The Cathedral of St. John the Baptist, Savannah, GA
December 2010
Our Lady of Fatima, Model and Witness
By Gretchen K. Reese

On Saturday, October 9, about 75 Catholics from various parishes in Savannah, and several members of the Legion of Mary from Hinesville, Georgia, gathered at the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist to honor Our Lady of Fatima, and to commemorate the Miracle of the Sun, which occurred 93 years ago. A procession was held, followed by the Rosary and public crowning of Our Lady. If you were not present, maybe you asked yourself why Catholics should participate in something like that, such a public spectacle...Isn't private prayer better?

The Miracle of Fatima happened in Portugal on October 13, 1917. The Miracle of the Sun was a public act. Many thousands of people witnessed this extraordinary work of Our Lady, and because of their experience, many were converted. Through her example, Mary showed us the value of public witness and public acts of faith. Such acts lead to conversions.

Our Lord sent the Apostles forth to teach all nations. After Pentecost, they spoke openly in synagogues and in forums. Their actions were public acts of faith and many were converted because of their witness.

Common sense tells us we cannot do what Mary did at Fatima nor can we go out to teach all nations as the Apostles did either. But didn’t Jesus also send each of us forth as ambassadors for the Faith? Doesn’t Jesus expect each of us to go out into the world and live our faith every day, as witnesses of God’s love for all mankind? God does not desire that men shall perish. He wishes that all might be saved.

Today, according to research, less than 30% of Catholics regularly attend Sunday Mass in America. Many Catholics have fallen away from the Faith. Many have been seduced by the lure of secularism, and the idea that each one must only please himself. There is no longer any stigma to missing Mass or eating meat on Friday. Why go to church at all, asks our culture? Because we are aware our culture is hostile to religious expression, and discourages it, how shall our fallen away Catholic brothers and sisters return to the Faith without our active help? Who will call them home? Who will speak up and reach out to them by their actions and witness if we ourselves fail to act when the opportunity presents itself?

Since we cannot perform miracles or travel the world preaching the Gospel, we must be witnesses in other ways. We can live a life that reflects our faith, practicing generosity by reaching out to the poor, the sick and the elderly. We can share our faith with a coworker or take someone to Mass. In that way we will be helping to build up the family of faith.
Consistent with the Advent season, a time of expectant waiting and preparation for the celebration of the Nativity of Jesus at Christmas, we will soon launch the Catholics Come Home initiative in our diocese. The program is aimed at inviting our missing brothers and sisters, back to the Church. Inspiring and compassionate TV commercials will be aired on all major TV networks in South Georgia, in order to inspire, educate and evangelize inactive Catholics and others, to live a deeper faith in Jesus Christ.

Over the past several weeks, we have been preparing our parishioners for their role in building up our family of faith. The key elements of this evangelization initiative are the genuine invitation, the warm welcome and the ongoing pastoral and Catholic accompaniment at the parish level. The television commercials, “an invitation,” will be the most visible component of the initiative’s three components. The Catholics Come Home campaign also includes “the welcome,” in which parishes greet people who return to the faith. Finally, “the accompaniment” encourages all Catholics to strengthen their knowledge of the faith, observe the sacraments, and participate in the parish life.

To date, CCH campaigns have aired in twelve dioceses from Providence to Sacramento, Chicago to Seattle, helping to increase Mass attendance an average of nearly 11%, and welcoming a total of 200,000 inactive Catholics and converts home since inception. Now, Catholics Come Home is inviting other families back to the Catholic faith in the Dioceses of Savannah and Atlanta plus 13 additional dioceses, including Boston, Worcester, Portland, Maine, Charlotte, and many other dioceses and archdioceses.

As faithful followers of Christ, we all have a responsibility to encourage our fellow brothers and sisters to return home to the Church, the mystical body of Christ, all its members being guided and directed by Christ as the head. However, as a Catholic family, we have been failing to maintain and build our family of faith as:

• 72 percent of Catholics have not tried to win a convert to Christ.
• For every four Protestants, there is one convert. For Catholics, the numbers were 250 to one.

There are a couple of things that we all can do to make this campaign a success here in the cathedral parish. First of all, it is important that each of us help create a welcoming atmosphere in our parish.

When Monsignor O’Neill came here 14 years ago, he hoped the cathedral parish would become a warm and welcoming community someday. Although we have come a long way since then, we still have a way to go until our parishioners are genuinely and evangelically welcoming to all who worship here with us. You are among the first people a returning Catholic is likely to encounter at the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist.

First impressions can be enormously important. You are all God’s public relations people, representing the church to every parishioner and visitor. A “good morning” with a smile or even moving over in your pew to make room for someone, can make a tremendous difference in making a member or a visitor feel welcome.

I would also ask that you spread the word about Catholics Come Home to friends & family. We all know a family member or friend who does not attend Mass regularly. It does not matter how long they have been away from the practice of their faith, we want to encourage them to come home. You recently received a brochure that describes the intent of the campaign. I hope that you will give it to someone who has been away from his or her Catholic faith for a while.

A family member or friend may ask about the campaign, so have a gentle talk about coming back. Encourage them to attend even just one Mass. When people who returned were asked why they did, nearly 90% said, “Because someone invited me.”

It is important for us to reach out to those who have been away from the church for a while, assure them that God has missed them and there is a place for them here at the cathedral where they will feel embraced, supported and fulfilled.

By enthusiastically participating, you will be contributing significantly to building up our family of faith. Please help us spread the good news about Christ’s Church to our families, friends and neighbors.
Ten years ago, Jerry Hogan and Otto Aliffi led a small committee into the unknown territory of the first Cathedral Heritage Ball. Aimed at preserving this magnificent landmark, almost $50,000 was raised as a down payment on establishing a one million dollar Cathedral Endowment Fund, to preserve the architectural soundness, integrity and beauty of the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist as a symbol of our faith for future generations.

