

**This and previous articles were first published by the Benedictine Monks of Sainte Joseph de Clairval in France. I have found the articles in their newsletter very interesting and inspiring. With the permission granted me by Père Jacques, I present for your edification random selections from past and present issues.**

**Please visit the web site of [Abbaye Sainte Joseph de Clairval](#) to view some of the beautiful work of these sons of Saint Benedict.**

From the Article of December 25, 2000

Dear friends of Saint Joseph Abbey:

In Fatima on the morning of Saturday, May 13, 2000, Pope John Paul II beatified Francisco and Jacinta Marto. During his homily, the Holy Father expressed himself thus: *“Father, to You I offer praise, for You have revealed these things to little children (Mt. 11:25). Today Jesus' praise takes the solemn form of the beatification of the little shepherds, Francisco and Jacinta. With this rite, the Church wishes to place in the candelabrum these two candles which God lit to illumine humanity in its dark and anxious hours... May the message of their lives live on forever to light humanity's way!”*

Francisco Marto was born on June 11, 1908, his sister Jacinta on March 10, 1910. Their cousin Lucia, who saw the Blessed Virgin with them, was born on March 22, 1907. All three came from a hamlet named Aljustrel, close to Fatima, in central Portugal. The Marto household exuded a Christian ambiance, founded on a solid, natural integrity. Love of truth—one could not lie—was a fundamental rule carefully respected. Love of purity was another distinctive family trait. Entertainment, words, attitudes—all of them were honest, gentle, and pure. Christian piety and prayer, attendance at Sunday mass, and the reception of the sacraments were regular.

The peasants in Aljustrel scraped an existence from the resources of their rocky earth and their sheep. Lucia, Francisco, and Jacinta customarily gathered their herds to graze them together, and they organized games that did not prevent them from keeping watch. One spring day in 1916, an Angel appeared to them. Bending his forehead to the ground, he repeated three times: “My God, I believe, I adore, I hope and I love You! I ask pardon for all those who do not believe, who

do not adore, who do not hope, who do not love You!" During a second apparition that summer, the Angel recommended them to offer to God "prayers and sacrifices." He returned in September, bearing a chalice over which a Host hovered; from the Host, drops of blood flowed. The angel kneeled with the children and had them repeat three times: "Most Holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, I adore You profoundly, and I offer You the most precious Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, present in all the tabernacles of the world, in reparation for the outrages by which He is Himself offended. Through the infinite merits of His Sacred Heart and through the intercession of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, I beg the conversion of poor sinners."

O May 13, 1917, Lucia, Francisco, and Jacinta had led their sheep to a place called Cova da Iria. It was noon, and the sky was clear. Suddenly, a flash of lightning crossed the skies. Believing that a storm was coming, the children pressed the herd towards the base of the narrow valley. Standing before them was an extraordinary beautiful young woman, completely illuminated, wearing a long white robe and a veil which extended to her feet which were resting on an airy cloud that brushed against a little green oak. She appeared to be about eighteen years old. Lucia asked her, "Where do you come from, Ma'am?"---"I come from Heaven."---"And what do you want of us?"---"I come to ask you to return here six times in succession, at this same time, the 13<sup>th</sup> of each month. Afterwards, I will tell you who I am and what I want of you."---"You come from Heaven!"... And will I go to Heaven?"--"Yes, you will."---"And Jacinta?"---"She will, too."---"And Francisco?"---"So will he. He must pray the Rosary..."

### **Oh, that we might see good things! (Ps 4:7)**

The Blessed Virgin's first lesson at Fatima was the reminder of the reality of Heaven. God has placed us in the world to know Him, love Him, and serve Him, and thus to attain Paradise. Those who die in the grace and friendship of God, and who are perfectly purified, enter into Heaven, where they are forever like God, for they see Him *as he is* (1Jn 3:2), *face to face* (cf. 1Cor 13:12). This perfect life of communion and love with the Most Blessed Trinity, with the Virgin Mary, the angels and the saints, all owing to God's free gift, is the ultimate end and the realization of man's most profound aspirations, the supreme and definitive state of happiness. God, in effect, has placed in the heart of man the desire for happiness so as to draw him towards Himself. The hope of Heaven teaches us that true happiness does not reside in riches or well-being, nor in human glory or power, nor any other human creation, as useful as it might be, such as the sciences, but in God alone, source of all good and all love. "God alone satisfies," said Saint Thomas Aquinas.

