



# BLESSED

## FRANCISCO AND JACINTA MARTO

BULLETIN OF THE LITTLE SHEPHERDS – APRIL-JUNE 2004 (42<sup>nd</sup> YEAR)

### FATIMA AND MODERNITY – PROPHECY AND ESCHATOLOGY (2)

(continued)

#### 2. *Cloud of mercy*

The extraordinary fact that these apparitions occurred at the same time as historical events of great importance (World War I, the new creed of Bolshevism and, a little later, the new Nazi paganism) enables us to understand, them in psycho-analytical terms, as a fateful warning, and also, in terms of salvation history, as a form of prophecy, the breaking in of the word from on High, a Word of Grace coming, not so much through official institutions but rather by way of charisma.

The suggestive expression of St James of Sarug (died 521 A.D.) describing Mary as a «cloud of mercy bearing the anguish and hope of the entire world» is an apt description of the meaning of the Fatima apparitions and the essence of the message contained in them.

In the first place, the apparition of the Virgin Mary with her message is perceived as an intervention from on high designed to reveal to the faithful that the heart of God is not impassible but vulnerable, and assuring them of his pain and love in the face of the devastation caused by sin, and the suffering of the world and the Church: in other words that He is the God of compassion, the God who is with us.

Classical theology established too great a distance between God and human beings, thereby leading believers to envisage God as a Being not very different from the pagan 'Destiny', supreme, deaf, dumb and remote. A false idea of God which did not extend very far beyond the limits of a certain deism: God the immovable mover, the prime cause, «heavenly lord and patriarch of the Universe» (Moltmann), – apathetic, impassible, — «a God reduced to an abstract postulate of theoretical or practical reason, perhaps wrapped in a Christian cloak», thereby concealing the genuine face of the God of Jesus Christ.

In the Fatima Message, misfortune and sin do not leave God indifferent, and Rachel continues to weep for her children (cf. Mt. 2, 18). Hence, from beginning to end, the essence of the message lies in the pressing invitation to bring back to the centre of the life of the Christian and of the world

the adoration of God, Lord of History, recognition of his primacy, acceptance of his salvific will, the invitation to enkindle a desire to love God and promote the practice of the love of reparation. All the rest irradiates from this central point.

In the second place, and to some extent linked with the previous point, the message contains a paradox, which is one of the constants of the history of salvation: namely the extreme and mysterious contrast between the "great" history of the nations and their conflicts, the history of the great and the powerful with its proper chronology and geography of power, and the "little" unknown history of the small and the humble, of the poor at the periphery of the world, possessing neither knowledge nor power. And it is from here, from the periphery, that are called to intervene in history, in favour of peace, another strength, another power, other means, that are apparently useless and inefficient to human eyes: namely, the power of the fervent prayer of the just man, perseverance in prayer in order to obtain the gift of peace by



I will take Jacinta and Francisco soon.  
But you are to stay here some time longer.

means of adoration, the devotion of reparation, conversion and the making of sacrifices in accordance with the pious customs of the age, all of these are in perfect accord with what is revealed in Scripture. «The walls of Jericho fell at the sound of the trumpets of prayer» declared La Pira in 1959 on his return from the first journey made by a Western politician to Russia after World War II.

From this point of view, Our Lady's message is an appeal to us to lay ourselves open to another dimension of history, fed by another Presence, sustained by a different Force, led by another Light, heading for another Destination, but already mysteriously and silently present in the here and now, and at work in the succession of generations which keep the Promise (the Promises) of the Lord and transmit it (them) from one generation to the next.

The thread of Marian spirituality running through Our Lady's message finds in Mary herself a luminous point of focus in the contemplation of the mystery of divine goodness and mercy. Devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary introduces

us to the «humanity and loving kindness of our God and Lord Jesus Christ». It summons us to the prompt and simple faith of Her who «believed that the words spoken to her from the Lord would be fulfilled» (Luke 1, 45). She accompanies not only the drama of the «mystery of evil» in the world, but also the mystery of the bringing to birth of believers, though accompanied by that of the risk of unbelief and apostasy.

In these two vital aspects to which I have just referred (namely the non-impassibility of God and the part played by the lowly in history by their adoration and intercession), we believe we can find the axle which enables us to co-ordinate organically the various elements which are typical of the message of Fatima.

– the sacrificial element, centred on the Eucharistic sacrifice and on the offering of oneself with Christ;

– the eschatological element (vision of hell and the conversion of sinners) displaying an at first sight inhuman sense of urgency in order to emphasise the extreme gravity of the misfortunes hanging over humanity and the Church on account of sin. In its own way, this element conveys the gospel warning: «unless you repent, you will all likewise perish» (Luke 13, 3).

