

## 22.

# Jacinta Follows Her Brother to Heaven

Fatima's cemetery was just across the road from the parish church. Four boys dressed in white carried a little coffin, which was put into the ground without a monument, until Lucia marked Francisco's grave with a simple wooden cross.

Jacinta had been moved into Francisco's bed. Too ill to attend her brother's funeral, she lay there alone in silent anguish. No sacrifice is pleasant, but there was a particular bitterness to Jacinta's sufferings. She missed her brother terribly ("I'd give anything to see him again"), but was unable even to pray at his grave.

Her influenza had turned into bronchial pneumonia, which in turn developed into purulent pleurisy. Jacinta didn't have long to live, but her final months would be a steep uphill climb, as her young Catholic soul struggled to turn her increasingly dire situation into gold for the conversion of sinners. She was accompanied along her *Via Dolorosa* by the beautiful Lady from the Cova da Iria.

She visited Jacinta during Francisco's last days. "Our Lady came to see us," she told Lucia. "She told us She would come to take Francisco to Heaven very soon, and She asked me if I still wanted to convert more sinners. I said I did. She told me I would be going to a hospital where I would suffer a great deal; and that I am to suffer for the conversion of sinners, in reparation for the sins committed against the Immaculate Heart of Mary, and for love of Jesus. I asked if you would go with me. She said you wouldn't, and that is what I find hardest. She said my mother would take me, and then I would have to stay there all alone."<sup>1</sup>

Not much later Ti Marto carefully placed Jacinta's emaciated body on a donkey and took her to Ourem. She stayed in a hospital there for two months, and came home worse than when she left. Now she had an open wound in her chest that needed constant attention in order to avoid infection. The wound became infected anyway. Father

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Formigao came to see her, and wrote:

"Jacinta is like a skeleton and her arms are shockingly thin. Since she left the local hospital where she underwent two months' useless treatment, the fever has never left her. She looks pathetic. Tuberculosis, after an attack of bronchial pneumonia and purulent pleurisy, is undermining her enfeebled constitution. Only careful treatment in a good sanatorium can save her, but her parents cannot undertake the expense which such a treatment involves."<sup>2</sup>

Lucia would go to the Cabeco to pray, and bring back wild flowers for Jacinta. She looked at them and began crying. She gave Lucia her rope which, like Francisco's, was knotted and stained with blood. And she put up with visitors without the slightest impatience. Once again the Blessed Virgin visited Jacinta, who told Lucia:

"She told me that I am going to Lisbon to another hospital; that I will not see you again, nor my parents either, and after suffering a great deal, I shall die alone. But She said I must not be afraid, since She Herself is coming to take me to Heaven."

The thought of being alone was what tortured the small girl the most. Lucia told her to think of other things, and Jacinta replied, "Let me think about it, for the more I think the more I suffer, and I want to suffer for love of Our Lord and for sinners. Anyway, I don't mind! Our Lady will come to me there and take me to Heaven."<sup>3</sup>

Jacinta advised Lucia: "I shall go to Heaven very soon. You must stay to tell people that God wants to establish in the world devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. When you have to say this don't hide, but tell everybody that God gives us His grace through the Immaculate Heart and that people must ask it through Her and that the Sacred Heart of Jesus wants the Immaculate Heart of Mary by His side. They must ask peace through the Immaculate Heart because God has given it to Her. I wish I could put into everybody the fire that I have here in my heart which makes me love the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary so much!"<sup>4</sup>

At times she would offer her fear and her physical agony to Heaven with heartbreaking courage. Seizing a crucifix and kissing it, she exclaimed, "O my Jesus! I love You, and I want

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to suffer very much for love of You...O Jesus! Now You can convert many sinners, because this is really a big sacrifice."<sup>5</sup>

