



We live in an age of enormous spiritual thirst. While technology advances at a breathtaking pace and access to information has never been greater, millions of people experience a profound inner emptiness. In this context, alleged apparitions, messages from Heaven, prophecies, visionaries, extraordinary promises, chains of prayer with supposed supernatural guarantees, and all kinds of phenomena claiming to come directly from God, the Blessed Virgin Mary, or the saints continue to multiply.

The Internet and social media have amplified this phenomenon to unimaginable levels. Every day, new “urgent messages,” announcements of the end of the world, secret revelations, or promises guaranteeing extraordinary favors to anyone who performs certain practices appear online. Many Catholics, moved by sincere faith, feel confused: how can one distinguish an authentic grace from manipulation? Where does true devotion end and superstition begin? Is a Catholic obliged to believe in approved apparitions? What place do private revelations occupy within the Catholic faith?

These questions are far from secondary. They concern something essential: the purity of our relationship with God.

The Church, as Mother and Teacher, has reflected on this issue for centuries and offers sound, profoundly theological, and remarkably relevant criteria. These principles enable us to walk safely, avoiding both rationalistic skepticism and naïve credulity.

A Human Need: God Still Speaks, but He Has Already Said Everything in Christ

From the very beginning of Salvation History, God has spoken to humanity.

He spoke through the patriarchs.

He spoke through Moses.

He spoke through the prophets.

Yet all of this revelation reached its culmination in one Person.



Christ.

The Letter to the Hebrews begins with a magnificent declaration:

*“In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son.”
(Hebrews 1:1-2)*

Here we find the first fundamental principle.

Jesus Christ is not merely another messenger.

He is the definitive Word of the Father.

With Him, Public Revelation comes to an end.

Everything necessary for salvation has already been revealed.

Nothing can be added.

Nothing can be corrected.

Nothing can replace it.

This principle is absolutely essential for understanding the role of private revelations.

What Exactly Is a Private Revelation?

Theology carefully distinguishes between two kinds of revelation.

Public Revelation

This is the revelation contained in:



- Sacred Scripture
- Apostolic Tradition

Safeguarded and authentically interpreted by the Magisterium.

It was definitively closed with the death of the last Apostle.

There will be no other.

There can be no “new Gospel.”

No “fifth evangelist” will appear.

No future message will complete Christianity.

For Christ is absolute fullness.

Private Revelations

These are extraordinary interventions that God may grant to help people live the Gospel more faithfully in particular periods of history.

They do not belong to the Deposit of Faith.

They do not complete Revelation.

They do not add new dogmas.

They do not modify doctrine.

They do not establish new sacraments.

Their sole purpose is to remind the faithful more forcefully of truths that have already been revealed.

For this reason, even when a private revelation is approved by the Church, no Catholic is obliged to believe in it with divine and Catholic faith.



This distinction often surprises many believers.

For example, a Catholic is obliged to believe in the Resurrection of Christ.

However, he is not obliged to believe in the apparitions of Lourdes or Fatima, even though they are fully compatible with the faith and worthy of human belief grounded in prudence.

The Constant Danger: When Devotion Becomes Superstition

Superstition does not simply consist in believing too much.

It consists in believing wrongly.

Saint Thomas Aquinas devotes profound reflection to this issue in the *Summa Theologiae* (II-II, qq. 92-96), where he explains that superstition is a vice opposed to the virtue of religion.

It is especially dangerous because it appears to be religion while actually distorting it.

Superstition arises when we attribute supernatural efficacy to acts, objects, or formulas in an automatic way, as though God were obliged to act.

For example:

- believing that a scapular saves without conversion;
- treating a blessed medal as a lucky charm;
- considering certain prayers to be “magic formulas”;
- placing greater trust in an alleged prophecy than in the Gospel;
- living obsessed with apocalyptic messages.

In all these cases, Christ ceases to be the center, and the object, message, or extraordinary phenomenon takes His place.

Faith is transformed into a kind of religious magic.



The Supreme Criterion: The Deposit of Faith

Every private revelation must be judged in the light of the Deposit of Faith.

Never the other way around.

This principle is absolutely non-negotiable.

We do not interpret the Gospel according to an apparition.

