



BLESSED FRANCISCO AND JACINTA MARTO

BULLETIN OF THE LITTLE SHEPHERDS – JULY-SEPTEMBER 2009 (47th YEAR)

'FRANCISCO' CONGRESS

The programme of events to commemorate the centenary of the birth of Francisco Marto has come to an end.

The close of the centenary year was marked by a Congress dedicated to the life and figure of the little Shepherd. This Congress was entitled «*Francisco Marto: growing by giving*» and took place in Fatima on 19th and 20th June, 2009.

The aim of the Congress was to present various views concerning the unusual and attractive figure of this child, by analysing the historical, social, political and ecclesiastical contexts of the period of the Apparitions. In the course of the Congress, it became clear to what extent these contexts contribute towards a better understanding of the life of the young seer.

The many talks and conferences converged in seeing in Francisco a personality marked by the dynamic of gift. Like all good mystics, he, too, was seduced by the experience of God, surprised and enchanted by the abundance of his gifts.

The contemplative dimension of the little Fatima Shepherd was frequently stressed. His personality, marked by a taste for solitude and silence, with a tendency to speak little, drew the divine beauty to him in a special way, and prompted him frequently to distance himself from others in order to contemplate God. In this way, Francisco grew in interiority.

The acute perception of the centrality of God represents, for the mystic Francisco, a sign of a deep awareness of the hierarchy of the truths of the faith.

Arising out of reflection on the spirituality of children seen as a possibility and a Christian phenomenon, the meaning and role of children in the living out of the faith and of Christian spirituality were also discussed. The question of whether there was a precocious readiness for spirituality in children was also considered. There is in children an inclination, a natural impulse over and above the senses, a spontaneous and entirely natural inclination to go beyond the world captured by the senses. However, this inclination does not lead immediately to God, as if the process were



automatic. It was pointed out that the role of the atmosphere is decisive in either opening or blocking the way to this process. The path to be followed in the presence of the Spirit of the Lord naturally requires an atmosphere which is suited to the transmission of the faith, one which is conducive to leading the child to the mystery.

Taking basic Christian spirituality as a starting point, the conclusion was reached that a spirituality of childhood helps in assessing the seriousness of a particular revelation; it also shows how God prefers humble hearts which facilitate spontaneity in living the faith and show that divine gifts are communicated to the Church in a public and universal way, thereby contradicting the Gnostic mentality of many adults who tend to conceal and take possession of the grace of God.

The conclusion was reached that we have in Francisco and Jacinta Marto magnificent examples of the call of children to holiness. In beatifying them, the Church has confirmed this lived holiness. Children are capable of attaining holiness and this is the most adult manifestation of life

ASSISTANT VICE-POSTULATOR APPOINTED FOR THE CAUSE OF THE CANONISATION OF THE LITTLE SHEPHERDS OF FATIMA

Due to the precarious state of health of Mons Kondor, Vice Postulator of the Cause of the Canonisation of Francisco and Jacinta Marto, Sister Angela de Fatima Coelho, of the Aliança de Santa Maria (Alliance of Holy Mary) was appointed as his Assistant, with right of succession, on 25th June, 2009.

According to the decree of nomination, Sister Angela will share this responsibility with Fr Luís Kondor who, since 1960, has been responsible for the causes of beatification and canonisation of Francisco and Jacinta Marto. The appointment was made by the Postulator in the Vatican, Fr Paolo Molinari SJ, and confirmed by D. Antonio Marto, Bishop of Leiria-Fatima.



Angela de Fatima Coelho is both a religious and a doctor.

She was born in 1971 in Frende (Baião), Portugal. She graduated in Medicine in the Faculty of Medicine in Porto, and then went on to lecture in this same Faculty. She gained her Licentiate in Religious Knowledge in the Pontifical University of Comilas in Madrid.

She practises medicine in the Hospital in Leiria.

She entered the Congregation of the Aliança de Santa Maria in 1995. Until her recent nomination, she was novice mistress of her Congregation and superior of the community in Fatima; she was also a member of the initial formation Commission of the Conference of Religious Institutes in Portugal and was one of the team responsible for Inter-Noviciates in Fatima.

She lectures in the Course of Religious Knowledge in IS CRA (Aveiro) and in the General Course in Theology at the Formation and Culture Centre in the Diocese of Leiria-Fatima.

She gives religious formation courses, directs spiritual retreats and is frequently invited to give lectures, as well as undertaking a variety of other formation activities.