Shortly before leaving for a sanatorium in Lisbon,<sup>6</sup> Jacinta made a final trip to the Cova, on a donkey. Olympia Marto remembered: "She got off the donkey and began to say the Rosary alone. She picked a few flowers for the chapel. When we arrived, we knelt down and she prayed a little in her own way. 'Mother,' she said when she got up, 'when Our Lady went away She passed over those trees and afterwards She went into Heaven so quickly that I thought She would get Her feet caught!'"<sup>7</sup>

"The day came at last," Lucia wrote, "when she was to leave for Lisbon. It was a heartrending farewell. For a long time she clung to me with her arms around my neck and sobbed: 'We shall never see each other again! Pray a lot for me until I go to Heaven. Then I will pray a lot for you. Never tell the Secret to anyone, even if they kill you. Love Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary very much, and make many sacrifices for sinners.'

"From Lisbon," Lucia continued, "she sent me word that Our Lady had come to see her there; She had told her the day and hour of her death. Finally, Jacinta reminded me to be very good."<sup>8</sup>

"How sad I was to find myself alone," Lucia wrote. "In such a short space of time, our dear Lord had taken to Heaven my beloved father, and then Francisco; and now He was taking Jacinta, whom I was never to see again in this world.

"As soon as I could I slipped away to the Cabeco, and hid within our cave among the rocks. There, alone with God, I poured forth my grief, and shed tears in abundance. Coming back down the slope, everything reminded me of my dear companions; the stones on which we had so often sat, the flowers I no longer picked, not having anyone to take them to; Valinhos, where the three of us had enjoyed the delights of Paradise!

"As though I had lost all sense of reality, and still half abstracted, I went into my aunt's house one day and made for Jacinta's room, calling out to her. Her sister Teresa, seeing me like that, barred the way, and reminded me that Jacinta was no longer there!

"Shortly afterwards,<sup>9</sup> news arrived that she had taken

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flight to Heaven. Her body was then brought back to Vila Nova de Ourem. My aunt took me there one day to pray beside the mortal remains of her little daughter, in the hope of thus distracting me. But for a long time after, my sorrow seemed only to grow ever greater. Whenever I found the cemetery open, I went and sat by Francisco's grave, or beside my father's, and there I spent long hours."<sup>10</sup>

Lucia's landscape had changed dramatically in three years. Once the pride of her family, and perhaps the most popular child in Aljustrel, she became an object of mockery and violence, estranged from her family, her parish priest, and many of her former friends. Conversely, she was seen as a prophetess, a mystic, an insider into Heaven's secrets, even a living saint.

She was now thirteen years old. The beautiful Lady didn't come to the Cova any more, but government soldiers did. Her father was dead, and so were her two dearest friends in the world, the only people who really understood Lucia and what she had been through. She was a stranger in a strange land. Her friends were solitude and grief, and a heavenly companion who appeared only a few years older than Lucia herself.

"Do you suffer a great deal?" She had asked Lucia. "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." Life would never be the same for Lucia, for Heaven was more real to her than earth. Imagine how tightly she held onto the beautiful Lady's assurances, and how the sorrowful and Immaculate Heart of the beautiful Lady enfolded Lucia, a maternal – perhaps even sisterly – embrace of a lost and lonely sparrow who had forgotten how to sing.

### Notes

1. First Memoir, p. 42.
2. De Marchi, op. cit., p. 199.
3. First Memoir, p. 45.
4. Father John de Marchi, *Fatima From the Beginning* (6<sup>th</sup> edition, Fatima, 1986), p. 192.
5. First Memoir, p. 45.
6. At the last minute a doctor had offered to pay expenses for Jacinta's care there; prior to that both her parents doubted Jacinta's insistence that Our Lady told her she would go to Lisbon and die there.
7. TWTAF, Vol. II, op. cit., p. 144.
8. First Memoir, p. 46.
9. Jacinta left for Lisbon on January 21, 1920. She died there, alone, on February 20, 1920.
10. Second Memoir, p. 94.