

## 20. Death and Deliverance

Maria Rosa accompanied Lucia to the Cova on October 13, convinced they both were going to die. She saw the Miracle of the Sun. Later she was asked if she now believed that Our Lady had visited the Cova da Iria.

“I’m not quite sure,” she answered. “That it should be Our Lady is something so great that we are not worthy of it...I am still asking myself if this can be true. And I don’t know.”<sup>1</sup>

Although Lucia believed that Maria Rosa went to her grave doubting the authenticity of the Fatima apparitions, Olympia Marto maintained that Maria Rosa did come to believe in the apparitions shortly before she died. Humanly speaking, it is understandable that Maria Rosa was conflicted, for the apparitions seemed to generate familial conflict and financial hardship, which hardly seemed blessings from Heaven.<sup>2</sup>

The continual stream of visitors didn’t help either. They came almost daily, and Lucia could not be called back without bringing the sheep back too, before they were fed. Eventually Lucia’s parents decided to sell their sheep and send Lucia to school, another blow to the family’s finances.

Maria Rosa fell sick again. She saw many doctors, and her condition only worsened. A priest was called to administer the last Sacraments. Lucia remembers

“the whole family assembled to embrace her for the last time and receive her last blessing, kissing her trembling dying hand. She began with my older sisters. Being the youngest, I was last. When my poor mother saw me, she raised herself up a little, hugged me tight and said:

“My poor little girl! What will become of you without your mother? I am dying with you stuck in my heart.” At this point one of Lucia’s sisters pulled her

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aside and scolded her, saying: "Our mother is dying of sorrow because of you and all the trouble you have caused."

"I knelt down and put my head on a bench," Lucia said, "and with a deep sadness the like of which I had never felt in my life before, I offered my sacrifice to God, and begged that my mother would recover. Shortly afterwards, my two sisters, Maria and Teresa, came up to me and said:

"Lucia if you really did see Our Lady, go now to the Cova da Íria, and ask Her to heal our mother. Make Her whatever promise you like; we will fulfil it. And then we will believe."<sup>3</sup>

She went that night, praying the Rosary as she walked in the dark, and finishing it kneeling in front of the holm oak tree, now only a stump sticking a few feet out of the ground.

"I was in a flood of tears as I presented my request to Our Lady, asking Her to heal my mother and promising at the same time to go there on nine successive days with my sisters to say the Rosary on our knees as we made our way from the road to the place where the holm oak tree had been, on which She had appeared..."<sup>4</sup>

When Lucia returned home her sister Gloria said, "Lucia, come here. Mother is already better." Maria Rosa was sitting up in bed drinking chicken broth. She asked Lucia: "Did you go ask Our Lady to heal me?" Lucia said yes, and explained the promise she made to the Blessed Virgin if Maria Rosa recovered. Antonio pledged that the whole family would return to the Cova on nine successive days as soon as Maria Rosa was up to it.

"From the third day of her recovery onwards," said Lucia, "my mother continued her normal life for many years, though from time to time she did have a certain amount of discomfort, but nothing that prevented her from carrying out her ordinary household tasks."<sup>5</sup> The entire family went to the Cova for nine successive days to fulfill Lucia's promise. The mood at the Cova and in the dos Santos' home was one of joyful thanksgiving. The family feasted, prayed, and laughed and talked together, just like the days before the apparitions.

Death had been averted, thanks to Our Lady of the

## *Sister Lucia*

Rosary; but death came on July 31, 1919 to the dos Santos home. On July 30, Lucia's father contracted double pneumonia and asked Maria Rosa to get a priest. The priest did not think Antonio was seriously ill, and did not come right away. He was passing by the Marto house, less than one hundred yards away,<sup>6</sup> when Antonio died in the arms of Maria Rosa and his sister, Olympia Marto.

Antonio Santos has probably been treated too severely by some Fatima historians.<sup>7</sup> In her fifth Memoir Lucia takes issue with negative characterizations of her father made by Fatima historians like Father de Marchi and William Thomas Walsh. Antonio's problems — drinking, gambling, poor business decisions, and familial neglect — seemed to coincide with the apparitions (and everything that came along with them). Lucia does acknowledge a change in her father after the apparitions began, but disputes the charge that he squandered family finances, and that he was a drunkard.

According to Lucia, Antonio's main vice was a love of card playing, which appears to have been a refuge for him during and after the apparitions. As for the drinking, Lucia maintains:

"If my father did sometimes drink a little more than those who drank nothing, he never carried it to the point of creating disorder at home, nor of ill-treating his wife and children. He was a sincere and honest man and, although he died within 24 hours of double pneumonia, he left his family neither weighed down in debt nor with the burden of any troublesome business.

"If it is true (she continues) that some years passed without his having made his Easter duty in the parish, because of a disagreement that he had with the parish priest, he did not stop going every year, to Our Lady of Ortiga, on Her feast day and there he confessed and received Holy Communion in order to gain the jubilee indulgence."<sup>8</sup>

Lucia admits that "it was after Mass, in the company of his friends, that he delayed longer coming home and, at night, when he came from work...he remained longer talking

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and in the tavern, and came home late; with that, my mother was very distressed..."<sup>9</sup>

It is reasonable to believe that Lucia knew her father better than historians. Let us let her have the final say regarding Antonio dos Santos:

"I feel entirely at peace, with respect to the eternal salvation of my father, certain that the Lord received his beautiful soul into the arms of His infinite Mercy and presented him into the full possession of the immense Being of God, our Father.

"As I write this, I am recalling the story of King David, who — in spite of having been such a great sinner — was chosen by God to have among his descendants, St. Joseph, Our Lady and Jesus Christ, Son of David — Hosanna to the Son of David! — The One Who said He had come to save sinners, because it is not the healthy who need the doctor, but, indeed, it is the sick."<sup>10</sup>

Lucia obviously loved and respected her father, and bore no grudges against him for the difficulties between them. We could do worse than emulate her, particularly if we each recall our own awkward, backhanded attempts to respond to grace; or times in our own lives that were traumatic and stressful, and our imperfect responses to life as God gives it to us in this vale of tears.

### Notes

1. Sixth Memoir, pp. 150-151.
2. Lucia's belief is from her Fifth Memoir. Olympia's opinion is from Pelletier, op. cit., p. 159, fn 5. One advantage Olympia's opinion has is that she was with Maria Rosa in her final days; Lucia was not permitted to leave her convent to visit her dying mother.
3. Sixth Memoir, pp. 151-152.
4. Ibid., p. 152.
5. Ibid., p. 156.
6. Pelletier, op. cit., p. 150, fn 2. It appears Antonio had gone to Confession and received Communion earlier in the month in which he died. See also Frère Michel de la Sainte Trinité, *The Whole Truth About Fatima*, Volume II, *The Secret and the Church*, Immaculate Heart Publications, 1989, p. 197.
7. Accusations of drunkenness, financial irresponsibility, and familial neglect were based in part on statements made by Lucia in her earlier Memoirs — statements she later either retracted or amended — and in part on testimony by various family members, and others, including Olympia Marto. Fr. de Marchi and Canon Barthas also maintain Antonio had a habit of making "vulgar" and "obscene" remarks about what was happening at the Cova da Iria.
8. Fifth Memoir, pp. 41-42.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid., p. 36.