CONVERSATION WITH SISTER ANGELA OF FATIMA *

How I see Francisco Marto!

A special child

The Message of Fatima, which is based on the requests made by Our Lady, was practised jointly by the three children, Francisco, Jacinta and Lucia, but also individually by each of the children with the contribution proper to his or her own way of living.

I recall a passage in the Old Testament which can be said to describe the three children. When Elias climbed Mount Horeb in order to meet with God, there was first a clap of thunder and a strong wind which reminds us of Lucia, who saw, spoke, and was given the mission of proclaiming the message; then there was the fire, which reminds us of Jacinta who had in her heart that burning love for the Immaculate Heart of Mary and for the Holy Father; finally there was the still small breeze concealing God himself. This reminds us of Francisco, a contemplative child who encounters God in silence. His silent soul perceives such sublime mysteries as the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus.

Many Christians and contemplative saints have developed this gift only much later in their lives: only as adults do they discover their "desert". This, too, is special about Francisco: he discovered his mission very early in life, he is a child who withdraws to the "desert" of the Serra de Aire, where he develops his contemplative dimension.

Certain characteristics distinguish him from Lucia and Jacinta

Before the apparitions, Lucia used to say that the only thing in common between herself and Francisco was the fact that they were cousins, and the only thing in common

between herself and Jacinta was their physical features, because they were very different in character. Francisco was more introverted, quieter, a peace-loving little boy who lost at games and did not seem to mind, whereas Jacinta sulked at once. After the apparitions, the change that took place in Francisco was according to his nature: he liked to be on his own, but his solitude had a reason, he wanted to be alone with God.



He was also very sensitive. Of the three, he was most sensitive to nature, being very fond of animals and loving his flute.

In addition, he was also brave. While they were in prison, it was he who consoled his sister who was crying, encouraging and animating her.

Inspiring model for the children of today ...

Little children can look to him. Like the children of his own day, he loved to play, to run about, to chat and spend time with friends; he loved his parents and his family. Even when playing with play-stations and computers, today's children can recognise themselves in Francisco, who was not an unusual child. He lived through an unusual experience which caused him to develop special virtues and characteristics which, however, continue to be fundamental for all children.

For example, obedience: in addition to obeying his parents, Francisco also promptly obeyed Our Lady. She asked him to recite many Rosaries in order to go to Heaven. Francisco did not ask why, he did not complain, he did not throw a tantrum, he just prayed. It is this obedience that his human character developed. The children of today easily complain at having to go to Mass, study, come out of their own little world and its preoccupations.

Another aspect of his character is his sense of purity. To be pure is to see things as God sees them, to see people and events with God's eyes. The theme for the Fatima Shrine this year is Jesus' maxim: "The pure of heart will see God". To this idea I like to add: 'and will

see like God'. Children have a lot to learn from Francisco, for example, in the internet, which is so marvellous but which holds many dangers, where a child's gaze can be corrupted and cause them to look at things from a wrong angle.

Another basic characteristic of Francisco's is his humility. During the apparitions, Lucia could see, hear, and speak, Jacinta could see and hear, but Francisco could only see. He never complained, never felt left out, never said: "Poor me, I can only see"; he knew how to come to terms with his own limitations. In our day, so marked by competitiveness, each child has to be better than the next. In a society that requires everyone to be more intelligent, prettier, richer, more powerful, and so on, there is no place for fear and weakness. Francisco with his humble outlook has much to teach the children of today.

Inspiring model for the adults of today

Francisco was a child, but his was a mature childhood. As he lived out the spiritual experience of the message of Fatima, while remaining a child who appreciated the company of his cousin and his sister, who enjoyed the love of his father and mother, he lived with surprising maturity the events and the challenges that he encountered, and through them moulded his own personality.

Grown-ups can very well learn from Francisco, beginning by practising the prudence and sensitivity he displayed. He used to advise Lucia not to return home from school with certain friends, but to go "and spend a little time with the hidden Jesus and then come home alone". Even parents, in the education of their children, can learn from this prudence displayed by Francisco.

Another characteristic of Francisco's that can help grown-ups is his capacity for discernment. For example, seeing Lucia upset and not knowing what to say to people, Francisco's advice often put ideas into her head.