We interpret every alleged apparition according to the Gospel.

If a supposed message contradicts:

- Scripture,
- Tradition,
- the Catechism,
- the dogmas,
- the liturgy,
- Catholic morality,

then it simply cannot come from God.

Even if the visionary appears holy.

Even if conversions occur.

Even if extraordinary phenomena accompany it.

Even if millions of people believe it.

God never contradicts Himself.



The Sacraments Must Never Be Relegated to the Background

This is perhaps one of the most important pastoral criteria.

Whenever an alleged revelation leads the faithful to:

- abandon their parish,
- distrust all priests,
- neglect Confession,
- minimize the importance of the Eucharist,
- become concerned only with receiving new messages,

that spirituality has already begun to go astray.

Every authentic grace always leads to the sacraments.

It never replaces them.

The Blessed Virgin Mary will never draw souls to herself by leading them away from Christ.

She will never ask for a spirituality independent of the Church.

She will never replace the Holy Mass with private messages.

Saint Thomas and the Common Good: A Key to Discernment

Although it may seem like a different subject, Saint Thomas Aquinas' teaching on the common good provides a surprisingly useful criterion for discerning private revelations.

For the Angelic Doctor, every truly good action contributes to the common good, because God does not save isolated individuals but gathers together a people—the Church—as the



Mystical Body of Christ.

A spirituality focused exclusively on one's personal salvation, obtaining individual favors, or accumulating "secret" spiritual knowledge risks distorting Christian life. Whenever an alleged revelation fosters elitism—"only this small group knows the truth," "only those who follow these messages will be saved"—it breaks ecclesial communion and encourages a sectarian mentality.

The authentic Christian seeks personal holiness precisely in order to serve God and others more faithfully. Grace does not imprison us within ourselves; it opens us to our neighbor. True devotion strengthens the family, the parish, the community, and society itself. Superstition, on the other hand, often nourishes fear, suspicion, and isolation.

The Legal Positivism and the Forgetting of the Divine Order: A Thomistic Application

At first glance, speaking about private revelations and the philosophy of law may seem like an unusual combination. Yet both subjects are united by the same fundamental principle: truth does not depend upon human will.

Saint Thomas teaches that human law derives its legitimacy from the natural law and, ultimately, from God's eternal law. A law that seriously contradicts the moral order ceases to be fully just, even if it has been enacted according to the proper legal procedures.

Modern legal positivism frequently maintains that a law is valid simply because it has been promulgated by the competent authority, regardless of its moral content. This perspective facilitates the approval of laws that violate the dignity of human life, the family, or religious freedom.

Something similar can happen in the spiritual realm when a person grants absolute authority to an alleged private message simply because it is emotionally moving, widely shared on the Internet, or promoted by someone who appears convincing. In both cases, an objective criterion is replaced by one based solely on subjectivity or human will.

The Church reminds us that truth has an objective foundation: the Revelation entrusted to the Apostles, authentically interpreted by the Magisterium and lived through Sacred Tradition. Just as an unjust law does not become good simply because it has been voted into existence, an alleged revelation does not become true merely because it has millions of



followers.

The Signs the Church Examines

When the Church investigates an alleged apparition, she is not seeking sensationalism.

She carefully examines numerous aspects.

Among them are:

Doctrinal Conformity

Nothing may contradict the Gospel.

Nothing may correct the Magisterium.

Nothing may alter Catholic morality.

The Psychological Health of the Visionary

The Church carefully investigates the visionary's emotional stability, sincerity, and human balance.

Not because holiness depends upon these qualities.

But because God respects human nature.

Spiritual Fruits

Jesus taught:



| *“You will know them by their fruits.” (Matthew 7:16)*

Does it produce conversions?

Does it deepen sacramental life?

Does it foster greater humility?

Does charity grow?

Does obedience to the Church become stronger?

These fruits are far more important than any extraordinary phenomenon.

Humility

This is perhaps the clearest sign of all.

Authentic saints never seek prominence.

They accept the decisions of the Church.

They obey even when they do not fully understand.

False mysticism, on the other hand, usually rejects all correction.

The Modern Fascination with the Extraordinary

We live in a paradoxical age.

Many people consider Christ's Resurrection impossible...