After having strengthened the children with this inestimable promise of Heaven, the Lady introduced them to the mystery of the Redemption, which, with exquisite gentleness, she asked them to associate themselves with. "Do you want to offer yourselves to God to make sacrifices and gladly accept all the sufferings that He wishes to send you in reparation for the sins that offend His Divine Majesty? Do you want to suffer to obtain the conversion of sinners, to make reparation for the blasphemies as well as the offenses made to the Immaculate Heart of Mary?"---"Yes, we want to!" Lucia replied. "You will have much to suffer, but the grace of God will assist you and will sustain you always." While speaking, the Apparition opened her hands, and this gesture shed on the visionaries a beam of mysterious light which, penetrating their souls, made them see themselves in God.

### **First to console Jesus**

This grace, by which God joined the three children in the deepest depths of their beings, filled Francisco with wonder. By an astonishing mystery, God had revealed, that he was "sad" as a result of the sins of men. A radical transformation then took place in this boy barely nine years old. At first site he appeared to be less favored than his companions—Lucia saw Our Lady and spoke with her: Jacinta saw her and heard her, but did not speak; Francisco only saw her, but did not hear her and did not speak with her. Nevertheless, he entered in to an intense spiritual life. Knowing that his going to heaven was determined by the recitation of many Rosaries, he nevertheless remained in a marvelous state of tranquility and confidence. He began to recite up to two fifteen decade Rosaries and more, and would do so every day. His piety, far from being a mechanical repetition of the prayers of the Rosary, plunged him into habitual state of prayer. His preoccupation was to keep Our Lord company and to console him. One night, his father heard him sobbing. "I think of Jesus who is so sad because of the sins that are committed against Him," Francisco confided to him. To Lucia's question, "What did you like the most: consoling Our Lord or converting sinners so that souls don't go to Hell?", he replied, "I would prefer to console Our Lord, but then to convert sinners so they don't offend him anymore."

The parable of the prodigal son reveals to us that the drama of sin is not only that of a son who wanders from the paternal home, but also the tragedy of the father who suffers from this estrangement. God mysteriously finds himself in this situation when we commit sin. In our human language, we say then that God "suffers" from our estrangement. Souls inhabited by a very intense love of God preoccupy themselves with the repercussions of sin on the Heart of God, which they wish to "console." This seems to have been Francisco's case. This little visionary, who seemed less favored on the level of apparitions, attained the highest summits of Christian spirituality.

The effect of the apparitions on Jacinta was made manifest especially after July 13. That day, Our Lady showed the three children Hell. Lucia would write, "She showed us an ocean of fire... and, submerged in this fire, demons and souls like

black and transparent embers... Amid cries and groans of pain and despair which terrified us and made us tremble with fear." The Blessed Virgin told them to keep this vision secret. She did not permit Lucia to reveal it until 1941. Jacinta retained an impression of it which left a profound mark on her. From this day on, she was very preoccupied with the fate of poor souls who went to Hell. She often sat on the ground or on a rock, and, deep in thought, she would say, "Oh! Hell! How sorrowful I am for the souls who are going to Hell!" Yet she did not confine herself to futile pain but, under the motion of the most elevated charity, she prayed and sacrificed heroically for those who were in danger of being lost.

### **A painful reality**

The vision of Hell which the three children were favored with is not an exaggeration of the reality it represented. It is a presentation of it within the grasp of the human mind. Pope Paul VI, in his *Credo of the People of God*, begins by placing things in the perspective of God's love and mercy, which lead us to eternal life. But he adds that "those who have refused God's love and mercy to the end will go to the fire that is not extinguished." In 1992, Lucia, who has been a Carmelite in Coïmbra, Portugal since 1948, told a Cardinal who had come to visit her, "Hell is a reality... Continue to preach about Hell, for Our Lord Himself spoke of Hell and it is in the Holy Scriptures. God condemns no one to Hell. People condemn themselves to Hell. God has given mankind the freedom of choice, and he respects this human freedom." Describing the last judgment in advance, Jesus affirms, *Then the Son of Man will say to those on his left: "out of my site, you condemned, into that everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels"... These will go to eternal punishment and the just to eternal life* (Mt 25:41 and 46).

