

# 1951- HOLY YEAR CLOSES

By John M. Haffert

I had the chance to speak to each of the five Cardinals who were going to Fatima. To each, mentioning that I was an American journalist seeking a statement for publication, I asked the same question:

"What does Your Eminence feel to be the profound reason why the Holy Father chose to close the Holy Year at Fatima?"

All the Cardinals, with slight variation of phrasing, said that the Holy Father wished to emphasize the Fatima message, which is the message of prayer and penance.

On the way to Fatima from Lisbon, we traveled with newsmen from all parts of the world.

## Arrival at Fatima

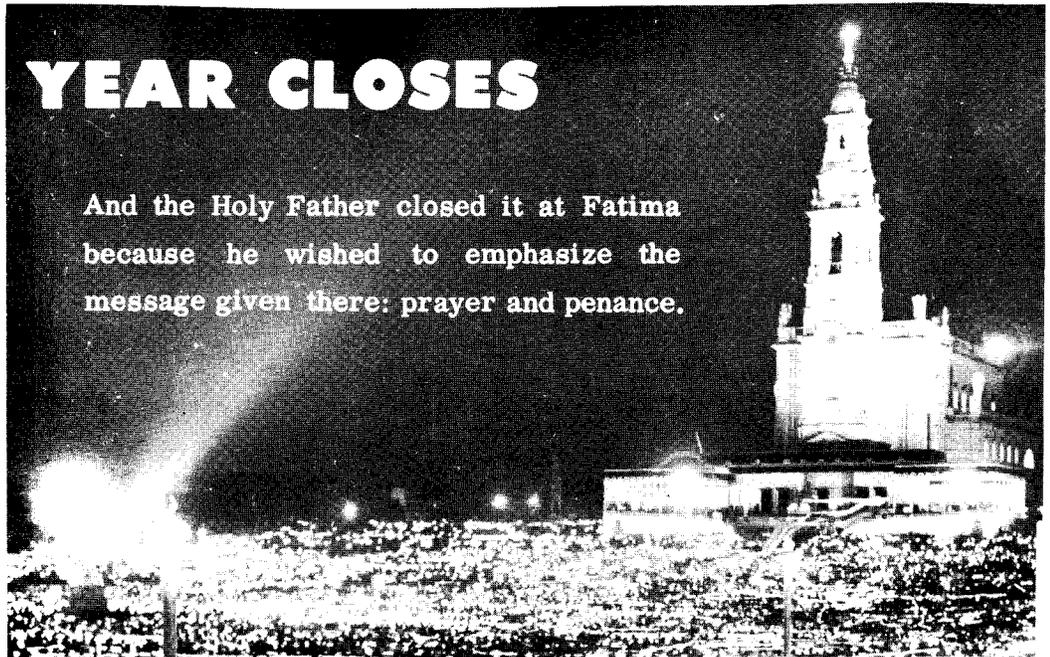
When we arrived at Fatima our breath was simply taken away by the crowd which had already gathered! As darkness fell, candles were lighted throughout the Cova and the crowd seemed to grow and grow. By ten o'clock, when the statue was taken out of the Chapel of the Apparitions for the procession, the Cova da Iria . . . to quote the words of *AS NOVIDADES* . . . was a "sea of flame."

*AS NOVIDADES* said: "It was unquestionably *one of the most immense aggregations of people in all history.*"

## Russians Say Mass

At 7:00 A.M., the three-hour-long Pontifical High Mass, celebrated by a Russian Bishop, assisted by 17 members of the Collegium Russicum, from Rome, began the climax of the Holy Year. The Russian Bishop . . . the Bishop of Briansk . . . was a prisoner in Russia for 12 years . . . five in Russia, and seven in a concentration camp in central Asia. He escaped from Rus-

And the Holy Father closed it at Fatima because he wished to emphasize the message given there: prayer and penance.



sia during the war, and joined the union of the Catholic Church.

As the Mass progressed, the Bishop of Coimbra, Portugal, preached on the subject: "Fatima and the Conversion of Russia." Afterwards we were invited to talk on the same subject for five minutes in English. This was not a scheduled part of the program . . . and was the only English spoken in the Cova that day.

## "On This Spot . . ."

I cannot say what feeling moved me as I found myself there, in front of the altar as the Bishop of Briansk was finishing his Mass, facing a million people on the very anniversary of the Miracle of the Sun . . . within two hours of the closing of the Holy Year by the Cardinal Legate and the Holy Father's address, (by radio, from Rome).

Ordinarily, to talk for five minutes would have been simple, but I found that only a few sentences expressed all that was in my heart . . . and probably in the hearts of most:

"We are witnessing the closing of a Pontifical Mass . . . celebrated by a Russian Bishop who was imprisoned by the Reds for twelve years and who, after his escape, joined the union of Catholicism. Let us join with him and with the members of the Pontifical Russian College of

Rome, in this Holy Mass, in prayer for the Conversion of Russia and the return of all people to the union of Catholicism. On this spot, thirty-four years ago, the Blessed Virgin promised the Conversion of Russia and world peace. With all our hearts . . . let us pray that it will come soon."

## Close of Holy Year

After the Russian Mass, at 10:00, the vast crowd in the Cova parted to permit passage of the procession of the Bishops and Cardinals, accompanying the statue of Our Lady from the chapel of the Apparitions. The Pontifical Mass by the Cardinal Legate followed, his address (in French and Italian), the blessing of the sick, and then that long-expected moment, when a great hush fell on all that vast crowd and all stood . . . Cardinals, Bishops, priests and people . . . as the rich voice of Pope Pius XII sounded through the Cova on the loud speaker as though His Holiness were actually there. Through the entire address, there was hardly a sound from the entire throng. Afterwards, there was a climactical pandemonium of joy. In the name of the Pope, Cardinal Tedeschini gave the closing Solemn Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.