...yet they readily believe any viral video about alleged miracles.

The Gospel is rejected.

Yet hundreds of anonymous messages spread across social media are accepted without examination.

There is a genuine “inflation of private revelations.”

And the more spectacular a message appears, the faster it is shared.

This reveals a permanent temptation of the human heart:

We prefer the extraordinary to everyday holiness.

Yet God most often acts precisely in ordinary ways.

In a well-made confession.

In a fervent Holy Communion.

In silent prayer.

In a life of charity.

The Danger of Automatic Promises

One of the greatest pastoral dangers consists in absolutizing certain promises attributed to particular devotions.

It is true that the Church recognizes many promises associated with approved devotional practices. However, these promises must always be understood within the context of the whole Christian life. God has not established automatic mechanisms of salvation.

There is no prayer that dispenses with conversion.

There is no devotion that makes perseverance unnecessary.



There is no blessed object that replaces sanctifying grace.

Spiritual promises always presuppose a life of faith, hope, and charity. To separate them from this reality is to transform them into superstition.

Discernment Requires Patience

The Church is never in a hurry.

Sometimes decades pass before she reaches a judgment.

Why?

Because truth does not fear time.

Falsehood usually requires immediate publicity.

Truth endures.

Prudence is a profoundly Christian virtue.

It is not a lack of faith.

It is wisdom.

Mary Always Leads to Jesus

There is one especially beautiful criterion.

Every authentic apparition does exactly what Mary did at Cana:

| *“Do whatever He tells you.” (John 2:5)*



She never takes Christ's place.

She never overshadows the Gospel.

She never creates a parallel path.

She always leads souls toward:

- the Eucharist;
- frequent Confession;
- prayer;
- penance;
- conversion;
- obedience to the Church;
- charity.

If a phenomenon produces the opposite effect, it is wise to maintain a prudent distance.

How to Live an Authentic Devotion in the Twenty-First Century

In a culture marked by immediacy, spectacle, and the constant search for novelty, Christians are called to cultivate a mature faith. This means embracing the devotions approved by the Church without absolutizing them; gratefully accepting any extraordinary gifts that God may grant without making them the center of one's spiritual life.

Authentic piety is recognized by its deep roots in the liturgy, in prayerful reading of Sacred Scripture, in the frequent reception of the sacraments, in sound doctrinal formation, and in the practice of charity. A private revelation, even when deemed worthy of belief, has meaning only insofar as it helps us live these fundamental realities more intensely.

Christian prudence does not extinguish the Holy Spirit; rather, it prevents us from confusing God's voice with our own emotions, desires, or fears. Believers do not need to pursue extraordinary experiences continually, because they already possess the greatest treasure imaginable: Christ truly present in the Eucharist, the Word of God handed down through the



Church, and the grace that flows from the sacraments.

Conclusion: The Security of Walking upon Solid Rock

The Christian does not live on heavenly rumors but on the certainty of God's definitive Revelation in Jesus Christ. Private revelations may be a providential help for certain individuals or particular periods of history, but they never constitute the foundation of faith. That foundation is Christ Himself, entrusted to the Church through the Deposit of Faith.

For this reason, discernment is born neither of fear nor of contempt for the supernatural, but of love for the truth. Saint Thomas Aquinas reminds us that reason enlightened by faith is an indispensable ally in recognizing what is good and rejecting error; and the Church, assisted by the Holy Spirit, provides the secure criteria for walking this path.

In an age overflowing with messages, prophecies, and extraordinary promises, the best antidote to superstition remains what it has always been: an intense sacramental life, solid doctrinal formation, persevering prayer, and concrete charity. Whoever remains united to Christ in His Church has no need to seek spiritual novelties constantly, because he has already received the greatest gift God could ever grant the world: His own Son, "the same yesterday and today and forever" (cf. Hebrews 13:8).

True devotion neither enslaves nor nourishes fear; it leads to the freedom of the children of God. It does not replace faith but strengthens it. It does not create parallel paths but always leads to the same destination: Jesus Christ, the one Savior of the world, present in His Church until the end of time. There, upon the solid rock of the Gospel, the Magisterium, and the sacraments, the believer finds a security that no private revelation can ever surpass.