrinate - concludes Father Cabecinhas quoting the words of Cardinal Marto in the message addressed to the diocese of Fatima - but we will be able to do so at another time as a sign of gratitude: "In the time ahead prayer must represent our greatest challenge: for us, for the direct and indirect victims of the pandemic, for healthcare workers, for the dead and their grieving families, for politicians, that they may take the best decisions concerning our lives."

Daria Arduini