– the Marian element of devotion and consecration to the Immaculate Heart, as a means of profound adoration of the mystery of God, expressed in the immaculate Mary's 'yes' to God's loving plan, and thus also to attaining the gift of peace;

– the ecclesial element, in the form of united solidarity with the entire Church in praying for peace for the world and for the persecuted Church;

– the pedagogical/religious element, made concrete in popular pious practices (prayers, devotions, sacrifices) that provide a simple spiritual path accessible to everyone in accordance with the customs of the time and expressed in psychological and affective terms (reparation, consolation, causing pain, etc.).

## THE APPARITIONS OF OUR LADY

There was a terrible war on. Fear and pain and death everywhere. Portugal, too, was involved in crisis. Bewildered souls took refuge in unbelief, faithful hearts prayed for peace and the salvation of the world. On this dark world dawned the brilliant light of the 13th day of May, 1917.

God looked on the world with kindness and mercy in the silent Cova da Iria.

### The first Apparition

Lucia accurately describes the first meeting with the Virgin of the holm oak.

«I was playing with Jacinta and Francisco at building a little stone wall around a clump of furze. Suddenly we saw what seemed to be a flash of lightning.

“We'd better go home,” I said to my cousins, “that's lightning; we may have a thunderstorm.”...

We began to go down the slope, hurrying the sheep along towards the road. We were more or less half-way down the slope, and almost level with a large holmoak tree that stood there, when we saw another flash of lightning. We had only gone a few steps further when, there before

us on a small holmoak, we beheld a Lady all dressed in white. She was more brilliant than the sun, and radiated a light more clear and intense than a crystal glass filled with sparkling water, when the rays of the burning sun shine through it.

We stopped, astounded, before the Apparition. We were so close, just a few feet from her, that we were bathed in the light which surrounded her, or rather, which radiated from her. Then Our Lady spoke to us:

“Do not be afraid. I will do you no harm.”

“Where are you from?”

“I am from Heaven.”

“What do you want of me?”

“I have come to ask you to come here for six months in succession, on the 13th day, at this same hour. Later on, I will tell you who I am and what I want. Afterwards, I will return here yet a seventh time.”

“Shall I go to Heaven too?”

“Yes, you will”

“And Jacinta?”

“She will go also.”

“And Francisco?”

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

“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.”

“Then you are going to have much to suffer, but the grace of God will be your comfort.”

As she pronounced these last words “...the grace of God will be your comfort”, Our Lady opened her hands for the first time, communicating to us 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 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!”

After a few moments, Our Lady spoke again:

“Pray the Rosary every day, in order to obtain peace for the world, and the end of the war.”

Then 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.

### The Second Apparition

Around 11 o'clock, I left home and called at my uncle's house, where Jacinta and Francisco were waiting for me. Then we set off for the Cova da Iria, in expectation of the longed-for moment...

As soon as Jacinta, Francisco and I had finished praying the Rosary, with a number of other people who were present (Mr Ignatius Antonio Marques counted 40 people),

we saw once more the flash reflecting the light which was approaching (which we called lightning). The next moment, Our Lady was there on the holmoak, exactly the same as in May.

“What do you want of me?” I asked.

“I wish you to come here on the 13th of next month, to pray the Rosary every day, and to learn to read. Later, I will tell you what I want.”

I asked for the cure of a sick person.

“If he is converted, he will be cured during the year.”

“I would like to ask you to take us to Heaven.”

“Yes. I will take Jacinta and Francisco soon. But you are to stay here some time longer. Jesus wishes to make use of you to make me known and loved. He wants to establish in the world devotion to my Immaculate Heart.”

“Am I to stay here alone?” I asked, sadly.

“No, my daughter. Are you suffering a great deal? Don’t lose heart. I will never forsake you. My Immaculate Heart will be your refuge and the way that will lead you to God.”

As Our Lady spoke these last words, she opened her hands and for the second time, she communicated to us the rays of that same immense light. We saw ourselves in this light, as it were, immersed in God. Jacinta and Francisco seemed to be in that part of the light which rose towards Heaven, and I in that which was poured out on the earth. In front of the palm of Our Lady’s right hand was a heart encircled by thorns which pierced it. We understood that this was the Immaculate Heart of Mary, outraged by the sins of humanity, and seeking reparation.

You know now, Your Excellency, what we referred to when we said that Our Lady had revealed a secret to us in June. At the time, Our Lady did not tell us to keep it secret, but we felt moved to do so by God.

