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Worshippers hold candles May 12, 2022, at the Marian shrine of Fatima in central Portugal. Thousands of pilgrims arrived at the shrine to attend the 105th anniversary of the first apparition of Mary to three shepherd children May 13. (OSV News/Pedro Nunes, Reuters)



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Vatican City — July 16, 2024
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Applying its new norms intended to quicken rulings on alleged supernatural phenomena, the Vatican's doctrinal office has permitted devotion associated with alleged Marian apparitions in southern Italy.

The Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith issued a "nihil obstat" decree to the Shrine of Our Lady of the Rock in Calabria, Italy, effectively ruling that devotion at the shrine may continue but not validating the supernatural status of the apparitions associated with it.

The devotion traces back to 1968 when a man claimed to have seen Mary repeatedly appear to him out of a light that emanated from a large rock. A chapel was built on the site of the alleged apparitions which was later expanded into a larger shrine.

In a letter issuing the ruling and released by the dicastery July 16, Cardinal Víctor Manuel Fernández, wrote that the pilgrims who travel to the shrine "are a powerful sign of faith" in "the secularized world in which we live, in which many people let their existence pass without any link to the transcendent."

The letter explained that in 2008, the bishop of Locri-Gerace, where the shrine is located, had signed a decree acknowledging the site as a place of worship but had left judgment on the validity of the apparitions to the Vatican.

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In the years since, "no critical or risky elements" associated with the apparitions developed, but rather there have been "signs of grace and spiritual conversion," Fernández wrote in his letter. Applying the dicastery's norms for discerning alleged supernatural phenomena released in May, the cardinal issued the positive ruling "without making any judgment as to whether or not the events related to the spiritual experience in question were supernatural."

The dicastery's new norms make the "nihil obstat" the most positive ruling it issues on alleged supernatural phenomena, declaring that devotion associated with a phenomenon is licit without issuing judgment on the validity of the phenomenon itself.

In his letter, Fernández asked the bishop of Locri-Gerace to ensure that the Vatican's ruling "not be understood as an endorsement of the supernatural character of the phenomenon."

The ruling also "does not imply any judgment, positive or negative, on the lives of the persons involved in this case" and any further messages from them will only be publicized after consideration from the bishop, the cardinal specified.

He added that correct veneration of Mary must be manifested "in a clear Christological perspective" and avoid assigning her with improper titles.