

32. Sister Lucia Enters Carmel (1948)

Lucia's first attempt to enter the Carmelite Order was while she was at the boarding school in Vilar. Her Mother Superior discouraged her from being a Carmelite, suggesting instead that she become a Dorothean Sister. Lucia obeyed.

As the time for pronouncing her final vows to the Dorothean Order neared, Lucia's correspondence with Father Aparicio reveals she was still longing to be a Carmelite:

"I received a letter from Father Aparicio in which he told me that he would come to Tuy as soon as I return there. I hope that he will bring me some decisions with respect to the Carmelites. May God will that decision will be my going to the Carmelites, although I am a bit afraid because of my health; however I am confident that if the good God permits me to join the Carmelites, He will give me the strength; weak as I am in reality. It seems to me also that I have the reputation of weakness but none of its benefits."¹

The efforts of Father Aparicio were in vain, and in obedience to her superiors, Sister Lucia continued on in the Dorothean Order. During her emotional return to Fatima in 1946, Lucia noticed the Carmelites were becoming established there. "Who would have granted me the privilege of going to Carmel?" she wrote later. "But I was well aware that this permission would not be granted me...Also, it was more prudent not even to ask for it."²

Lucia's Dorothean Superior was fond of her and desired her to stay. So did Bishop da Silva, because he had an affection for the Dorotheans, and was able to visit and communicate with Sister Lucia easily. Among the Sisters there was a happy complacency with having the last surviving seer of Fatima in the Dorothean Order. Lucia herself retained fond memories of her years as a Dorothean; her continued desire to become a Carmelite was a supernatural impulse, not a merely human preference.

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Lucia's vocation was at an impasse until she wrote Pope Pius XII, requesting a transfer to the Carmelite Order. In her letter, she wrote: "I would like to live a life of greater austerity. I would like to be less known. I wish people would not surround me with such an environment of veneration which fills me with confusion."³

Pius XII intervened on Sister Lucia's behalf, but the opposition to Lucia leaving the Dorothean Order stiffened. Father Alonso wrote:

"When her superiors, as well as the Bishop of Leiria, put up the greatest difficulties for this change, Lucia threatened to withdraw to a Carmel of Spain which the Archbishop of Valladolid had just founded at Tordesillas on June 23, 1945. The decision came like lightning: she would enter the Carmel of Coimbra."⁴

On March 25, the feast of the Annunciation and Holy Thursday, 1948, Sister Lucia entered the Carmelite Order. She received the name "Sister Mary Lucia of the Immaculate Heart." One may assume that her stubbornness regarding being a Carmelite was not simply a matter of wanting her own way about things. That would have been totally out of character for Sister Lucia. She had, in fact, wanted to be a Carmelite for about twenty-five years, but remained obedient to the wishes of her superiors.

It seems reasonable to conclude that the desire to be a Carmelite was God's will for Sister Lucia. Perhaps the designs of Providence in this regard had even been traced in the sky on October 13, 1917, when Lucia saw Our Lady of Mount Carmel in the Portuguese sky. It was a supernatural impetus that accounted for Lucia's appeal to Pius XII. Although Pius never contacted Lucia directly concerning the matter, he sent her two medals; one was commemorative of the dogma of the Assumption.

Lucia entered Carmel and became dead to the world, living a life of renunciation, penance, prayer, and contemplation until she died. Little is known of her secret life except what can be gleaned from occasional correspondence that has been published over the years, and occasional contacts she had with the outside world, including the Vatican. She entered Carmel respected and admired inside and even outside the Church. Sister Lucia was seen as very

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holy and entirely credible in her person and her statements regarding Fatima. The publishing of her Memoirs increased the respect and deference of others. It can be assumed that she remained at Carmel what she had been before entrance. Canon Galamba saw her prior to her admission to Carmel and remarked:

“Like her cousins, Lucia was unpolished. ...If we had only the photographs of that time (the Apparitions) which have survived, many specialists would make a false judgment on the degree of her intelligence and her other qualities...Thanks be to God, Lucia is not dead, and we can, with the unrolling of the years, make a detailed analytical study of her personality.

“After spending a half-hour with her, one’s impressions are totally different. She is simple and is not anxious about her manner of being or presenting herself. She does not make herself noticed by her aspect, words or glances. She converses like any other religious, and when the occasion presents itself, she is spiritual and joyful, but of a moderate joy, modest and balanced.

“She does not speak arrogantly or haughtily, but she only ventures her opinion timidly, if they oblige her. She does not like to speak about the apparitions, and to broach the subject is always delicate and risks offending her. When she feels obliged to do it, she does it naturally, modestly, and with assurance. She does not treat her purely interior motions without an accompanying ‘it seems to me,’ ‘if I am not mistaken,’ or similar formulas.

“Her look is serene, her way of speaking sedate, her whole being is calm. There is nothing in her which can, even from a distance, give us the idea of a neurotic, exalted person, or of a visionary. She expresses herself with great facility and a natural elegance, remarkable for a person deprived of every literary formation. She is endowed with a very faithful, rapid and extraordinary memory. Words and actions seem to remain firmly imprinted in her memory and imagination. Her intelligence is lucid, brilliant, and she possesses an admirable faculty for discernment and reasoning.

“In her growing up days, before leaving her family and her native land, she had nothing of the bizarre of affected. One would have said she was a young girl like any other. As

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a religious, understood or not understood, she has always been exemplary, and the other novices and professed Sisters, even before knowing who she was, enjoyed a great deal being with her and associating with her as a close friend.

“In physical and moral suffering, she always knew how to stay full of joy, or at least, of the supernatural conformity with the most holy will of God. She revealed a great docility to the orders of her superiors, in whom she always recognized the Divine authority. She was no less respectful towards her spiritual directors, as towards the venerable Bishop of Leiria...whose opinion she asked for and which she generally adopted, with humility and confidence, even when it was contrary to her own manner of seeing and feeling.

“This is the unanimous opinion of all those who have approached her or studied her with calm and impartiality...There is truly nothing in her personality which permits judging that her declarations were the fruit of her own imagination or the effect of an action exercised over her by some other person.”⁵

It has been necessary at times to include rather lengthy commentaries on the person of Sister Lucia by those who knew her well, since she was so entirely self-effacing. She was known by many credible, holy Churchmen whose opinions may not be dismissed. Their unanimity regarding her holiness, her virtues, and her personality carries weight.

Yet Sister Lucia, it seems, was not interested in what others thought of her. One of the many constants in her personality was a dislike of interviews. She must have thought that in entering Carmel she was escaping at least this one cross. She surely thought her public life was ended, and for the most part, it was. But she still thought about Fatima continually, particularly the unfinished Consecration of Russia to the Immaculate Heart of the beautiful Lady, and the Third Secret, which she had entrusted to the Church to be revealed in 1960.

Sister Lucia was not the only one thinking about Fatima. During the next ten years interested parties would enter Carmel to question Lucia further about the meaning of the Fatima Message, and she would answer them in sometimes startling fashion.

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Notes

1. FIJWE, Book Four, op. cit., p. 15.
2. Ibid., p. 18.
3. *Fatima Findings*, Vol. XIV, No. 2, June 1959.
4. As quoted in TWTAf, Vol. III, op. cit., pp. 237-238.
5. As quoted in FIJWE, Book Four, op. cit., pp. 16-18.