## IN COIMBRA ... WITH SISTER LUCIA

On the first day of the Conclave, 26<sup>th</sup> August 1978, the 111 Cardinals of Holy Church, gathered in the Sistine Chapel of the Vatican, and elected Cardinal Albino Luciani, Patriarch of Venice, as Pope, the 263<sup>rd</sup> successor of St. Peter, Vicar of Jesus Christ on earth.

It was one of the most rapid conclaves in the history of the Church, Cardinal Luciani took the name of John Paul I.

On September 29<sup>th</sup>, 1978, the 1,300 bells of the Holy City brought very sad news to the people of Rome – God had taken to Himself the soul of Our Holy Father, Pope John Paul I.

Like Cardinal Roncalli, Cardinal Albino Luciani also came to Fatima before being elected Pope. On July 10<sup>th</sup>, 1977, Cardinal Albino Luciani, Patriarch of Venice, presided at the concelebrated Mass on the outdoor Altar of the Basilica.

In a brief homily to the pilgrims, he recalled how one of his predecessors, Cardinal Angelo Roncalli, had come as a pilgrim to Fatima before being elected Pope, and that in this very place he had addressed the pilgrims, speaking to them about the Apparitions of Our Lady and the Angel. In the same way he himself, Patriarch of Venice, was appealing for the fulfilment of the Message of Fatima,

which is penance and prayer, and especially the prayer of the Rosary.

On July 11<sup>th</sup>, Cardinal Luciani went to Coimbra, where he celebrated Mass, together with his priests, in the Chapel of the Carmelite Convent. Afterwards, he spoke to the community, and in particular with Sister Lucia. He wrote his impressions in an Italian review entitled «Il Cuore della Madre», in its January 1978 number.

«On Monday, July 11<sup>th</sup>, I concelebrated Mass with several priests from Venice and Veneto, in the Church of the Carmelite Nuns of Coimbra, a Portuguese city of about a hundred thousand inhabitants. Immediately afterwards, alone, I entered the convent (for cardinals have the right to enter a cloister) and met the whole community, consisting of twenty two, including professed and novices. After this, I spoke at length with Sister Lucia dos Santos, the only living survivor of the three seers of Fatima. Sister Lucia is 70 years old, but she carries her years well, as she herself assured me with a smile.

She did not add, like Pius IX: «I carry them so well that not one of them falls down on top of me». But her joviality, her ready speech, her intense interest, revealed by her words, for everything connected with the Church of today and its serious problems, all revealed her spiritual youthfulness. I understand Portuguese more or less well, having spent some weeks in Brazil, but even had I had no knowledge of the language at all, I would have understood just the same that she was insisting on the need for Christians and, above all, seminarians and novices, who are resolved to give themselves to God without reserve. She spoke to me with great energy and conviction of priests, religious and Christians with strength of mind, who must be as radical as the saints – it must be all or nothing if they want to belong seriously to God.

Sister Lucia did not speak to me about the Apparitions. I asked her a question about the famous «dance of the sun». She did not see it. Seventy thousand people, for ten consecutive minutes, on the 13<sup>th</sup> of October, 1917, saw the sun change colour many times, they saw it spin round three times and then hurl itself precipitously towards the earth. During those same minutes, Lucia and her two companions saw, beside the motionless sun, first the Holy Family, then the Virgin Mary as Our Lady of Dolours and finally as Our Lady of Mount Carmel.

Having reached this point, someone will ask: so the Cardinal is interested in private revelations? Does he not know that everything is contained in the Gospel? That even approved revelations are not articles of faith?

I know all that perfectly well. But an article of faith contained in the Gospel is also the following: «Signs will be associated with those who believe». (Mk. 16, 17).

If it is the fashion today to examine the signs of the times, if we are in fact witnessing a veritable inflation, even a plague of «signs», I think I may lawfully be allowed to refer to the sign of the 13<sup>th</sup> of October, 1917, a sign to which even unbelievers and anti-clericals bore witness. And behind the sign itself, it is opportune to be attentive to the elements which this sign contains. What are they?

Firstly: To repent of one’s sins and cease offending God any more.

Secondly. To pray. Prayer is the means of communication with God. But among men today, these means (tv, radio, cinema, press) shamelessly oust prayer and seem to desire to put it completely out of the picture. «This will be the death of that», as they say, and we seem to be seeing this actually happen. It is not I, but Karl Rahner who writes: «Even within the Church, there is to be found an exclusive commitment to temporal realities, which is not a legitimate choice, but apostasy and total loss of faith».

Thirdly: To pray the Rosary. Naaman the Syrian, a great general, disdained the simple bathing in the Jordan. Some do the same as Naaman, saying: «I am a great theologian and a mature christian, steeped in the Bible and in the liturgy through and through, and they talk to me about the Rosary!» Yet the fifteen mysteries of the Rosary are also the Bible, and so are the Our Father, the Hail Mary and the Glory – they are the Bible united to prayer that nourishes the soul. A Bible studied on the mere level of investigation could only nourish pride and empty it of its value; it is not rare for specialists in the Bible to lose their faith.