Little Francisco also possessed a strong sense of responsibility and fidelity to promises he had made. He had been entrusted, in a special way, with the mission of praying, indeed of praying many Rosaries, in accordance with his contemplative dimension. He never let go of whatever he had undertaken to do. In this *light* society of ours, whether in professional or business life, or in family relationships, Francisco calls on us to have a sense of responsibility and commitment.

He was the contemplative of the group, but also a model for those who are more 'active' in the Church and in the world.

According to *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the Church is both missionary and contemplative, and each of us must have both these dimensions. In fact, the contemplative dimension concerns the end of our lives, which is union with God. In a sense, the contemplative anticipates this greatest and definitive encounter with God. By living his contemplative dimension in such a very special way, Francisco shows us that the spiritual dimension of life is the same for all. As the theologian Karl Rahner would say: Christians of the 21st century will either be mystics or they will not be Christians, the next epoch is either mystical or it is nothing. How very much of today Francisco continues

to be in his appeal. Our human vocation comes to fruition in communion with Jesus who allows us to savour, here and now, what our full flowering will be when He will admit us definitively into the glory of the Father.

The content of the Fatima Message that Francisco embodied most intensely ...

Great lover of beauty that he was, Francisco one day declared: "I loved seeing the Angel, but I loved still more seeing Our Lady. What I loved most was to see Our Lady in that light from Her which penetrated our hearts." In other words, being so sensitive to beauty, he could distinguish between the loveliness of the Angel and the much greater loveliness of Our Lady, but Our Lord himself is, of course, lovelier still.

Then there is Francisco's spirituality of reparation. When he perceived that Our Lady was so sad on account of people's sins, he was deeply moved and sought only to console Her. Spending hours in the presence of the 'hidden Jesus', he dedicated himself entirely to Eucharistic adoration. We shall never know the degree of intensity of his intimacy with God.

Moreover, we must not forget his love for the Rosary. Our Lady said that Francisco was to pray many Rosaries, and he himself said: 'Oh my dear Our Lady! I'll say as many Rosaries as you want!'. As John Paul II wrote: «The Rosary transports us to Mary's side and enables her to train and mould us until Christ is fully formed in us (cf. *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, 15)». This is what happened with Francisco. Ever more closely moulded to Jesus by the hands of Mary, he attained a truly astounding capacity for contemplation.

The experience and witness of Francisco encourage all to live the Christian life...

Everything that was asked of the little Shepherds forms part of what has always been the life of the Church. The Message of Fatima does not deal in abstract fanciful mysticisms. On the contrary, it is stimulating because it expresses concretely the dynamic of the Church's tradition and puts us in touch with the experience and the faith of countless generations of Christians.

The experience of the little Shepherds shows us that even a child, in the short space of two or three years, can live deeply and intensely the mystery of the Eucharist. In Francisco we see especially also his love for sinners, with whom he felt at one, and for whom he was prepared to make every kind of sacrifice. In this way, with them all in his heart in the presence of the Hidden Jesus, he combines admirably the commandments to love God and our neighbour, in the deepest truth of the Lord's gospel.

All this was practised by a child who has been beatified by the Church, undoubtedly in order to say to us all that it is only necessary to live as he did in order to attain to holiness. If a child could do it, then I too can do the same.

Francisco is a 'talent' whom God has entrusted to the world!

* (In conjunction with the Shrine of Fatima and 'O *Mensagem*'. The conversational style of the interview has been retained.)



BLESSED FRANCISCO MARTO PATRON OF ALTAR SERVERS IN PORTUGAL

On account of his great love for the Eucharist, Blessed Francisco Marto, one of the little Shepherds of Fatima, has been proclaimed patron saint of altar servers in Portugal. The announcement was made to thousands of altar servers who had come in pilgrimage to Fatima by D. Anacleto Oliveira, Auxiliary Bishop of Lisbon and President of the Bishops' Liturgical Commission, during Mass on 1st May.

MIRACLE STILL NEEDED FOR THE CANONISATION OF THE LITTLE SHEPHERDS

Let us have recourse to the two little Shepherds in our difficulties. Their power of intercession with God is already well known and born witness to by countless letters and graces received throughout the years of this Vice Postulation.

We ask anyone who receives (through the intercession of Francisco and Jacinta) the inexplicable cure of a serious illness to write to the Vice-Postulation so that the cure can be examined and possibly accepted as the miracle that will serve for the canonisation of the two little Blessed.

«Blessed Francisco and Jacinta Marto» Bulletin of the Little Shepherds

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