In the face of the events of Aljustrel, the supporters of anticlerical politics in Portugal were growing restless. The administrator of the Vila Nova de Ourem district, to which the hamlet belonged, was a sectarian. On August 13, he went to Fatima, and took the three children to Ourem by trickery. The little visionaries were dismayed at missing the meeting with the Blessed Virgin. They offered the sacrifice to Our Lord. Interrogated about the apparitions, they're related what they had seen, but remained faithful to the secret. They were promised pieces of gold—nothing could shake them. As a last resort, the administrator led them to the prison and told them, "if you delay too long in talking, you'll be fried in oil." That evening, having found them unshakeable, he commanded a cauldron full of oil to be prepared. Then, turning to Jacinta: "Tell the secret that you claimed to have received---"I can't"---"You can't? Well, I'm going to see to it that you can!" A gendarme took Jacinta away. After several minutes, the administrator addressed Francisco: "See, your sister has been fried!... Now it's your turn!... Tell me your secret."---"I can't tell anyone." And he was likewise taken away. Then came Lucia's turn. In reality, it was a show; yet Lucia would later avow, "I'm relieved that it was for good and that I was going to die. But I wasn't afraid and I recommended myself to the Blessed Virgin." Such courage among children

manifests a supernatural intervention from God, granting them the gift of fortitude.

On September 13, the Blessed Virgin confirmed her promise of a great miracle for the 13th of October. That day, the lady gave her name: "I am Our Lady of the Rosary. I desire that a chapel be built here in my honor, and that the Rosary continue to be said every day." The crowd was estimated at least at 50,000 people. At the end of the apparition, the sun began to dance, and to give off all sorts of colors. Then it seemed to rush by zigzag ricochets on the crowd, and finally took its place again, a miracle which substantiated the apparitions. In the days that followed, the children were plagued with interminable interrogations by all sorts of individuals. Following the Blessed Virgin's recommendations, they offered their sufferings to God. Their desire for sacrifices in order to save sinners had become insatiable.

### **"What a beautiful light!"**

In the autumn of 1918, Francisco became seriously ill with the "Spanish flu," and awaited death with equal portions of certitude and patience. Even at the moments his fever was highest, he did not forget his Rosary. One day, Lucia asked him, "Are you suffering very much?"—"My head hurts so much!" he replied, "but I want to endure it to console Our Lord." On April 2, 1919, he confessed and, the following day made his First Communion, which was also his Last Rites. From the time he received Communion, he felt not the slightest pain. Around ten o'clock in the evening, he told his mother, "Look, Mama, what a beautiful light, there, close to the door." After a moment: "I don't see it anymore." His face lit up with an angelic brightness, and without agony, with a faint smile on his lips, his soul broke free from his body and went to return to the Lady whose beauty he had caught a glimpse of on earth. The last at la Cova, Francisco was the first to enter into paradise.

Jacinta was likewise struck by the epidemic. From a little girl who was sullen, frail, and who used to love games and dancing, she had become patient, strong, and even tough in the face of suffering. Yet she was not gloomy. While leading the sheep or picking flowers, she would sing improvised airs. "Sweet Heart of Mary, be myself salvation! Immaculate Heart of Mary, convert the sinners, save their souls from Hell." She had a singular love for the Pope. During the apparition of July 13, 1917, the Blessed Virgin had said, "The Holy Father will have much to suffer." A little later, Jacinta received--- two private revelations. One day, she told Lucia, "I saw the Holy Father, in a very big house, on his knee in front of a table, with his head between his hands, and crying. Outside, there was a big crowd. Some were throwing stones at him, others were shouting insults at him and were saying bad words to him. Poor Holy Father! We have to pray a lot for him!" Another time she saw the Pope praying, with a crowd, before the Immaculate Heart of Mary. These Revelations inspired Jacinta with a love-filled fervor in her prayers for the Holy Father. Pope John Paul II, aware of having himself been the

beneficiary of these prayers, expressed his thanks to Jacinta in the homily of the Beatification Mass: “And once again I would like to celebrate the Lord’s goodness to me when I was saved from death after being gravely wounded on May 13, 1981. I’d also express my gratitude to Blessed Jacinta for the sacrifices and prayers offered for the Holy Father, whom she saw suffering greatly.”

### **“It’s so good to be with Him!”**

One day, Jacinta confided to Lucia, “Our Lady came to see me. She wants me to go to two hospitals. But it isn’t to be cured—it’s to suffer more in love for Our Lord and for sinners.” While waiting, she prayed a great deal and missed no opportunity to make sacrifices. She got up at night to recite the Angelus, agreed to drink cups of milk that made her sick, and made the sacrifice of not turning over in bed in spite of the suffering. When Lucia returned from Mass, she told her, “Come very close to me since you carry Jesus hidden in your heart... I don’t know how, I feel Our Lord inside me and, without seeing Him or hearing Him, I understand what He tells me. It’s so good to be with Him!”

