

Part II

The Apparitions of Our Lady at Fatima

10.

Apparition of May 13, 1917

The usual routine for Lucia, Francisco, and Jacinta began with rising at dawn. They said their morning prayers¹, had a quick breakfast, and led the sheep to fields where they could graze to their satisfaction on dewy grass, and avoid some of the oppressive afternoon sun.

But May 13, 1917, was a Sunday, so the children went to Mass with their families, and only attended to the sheep after their Sunday obligation. Lucia usually decided where the sheep would graze. On this day she picked a property owned by her father, known as the Cova da Iria.

Cova means hole, or depression. The land at the Cova was about five hundred yards in diameter, depressed in the middle, almost like an amphitheater. *Iria* is likely a reference to St. Iria (or Irene), who lived in the region during the Seventh Century.²

The story goes that Iria was educated at a monastery dedicated to Our Lady. There she consecrated herself, and her virginity, to God. Calumnies spread about her virtue, and in 652 a jealous suitor ordered her murdered. Her corpse was thrown into the river Nabao. When her uncle, Abbot Selio, attempted to recover her body, the waters receded before him, and he found her lying, "extremely beautiful," in a watery tomb.³

It is unlikely Lucia, Francisco, or Jacinta were thinking about the story of St. Iria on May 13. It was a beautiful day: the sky clear and blue, the wildflowers in bloom, and a warm sun overhead. This and a hearty lunch was all that was on their minds. After eating, they prayed the Rosary and began piling stones up inside a thicket.⁴ The object was to make a rough sort of door for the thicket which had become, in their imaginations, a house.

There was a flash of light. The children ran for shelter, thinking it was a sudden storm coming over the mountain. But the skies were clear. There was another flash, and the

Sister Lucia

children saw a ball of light over a small holm oak tree.⁵ In the center of the light was a Lady, who Herself seemed all light.

She was short, maybe five feet tall, and seemed between fifteen and eighteen years of age.⁶ Everything about Her was beautiful, including Her voice. "Do not be afraid," She told the children. "I will do you no harm."

"*De onde e Vocemece?*" Lucia asked Her. Where do You come from?

"I am of Heaven," the Lady answered. "What do You want of me?" asked Lucia.

"I have come to ask you to come here for six months in succession, on the thirteenth day, at this same hour. Later on I will tell you who I am and what I want. Afterwards, I will return here a seventh time."

"Shall I go to Heaven too?" asked Lucia. "Yes, you will," answered the Lady.

"And Jacinta?"

"She will go also."

"And Francisco?"

"He will go there too, but he must say many Rosaries."

Lucia continued asking the Lady about Heaven. She named two friends of hers. Were they there? The Lady said the first friend was in Heaven, the second would be in Purgatory until the end of the world.

Then the Lady asked Lucia a question.

"Are you willing to offer yourselves to God and bear all the sufferings He wills to send you, as an act of reparation for the sins by which He is offended, and of supplication for the conversion of sinners?"

"Yes, we are willing," Lucia said, answering for her cousins.

"Then you are going to have much to suffer," Lucia was told, "but the grace of God will be your comfort."

The Lady opened Her hands while speaking, and in so doing communicated to the children "a light so intense that, as it streamed from Her hands, its rays penetrated our hearts and the innermost depths of our souls, making us see ourselves in God, Who was that Light, more clearly than we see ourselves in the best of mirrors. Then, moved by an

Apostle of Mary's Immaculate Heart

interior impulse that was also communicated to us, we fell on our knees, repeating in our hearts:

'O Most Holy Trinity, I adore You ! My God, my God,
I love You in the most Blessed Sacrament!'"

Presently the Lady spoke again. "Pray the Rosary every day, in order to obtain peace for the world, and the end of the war."

"Then," Lucia recounted, "She began to rise serenely, going up towards the east, until She disappeared in the immensity of space. The light that surrounded Her seemed to open up a path before Her in the firmament, and for this reason we sometimes said that we saw Heaven opening."

