

28.

Our Lady Orders: Write Down Third Secret (1944)

The year following Maria Rosa's death saw Sister Lucia become so ill that Bishop da Silva worried she might follow her mother to the grave.

Lucia had a good constitution, but from time to time she would experience bronchial difficulties (this was why she went to Rianjo in 1931). In the summer of 1943, however, Lucia came down with pneumonia, which turned into pleurisy. She was gravely ill. Lucia has never been dramatic, so one may take her words to Bishop da Silva seriously:

"Perhaps all this is the beginning of the end, and I am happy. It is good that as my mission on earth is being completed, the good Lord prepares for me the way to Heaven."¹

But Bishop da Silva did not consider Sister Lucia's mission completed – not when Lucia was the only living person who knew the last part of the Fatima Secret (commonly called the Third Secret). He was relieved to see Lucia's health improve in July. Unfortunately, an injection Lucia received caused an infection, and then a relapse of pleurisy. In August she wrote to Father Aparicio:

"I live here in complete abandonment between the hands of God. I follow events according as He disposes them, striving to do in all things His Most Holy Will manifested directly, or indirectly through the person representing Him for me. The publication of so many things, which I tried so carefully to hide, costs me, but if this poor sacrifice serves in some way for His glory and the good of souls, I am content. I have no other desire."²

The following month Sister Lucia again contracted an infection from an injection of vaccine. Bishop da Silva visited her in the infirmary and spoke to her about the Third Secret. Perhaps because of Lucia's condition he did not formally

Sister Lucia

order her to write the Third Secret down on paper, but his suggestion that she could do so “if she wished” plunged Lucia into confusion.

“It seems to me (she wrote) that to write it down is already in a way to disclose it, and I do not yet have Our Lord’s permission for that. In any case, as I am used to seeing the will of God in the wishes of my superiors, I am thinking of obedience, and I don’t know what to do. I prefer an express command which I can rely on before God, so that I can say in all security, ‘They ordered me that, Lord.’ But those words, ‘if you wish,’ disturb me and leave me perplexed.”³

She decided not to commit the Third Secret to paper without an express command to do so. To Sister Lucia’s relief that command came in October, via a letter from Bishop da Silva ordering her to write down the Third Secret. Matters became complicated again, however, because Lucia did not receive confirmation from Heaven to obey Bishop da Silva, a confirmation she had invariably received and relied upon in the past. Her anxiety returned, and she told her confessor:

“They have ordered me to write down the part of the Secret that Our Lady revealed in 1917, and which I still keep hidden, by command of the Lord. They tell me either to write it in the notebooks in which I’ve been told to keep my spiritual diary, or, if I wish, to write it on a sheet of paper, put it in an envelope, and then close it and seal it up.”⁴

Lucia could not decide what to do, and this indecision lasted two months. It is clear her will was to immediately obey commands – but which commands? Was the silence of Heaven a command that Lucia likewise keep silence? Or should she obey Bishop da Silva? The dilemma caused her prolonged anguish. Several times she sat down to write the Secret but was literally unable to do so. Sister Lucia told her confessor that this inability was not the effect of natural causes.⁵

The crisis was resolved sometime between January 2 and January 9, 1944, when Lucia was finally able to write the words of the Third Secret on a sheet of paper,⁶ thanks to what Father Alonso called a “special intervention from Heaven.” Lucia’s Superior, Mother Cunha Mattos, was more specific, stating that Our Lady appeared to Sister Lucia on January 2, 1944, and told her to write the third part of the Secret.⁷

Apostle of Mary's Immaculate Heart

On January 9 Sister Lucia wrote Bishop da Silva in understated fashion:

"I have written what you asked me; God willed to try me a little, but finally this was indeed His will: (the text) is sealed in an envelope and it is in the notebooks..."⁸

It is evident that the contents of the Third Secret were of significant import, given Lucia's struggle to commit the Secret to paper, and the steps she took afterwards to make sure the sealed envelope was received, unopened, by Bishop da Silva. It would not be mailed, and could not be given to just any messenger. Months passed.

On June 17, 1944, Lucia met Bishop Manuel Maria Ferreira da Silva, titular Archbishop of Gurza, in Valencia do Minho, a small town on the Spanish-Portuguese border. She handed over the small sealed envelope, and within a few hours the Bishop of Gurza turned the Third Secret over to Bishop da Silva, along with another letter to him by Sister Lucia that he read.

Lucia's letter contained certain suggestions: that Bishop da Silva keep the Third Secret until his death, and then have it turned over to the Cardinal Patriarch at Lisbon. "It also seems certain," writes Father Alonso, the Church-appointed historian of Fatima, "an agreement was made between the Bishop of Leiria and Sister Lucia that the document would be opened *'not before 1960, and by all means after the death of Lucia it can be opened.'* A coincidental series of authorized statements obliges us to hold as certain these propositions."⁹

A number of sources affirm this stipulation: Bishop da Silva, Sister Lucia, Canon Barthas, Portuguese Primate Cardinal Cerejeira, Cardinal Tisserant, Cardinal Piazza, and da Silva's successor, Bishop Venancio.¹⁰ Cardinal Ottaviani, prefect of the Holy Office, declared:

"In May of 1955, I asked Lucia the reason for that date. She answered, 'Because then it will seem clearer.' This made me think the message was prophetic in tone, for it is precisely in prophecy, as we so often read in Sacred Scripture, that there exists a veil of mystery...'Then,' she said, 'in 1960 it will seem clearer.'"¹¹

Sister Lucia

Nothing prevented Bishop da Silva from opening the envelope immediately and reading the sheet of paper therein. "Lucia said only that it could be made known immediately, if the Bishop so commanded. But she did not say that it had to be opened immediately."¹² Bishop da Silva did not open the envelope. He sealed it within a larger envelope and placed it in his office safe. "It is not my duty to interfere in this matter," he told Canon Galamba. "Heaven's secrets are not for me, nor do I need to burden myself with this responsibility."¹³

Sister Lucia, who had borne the burden of the Third Secret for twenty-seven years, had the strange feeling that at last there was nothing more for her to reveal.

Notes

1. Frère Michel de la Sainte Trinité, *The Whole Truth About Fatima*, Vol III, *The Third Secret*, Immaculate Heart Publications, 1990, p. 38 (hereinafter cited as TWTA, Vol. III, op. cit.).
2. *Ibid.*, p. 39.
3. Joaquin Maria Alonso, C.M.F., *The Secret of Fatima, Fact and Legend*, English translation, The Ravengate Press, Cambridge, 1979, pp. 37-38.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 39.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 41.
6. This either occurred when Lucia was in the infirmary in Tuy, or in the Tuy chapel where she received the revelation that the time had come for the Pope, in union with the bishops, to consecrate Russia to the Immaculate Heart.
7. Frère François, *Fatima: Intimate Joy, World Event*, Book Four, *Fatima: Tragedy and Triumph*, English translation published by Immaculate Heart Publications, 1994, p. 35, fn. 13 (hereinafter cited as FIJWE, Book Four, op. cit.).
8. Quoted by Father Alonso, *Fatima 50*, October 13, 1967, p. 11. See also TWTA, Vol. III, op. cit., p. 47.
9. Alonso, op. cit., p. 44. See also Alonso, *La Verdad Sobre el Secreto de Fatima*, Ejercito Azul, Madrid, 1988, p. 38.
10. *Ibid.*, pp. 45-46.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 47.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 47.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 45. Bishop da Silva tried to give the envelope containing the Third Secret to Cardinal Cerejeira, and then to Rome. Both parties advised him to keep it.