This year, the Tenth Annual Cathedral Heritage Ball was held on Saturday, November 20, 2010 at the Hilton Savannah DeSoto Hotel. The theme for the black-tie affair was “Yesterday, Today, & Tomorrow” signifying the ten year history and the future of the Ball. Over 350 attendees and volunteers started arriving at 6:30 PM to begin bidding on the many silent auction items, which included art, jewelry, wine, health & beauty packages, restaurant gift certificates and hotels stays, to name a few. The exciting evening also included a 50/50 Raffle, and a Live Auction.

Bishop Boland, also serving as Honorary Chair for this year’s event, expressed his gratitude to all the attendees whose presence was testimony to their support of our beautiful and historic church as well as to the committee members who worked so hard to bring this event to fruition. Chairperson Judy Farabaugh was very appreciative of the outpouring of financial support to maintain this extraordinary Ecclesiastical Landmark. “Thank you for supporting the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist by attending tonight. Your presence will guarantee future generations the opportunity to visit Savannah’s most magnificent church.” Judy recognized not only
this year’s Ball Committee members present, but also those present who had worked on a committee in previous years. Monsignor O’Neill presented Judy with an official, evidently used, Fireman’s hat symbolizing the “many fires” a Chair sometimes has to put out in preparation for such an event. Tom Barton of the Savannah Morning News conducted the live auction. Attendees bid on items such as a dinner at Bishop Boland’s house for 12 people, a week’s stay at the Boland townhouse in Kinsale, Ireland, a Tybee Island Getaway, a “Celebrate Savannah Package” from the First City Club, a cocktail party for 40-60 at “Broughton and Bull” and a hand crafted model of an Irish Immigrant Ship, which were auctioned off to benefit the Cathedral Endowment Fund. “Although the figures have not yet been finalized, this year’s ball is expected to be successful,” according to Judy. Following dinner, attendees cut a rug to the rhythmic sounds of Uplifter Music. Even when the orchestra played its last song, guests were still begging for more and received an encore from the orchestra. It was a fun filled evening that benefited a good cause. The entire Cathedral Heritage Ball Committee expresses their deepest appreciation for the support they have received this year. Mark your calendars now for next year’s Ball, which will be held on November 19, 2011.
Frank Baker (left) and Peter Paolucci were among this year’s 73 recipients of the Bishop Francis X. Gartland Service Awards. Nominated by their pastors, the awards are presented each year by Bishop Boland on the Solemnity of Christ the King in the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist, to individuals in recognition of distinguished service to Church community and the Diocese of Savannah over a period of years in the tradition of our first Bishop, Francis X. Gartland. Congratulations to Frank and Peter on this well deserved award and thank them for many years of volunteer service to the Cathedral.

The Knights of Columbus Council 631 Ladies Auxiliary are providing assistance to the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist outreach work with the Savannah Care Center after learning about the needs for food and clothing for newborns. “Many of the members of the Ladies Auxiliary attend the Cathedral parish and it was determined that by joining forces they could work together for the common good of newborns in need,” said Jackie Ogden, President, Council 631 Ladies Auxiliary. In addition, the Ladies Auxiliary of Council 631, have made requests to local area businesses, who might be able to provide diapers, clothing and formula for infants and their families in crisis. The Ladies Auxiliary is delighted to work in collaboration with Deborah Wade and the Christian Service Committee representing the Cathedral parish to document our contributions that will provide the match each month. In addition, the Ladies Auxiliary has requested financial assistance from the Knights of Columbus Council 631 members to help throughout 2010-2011 with this project. Members have visited and toured the Savannah Care facility and will continue to share resources and contacts that may be helpful to the organization’s mission. “We are very fortunate to have these donations to be able to assist and put a smile on a new young mother,” said Deborah Wade.
Priests Feted at Appreciation Supper

Once again, the Cathedral Parish marked Priesthood Sunday by coming together as a faith community to “Say Thank You to Our Priests” and honor these good men who are so important in our lives. Almost 100 parishioners attended the October Covered Dish Supper to acknowledge the great debt we owe to Bishop Boland, Monsignor O’Neill, Fr. Van Alstine, Fr. Firmin, and Brother Robert Sokolowski, for faithfully serving our needs all these years and assure them of our loving care and gratitude for their presence in our midst. A good time was had by all.
Papal Thoughts on Advent

In recent years, Pope Benedict XVI has offered several perspectives on the Season of Advent as follows:

“Advent is a season of hope. Every year this basic spiritual attitude is reawakened in the hearts of Christians, who while they prepare to celebrate the great Feast of Christ the Savior’s Birth, revive the expectations of his glorious second coming at the end of time. It is a favorable time for the rediscovery of a hope that is not vague and deceptive but is certain and reliable, because it is anchored in Christ, God made man, the rock of our salvation. During Advent, the liturgy frequently repeats and assures us, that God “comes”: he comes to be with us in every situation of ours, he comes to dwell among us, to live with us and within us; he comes to fill the gaps that divide and separate us; he comes to reconcile us with him and with one another. Finally, he comes into human history to knock at the door of every man and every woman of good will, to bring to individuals, families and peoples the gifts of brotherhood, harmony and peace. We might say that Advent is the season in which Christians must rekindle in their hearts the hope that they will be able with God’s help to renew the world.”

In this season of hope, as faithful believers in Christ, Cathedral parishioners are being asked to reach out to others who may have fallen away from the practice of their faith and invite them to return and celebrate the Christmas miracle with us. I hope that with your encouragement, the approaching Nativity of Jesus will fill their hearts with joy, serenity and peace and inspire them to come home to Christ.