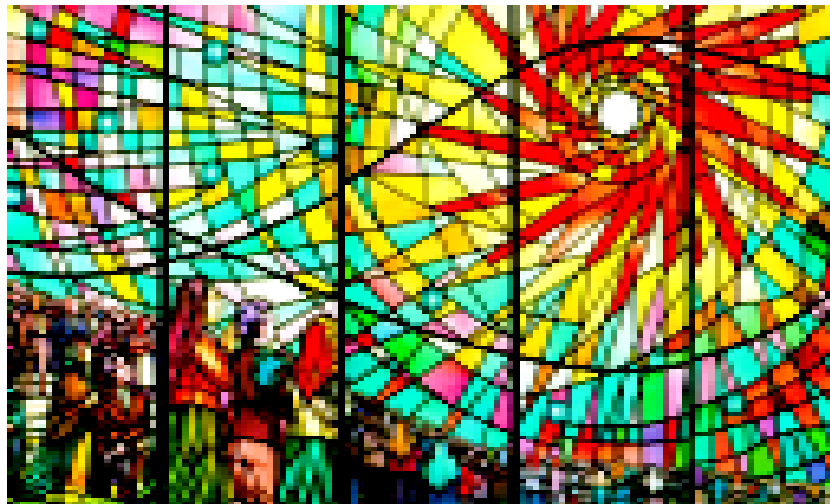
Fourthly: Hell exists and we can fall into it.

In Fatima, Our Lady taught this prayer: «O my Jesus, forgive us, save us from the fire of Hell, lead all souls to heaven». In this life, there is nothing more important than to merit heaven by leading a good life.

For it is not Fatima but the Gospel which says: «What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his soul?» (Matt. 16,26) »

### CRITICAL EDITION OF DOCUMENTATION RELATING TO FATIMA

The first three volumes of the critical edition of the Documentation relating to Fatima, covering the years 1917–1930, have already been published in Portuguese. They contain official and unofficial interrogations of the little Shepherds, the report of the Canonical Commission charged with ascertaining the authenticity of the apparitions, the decree of recognition issued by the Bishop of Leiria, personal letters, texts published in the press at the time, leaflets and photographs. The collection as a whole is of great interest for anyone wishing to know all about the event from the beginning, and to situate it in its historical context.



70.000 people, for ten consecutive minutes, on the 13th of October, 1917, saw the sun change colour many times, spin round three times and then hurl itself precipitously towards the earth.

To read this volume is to discover that news of the apparitions caused surprise throughout Portuguese society and, in due course, abroad also. Reactions varied considerably, ranging from curiosity and enthusiasm to contempt and complete and outright rejection. In some cases, the reaction was one of cautious hesitation. Even within the Portuguese Church, the enthusiasm of many “believers” was shocked by the reserved and critical attitude adopted by others. Among the clergy, some were present at the penultimate apparition, while others only put in an appearance later on, after the signs seemed to have lent credibility to the event. After a vain attempt to say nothing about what they had been experiencing, the children who saw the apparitions, ended up by recounting what they had seen and heard whenever they were questioned. However, they did not normally do this spontaneously, and even ran away when people’s curiosity became excessive and importunate.

Interpretation of the event and its significance was not unanimous. Republican political circles tended to see in the supposed apparitions a threat to the current regime organised by the clergy, by way of revenge for the separation of Church and State and the limitations that this had imposed on them. The

events are clearly viewed in a political perspective, not unassociated with monarchical tendencies and their attempts to return to power. In the Church, the interpretation of many Christians who witnessed the apparitions was that there had been a miracle, and the better educated associated them with events in France, so that they spoke of Fatima as a ‘Portuguese Lourdes’. As for the clergy and the hierarchy, their first idea was that it could all be a

trap set by the enemies of the Church as a pretext for persecuting and crushing it. Later on, particularly following the miracle of 13th October, the need for a serious investigation began to be expressed, in order to establish whether or not an ‘inrush of the supernatural’ had in fact taken place. Nevertheless, generally speaking, there was a willingness to accept this interpretation, and the beginnings of a cult, and of the building of structures on the site of the apparitions almost immediately after they ceased to occur, bear witness to this favourable attitude.

The texts already published and others which will be published in due time make possible a serious study of the events from both the historical and the theological point of view. Any reader who wishes to know the truth about Fatima and its significance has, in these documents, the material necessary for reaching an informed opinion.

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