

23.

Lucia Leaves Fatima

Being around much death and suffering takes a toll, and Lucia's health began to fail. She became pale and listless. Some were concerned enough to ask Maria Rosa to let Lucia live with them for brief periods, in the hope that a change of scenery would revive her. Maria Rosa consented.

"When away from home like this," Lucia wrote, "I did not always meet with esteem and affection. While there were some who admired me and considered me a saint, there were always others who heaped abuse upon me and called me a hypocrite, a visionary, and a sorceress.

"This was the good Lord's way of throwing salt into the water to prevent it from going bad. Thanks to this Divine Providence, I went through the fire without being burned, or without becoming acquainted with the little worm of vanity which has the habit of gnawing its way into everything.

"On such occasions I used to think to myself: 'They are all mistaken. I'm not a saint, as some say, and I'm not a liar either, as others say. Only God knows what I am.'"¹

For all the losses she had suffered, Lucia remained unusually well balanced for a thirteen-year-old. There was not a trace of vanity or self-pity in her. This was well, for national and international politics were being brought to bear on Fatima and, inevitably, upon Lucia herself.

Diplomatic relations between the Portuguese Republic and the Vatican were finally restored in 1918. The following year Pope Benedict XV urged Portuguese Catholics to submit themselves to the Masonic government. This good will gesture fell upon ears of stone, as the Republic continued persecuting the Church and attacking the Fatima apparitions. The Patriarch of Lisbon, Cardinal Mendes Belo, joined in by threatening to excommunicate any priest who spoke in favor of Fatima.² The Cardinal may have been exercising the prudence customary of the Church with new apparitions, or perhaps he was trying to maintain a working

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relationship with the Republic. In either case one can appreciate the courage it took for priests like Father Cruz and Canon Formigao to befriend Lucia, Francisco, and Jacinta.

The diocese of Leiria, which included Fatima, was also restored, and in 1920 obtained a bishop: Dom Jose Alves Correia da Silva, whose Celtic face belied his Portuguese heritage. A frequent pilgrim to Lourdes, His Excellency had suffered as a priest under the Republic. Taken from his rectory and imprisoned, he was forced to stand in icy water day and night, which left him able to walk only with difficulty. Small wonder he had a particular devotion to Our Lady of Sorrows.

Bishop da Silva's first order of business was figuring out what to do about Fatima. He arranged an interview with Lucia and Maria Rosa on June 13, the feast of St. Anthony. He asked Lucia if she would like to go to school. She said yes. He said the school was run by the Sisters of Saint Dorothy in Porto. Lucia nodded in agreement. Maria Rosa nodded emphatically; Fatima still perplexed her, and the continual stream of visitors and the exalted deference they gave Lucia drove her past distraction. Perhaps it would be best for all if Lucia left home.

His Excellency told Lucia she would have to leave in four days. She agreed. He told her she could not tell anyone where she was going. This meant Lucia could not say good-bye to Ti Marto and Olympia, or Maria Carreira, but Lucia agreed not to tell anyone. Then he told her she must not tell anyone at the school who she was. Lucia agreed. The final stipulation was that Lucia not mention the Fatima apparitions to anyone. She agreed.³

In the short time left to her, Lucia said good-bye to places and things, not people. The night before she was to leave Fatima — forever, for all she knew — she went to “all the familiar places so dear to us.” She meant herself and her two cousins, who would ever be in her thoughts.

“My heart was torn with loneliness and longing, for I was sure I would never set foot again on the Cabeco, the Rock, Valinhos, or in the parish church where our dear Lord had begun His work of mercy, and the cemetery, where rested the mortal remains of my beloved father and of Francisco, whom I could still never forget.

Sister Lucia

“I said good-bye to our well, already illumined by the pale rays of the moon, and to the old threshing-floor where I had so often spent long hours contemplating the beauty of the starlit heavens, and the wonders of sunrise and sunset which so enraptured me. I loved to watch the rays of the sun reflected in the dew drops, so that the mountains seemed covered with pearls in the morning sunshine; and in the evening, after a snowfall, to see the snowflakes sparkling on the pine trees was like a foretaste of the beauties of Paradise.

“Without saying farewell to anyone, I left the next day at two o’clock in the morning, accompanied by my mother and a poor laborer called Manuel Correia, who was going to Leiria. I carried my secret with me, inviolate.

“We went by way of the Cova da Iria, so that I could bid it my last farewell. There, for the last time, I prayed my Rosary. As long as this place was still in sight, I kept turning round to say a last good-bye.”⁴

Out of prudence and humility, Lucia omitted a meeting she had at the Cova on the evening of June 16. A short distance from where Lucia prayed, the beautiful Lady stood where the first steps of the Basilica would one day be.⁵ The two beheld each other for a time in silence. Perhaps Lucia was once more stunned to silence by the Lady’s beauty, or perhaps words were not necessary here at this blessed place where Heaven met earth, and handed to a rough peasant girl the will of God and the secrets of Heaven.

Wordlessly they parted. The Lady probably left first, for how could Lucia leave Her? What was the significance of this silent encounter? Only Heaven and perhaps Lucia knew with certainty. Perhaps the Lady willed to provide Lucia some companionship, to give her someone to say good-bye to, or simply to abide with her in her loneliness.

Lucia may have thought she would never return to Fatima, but she surely knew that the Lady would return to her.

Notes

1. Second Memoir, pp. 93-94.

2. Walsh, *op. cit.*, p. 177.

3. So say most Fatima historians, including Fr. de Marchi, William Thomas Walsh, and Frère Michel. According to Sr. Lucia, however, she and Maria Rosa were quite reluctant for Lucia to go to Porto. They had made plans for Lucia to travel to Lisbon to stay with Dona Assuncao, a close friend of the family. Moreover, Lucia states she was

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much more reluctant to leave Fatima: “No, I won’t go,” she told herself. “I prefer to go to Lisbon or to Santarem. If I am there, I can come back to Fatima from time to time, see my family and keep in touch with them. If I go to Porto, none of this will be possible! No, I won’t go! I said ‘yes’ to the Bishop but now I say that I have changed my mind and I don’t want to go there!” It took the intervention of the Vicar of Olival to persuade Lucia — and Maria Rosa — that Lucia should leave Fatima and go to Porto. See Sixth Memoir, pp. 178-184.

4. Second Memoir, pp. 96-97.

5. Lucia told this to a close, reliable friend of hers who in turn related it to Father Joseph Pelletier (*op. cit.*, p. 139).