

Reflection from Fr. Colm on the feast of Our Lady of Fatima

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Hi everybody hope you're okay. Today we're celebrating the feast of Our Lady of Fatima, a feast in which those what's called apocalyptic visions were given to three young shepherds Lúcia Santos, and her cousins Jacinta and Francisco Marto. And the feast of course won't be celebrated in its usual form with thousands of pilgrims descending on this small Portuguese town however it can take comfort in the knowledge that it has one of the lowest death rates in the world from COVID-19.

In fact, it seems that Portugal had a very clear direction from the start as to how they were going to cope even despite an elderly population and an underfunded health system. I was reading recently that Ricardo Baptista Leite, whose a member of the PSD that's the Social Democrat opposition party he's also a physician and he specialises in infectious diseases so you get an impression this man might know what he's talking about.

He said *"The Portuguese people understood very clearly that if we want to survive this [meaning COVID] we would have to do even more than others in crushing the curve, [as he calls it] in prolonging and pushing forward the number of new cases,"* and then he said, which I found really interesting, *"The country has shown tremendous solidarity."*

Portugal, we know shut down schools when there were just 244 cases of COVID-19 in the country whereas Spain had over 2000 infections before closing their schools. Some explanations for Portugal's relative success ranging from sheer good luck have also included cleaner air to decades of anti-TB vaccinations and even as high as the PM Our Lady of Fatima has been mentioned. Now whether you believe that or not that's up to yourself however it is clear statement from somebody in a very important position.

Another reason for recognising Portugal's ability to cope has been the extraordinary fact that Portugal welcomed immigrants and refugees into the fold *during* the crisis. Why? So that they too could receive any health care necessary for them and were given temporary permits to come in and stay for that purpose. Now that's according to CNN.

And so today we're celebrating the feast of Our Lady of Fatima. A feast that has always been hugely important in, certainly in my own family growing up, but certainly in the parish here also over the years. That ideal of solidarity was pivotal in coping with COVID in Portugal. Solidarity I think is something that we're really going to need at the moment.

I think particularly of our schools, I think particularly of our Headteachers and their staff in the enormous challenge ahead for them almost I feel impossible challenge of shepherding social distancing from infants and young adults, so our prayers are with them at this time and on this day and the inseparability of the vine from the branches in today's Gospel, was and is and please God always will be the hallmark of our own Catholic faith and solidarity. Good morning everyone.