This last admonition of Our Lady – to "Pray the Rosary every day, in order to obtain peace for the world, and the end of the war" – occurred eight days after Pope Benedict XV, decrying the First World War as "the suicide of Europe", urged everyone to pray to "the great Mother of God" for peace. In a letter to Cardinal Pietro Gasparri dated May 5, 1917, Benedict declared:

"To Mary, then, who is the Mother of Mercy and omnipotent by grace, let loving and devout appeal go up from every corner of the earth...Let it bear to Her the anguished cry of mothers and wives, the wailing of innocent little ones, the sighs of every generous heart: that Her most tender and benign solicitude may be moved and the peace we ask for be obtained for our agitated world."

Benedict concluded his letter with "our ardent desire that all have recourse to the Heart of Jesus, throne of graces, and that they have recourse by the mediation of Mary. To this end we order that, beginning with the first day of June, there be permanently added to the Litany of Loreto the invocation: 'Queen of Peace, pray for us.'" Is it not evident that Mary's words on May 13 were a swift response to the papal plea?

The first visit from Heaven to the Cova da Iria was brief. The following visits would follow the pattern of the first. The Lady talked to Lucia, and Lucia talked to Her. Jacinta could see and hear that Lady, but never spoke to Her during the apparitions at the Cova. After the Lady left, Jacinta would

Sister Lucia

become very talkative, although much of her speech consisted in exclaiming over and over again: "*Ai, que Senhora tao bonita!*" Oh, what a beautiful Lady.⁷

Francisco would see the Lady but not hear Her. In the first apparition Francisco, at first, could not even see the Lady, and told Lucia to throw a rock at "it" to see if it was real. Our Lady said that if he would pray the Rosary, he would see her. When Francisco started praying the Rosary he became able to see the Lady.

The Lady did not frighten the children, although the lightning that preceded Her visit did. Upon reflection, Lucia deduced that "the flashes of lightning were not really lightning, but the reflected rays of a light that were approaching, i.e., the 'ball' of light that contained the heavenly visitor."

Like the angelic apparitions the previous year, the apparition of the beautiful Lady "plunged us once more into the atmosphere of the supernatural," said Lucia, "but this time more gently... it left us filled with peace and expansive joy, which did not prevent us from speaking afterwards of what had happened. However, with regard to the light communicated to us when Our Lady opened Her hands, and everything connected with this light, we experienced a kind of interior impulse that compelled us to keep silent."⁸

Elsewhere Lucia described the difference between her encounters with the Angel and the beautiful Lady like this:

"We felt the same intimate joy, the same peace and happiness, but instead of physical exhaustion, an expansive ease of movement: instead of this annihilation in the Divine Presence, a joyful exultation; instead of the difficulty in speaking, we felt a certain communicative enthusiasm."⁹

Jacinta seemed most affected by 'communicative enthusiasm.' After promising Lucia not to speak to anyone of the beautiful Lady's visit, she ran home to her mother and exclaimed, "Mamma, today I saw the Blessed Virgin at the Cova da Iria!"¹⁰

Notes

1. Olympia Marto remembers that her children were so groggy that early morning prayers were difficult. "They used to make the sign of the Cross," she explained, "and then say as much of the prayer as they could. Children of that age very soon get tired of praying." (De Marchi, op. cit., p. 35).

Apostle of Mary's Immaculate Heart

2. Canon C. Barthas, *Our Lady of Light*, The Bruce Publishing Company, Milwaukee, 1947, p. 11.
3. Ryan, op. cit., pp. 196-197. This occurred less than twenty miles from Fatima, leading one to believe that Iria once walked the hills of Fatima. The Portuguese city of Santarem is named after her.
4. At that spot, Canon Barthas wrote, "in a few years they would begin building the great Basilica of Our Lady of Fatima, as though our shepherds had already laid the foundations." At the very spot that Francisco was building, the first stone was laid, and it is also here that the bodies of Jacinta and Francisco lie. "*Locus iste sanctus est...*" Holy is this place (TWTAF, Vol. I, op. cit., p. 124).
5. Also known as a *carrasqueira*, or an *azinheira*; I will call it a holm oak tree.
6. The children used the word '*mulherzinha*' to describe her, "which in Portuguese is 'woman,' ending with the affectionate diminutive of which the Portuguese are so fond."
7. The entire account of the first apparition of Our Lady is from Lucia's Fourth Memoir, pp. 156-160.
8. Fourth Memoir, p. 123.
9. TWTAF, Vol. I, op. cit., p. 115.
10. Barthas, op. cit., p. 16.