She was taken to the hospital in Vila Nova de Ourem. The separation from Lucia cost her more than everything else, for only her cousin was in a position to understand her. A fistula had opened on her left side. Don’t tell anyone that the wound hurts me,” she confided to Lucia, who had come to visit her. “Tell Jesus in the Tabernacle that I love Him very much.” One day, she related to Lucia, “The Blessed Virgin foretold to me that I will go to Lisbon, to another hospital. I will not see you again, or my parents. After suffering a lot, I will die alone.” The prospect of this made her suffer much. “What does it matter,” Lucia was prompted to remark, “as long as the Blessed Virgin comes to get you!”—“Yes, that’s true. But there are moments when I forget that She will come to take me with Her.”

Jacinta was transferred to Lisbon for a surgical intervention especially painful since the sick girl’s weakness did not permit a total anesthesia. Once the operation was over, the dressings made the child suffer horribly.

The Most Blessed Virgin came to visit her and took away all her pain. Mary’s faced appeared quite sad. “The sins that lead the greatest number of souls to perdition are the sins of the flesh,” she confided to her privileged one. “People must renounce sin and not persist in it, as has been done until now. It is essential to make great penance.” A few days after the operation, complications arose. The evening of February 20, 1920, she made her confession. The priest thought he could wait until the next day to bring her Holy Communion. However, that same night, around ten-thirty, she died peacefully.

### **A little while longer...**

On June 13, 1917, Lucia had asked the Blessed Virgin to take all three of them to Paradise. “Yes,” Mary replied. “As for Jacinta and Francisco, I will take them

shortly. But you will remain here a little while longer. He wants to establish on earth devotion to my Immaculate Heart...I will never abandon you. My Immaculate Heart will be your refuge and the way which will lead you to God." While saying these words, Lucia relates, "the Blessed Virgin spread her hands, and for the second time, gave to us the reflection of the intense light which enveloped her, in which we saw ourselves as if immersed in God. Jacinta and Francisco appeared to be in a part which was raised towards Heaven, and I was in that which spread on the earth. Above the palm of Our Lady's left hand, there was a Heart surrounded by thorns that pierced it. We understood that it was the Immaculate Heart of Mary, outraged by the sins of humanity which demanded reparation." During her illness, Jacinta had told Lucia, "You will tell the whole world that the Good Lord sends us His graces by the mediation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary; that people should not hesitate to ask it for them; that the Heart of Jesus wants to be venerated with the Immaculate Heart of Mary; that men must ask for peace from the Immaculate Heart, because God has entrusted it to Her Heart." Since then, Lucia has not stopped giving testimony to the supernatural events of Fatima. By the considerate plan of the Blessed Virgin, she was able to attend the ceremony of beatification of her two little cousins.

On this occasion, the Pope recalled, "God does not want anyone to be lost; that is why two thousand years ago He sent His Son to earth, *to seek and to save the lost* (Lk 19:10). And He saved us by His death on the cross. Let no one empty that Cross of its power!... In her motherly concern, the Blessed Virgin came here to Fatima to ask men and women 'to stop offending God, Our Lord, who is already very offended.' It is a mother's sorrow that compels her to speak; the destiny of her children is at stake. For this reason she asks the little shepherds: 'Pray, pray much and make sacrifices for sinners; many souls go to Hell because they have no one to pray and make sacrifices for them.' "

This appeal from Our Lady is addressed to every one of us, especially in this jubilee year of conversion and intercession. On April 20, 1943, Lucia specified to the Bishop of Leiria which penances God expects from His children: "The good Lord is grieved to see such a small number of souls in a state of grace, and disposed to the renunciations necessary to observe His Law. This is precisely the penitence that He now demands, the sacrifice that each person must impose on himself so as to live a just life in conformity with His Law." The message continues that God desires as mortification "no more than the simple and honest accomplishment of daily tasks, and the acceptance of difficulties and troubles; and He desires that this way be shown clearly to souls, for many imagine that penance means great austerities, and, having neither the strength nor the magnanimity to undertake it, they become discouraged and fall into a life of indifference and sin."

With the help of grace, everyone may implement this quite simple program of penitence, through the duties of daily life, drawing one's strength from recitation of and meditation on the Rosary. This is what we ask for you from the

Immaculate Heart of Mary and from Saint Joseph, as we wish each of you and your families a very Blessed Christmas and a Holy Year 2001.

Dom Antoine Marie, osb

**[Abbeye Sainte Joseph de Clairval](#)**

F-21150 Flavigny-sur-Ozerain

[Helping Hand](#)