

# 11.

## Fatima Village Responds

Lucia went to sleep on the evening of May 13 with the assurance that no one knew of the beautiful Lady at the Cova except for she and her cousins. The next day she learned different. Her oldest sister, Maria dos Anjos, remembers:

“First thing in the morning, a neighbor came and told me that Jacinta’s mother had said the child told her a most extraordinary thing. When I heard it, it gave me rather a shock, and I went straight to Lucia who was sitting under a fig-tree doing I forget what.

“‘Lucia,’ I said to her, ‘I heard that you saw Our Lady in the Cova da Iria. Is it true?’

“‘Who told you?’ she almost gasped.

“‘The neighbors are saying that Jacinta came out with it to Olympia.’ Lucia thought for a while and then said to me: ‘And I told her so many times not to tell anyone!’

“I asked her why, and she said it was because she didn’t know if it was really Our Lady, though it was a beautiful Lady.

“‘What did She say to you?’

“‘That She wanted us to go for six months running to the Cova da Iria and that She would tell us later what She wanted...’

“It seemed as if she didn’t want to tell me any more, but I almost forced her to. I don’t think I ever saw Lucia so sad.”<sup>1</sup>

Later that day, when the children returned home with the sheep, they were greeted with mock applause by their neighbors, and taunts about their visit from Heaven. Worst of all, for Lucia anyway, was that Maria Rosa knew. Depressed over the changes in her family and their fortunes, still struggling to recover from a severe illness, and now stung by the laughter of Aljustrel, Maria Rosa bent her will to make her youngest daughter recant.

“One day, before I set out with the flock (Lucia wrote),

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she was determined to make me confess that I was telling lies, and to this end she spared neither caresses, nor threats, nor even the broomstick. To all this she received nothing but a mute silence, or the confirmation of all that I had already said. She told me to go and let out the sheep, and during the day to consider well that she had never tolerated a single lie among her children, and much less would she allow a lie of this kind. She warned me that she would force me, that very evening, to go to those people whom I had deceived, confess that I had lied, and ask their pardon."<sup>2</sup>

Lucia could not hide her tears when she met Francisco and Jacinta that morning. "What am I to do?" she asked them. "My mother is determined at all costs to make me say that I was lying. But how can I?" Perhaps because he had no answer, Francisco began rebuking Jacinta for causing Lucia's sadness. Jacinta, heartbroken, knelt and wept, begging them both for forgiveness, and swearing never to say another word about it.

Surely all three remembered the beautiful Lady's words: "You are going to have much to suffer, but the grace of God will be your comfort." They offered their lot as a sacrifice and, far from feeling sorry for themselves, began offering other sacrifices throughout their day.

The Lady had told the children She would visit them on June 13. This was also a great feast day in Portugal: the feast of St. Anthony of Lisbon, the patron saint of Portugal. St. Anthony was also the patron saint of the Fatima church, and every June 13 all the hamlets emptied into Fatima for a day of religious merrymaking: High Masses, sermons, decorated carts, flagging of streets, rockets and bombs.

There would be a colorful procession Lucia loved to be part of, music, feasting, and the giving out of "St. Anthony's bread": fine white loaves baked and wrapped, and placed in decorated ox carts by St. Anthony's parish, where the poor and children could eat their fill and take the rest home.

Her oldest sister, Maria dos Anjos, remembers:

"Our mother knew well how Lucia loved the *festa*, and she hoped the whole story of the Cova da Iria would pass with it. 'It is a good thing we are having St. Anthony tomorrow,' she said, 'and we mustn't say anything to Lucia about going to the Cova. We must

## *Sister Lucia*

talk of nothing but the *fešta*, so that by tomorrow she will have forgotten the other foolishness.'

"We were very careful to do what our mother told us, but of all our plans and preparations, Lucia seemed to take little notice. Except that once in a while she would remind us, 'Tomorrow I'm going to the Cova da Iria; that is what the Lady told us we must do.'"<sup>3</sup>

Would Lucia go to the *fešta* or to the Cova? On the morning of June 13 she rose at daybreak to take the sheep out. She dressed in her finest clothes, including a new pair of unscuffed shoes. Observing the care with which Lucia clothed herself, Maria Rosa breathed a sigh of relief, and perhaps said a prayer thanking St. Anthony for bringing her youngest daughter back to her senses.

Lucia soon returned home with the sheep, and found a group of people waiting outside her house. The strangers<sup>4</sup> asked if she was going to the Cova da Iria. Lucia told them she was on her way to Mass, but would return home afterwards. The group decided to wait for her in the shade of a fig tree, where they were subjected to no small amount of sarcastic comment by Maria Rosa and her daughters. "My mother and my sisters persisted in their contemptuous attitude," wrote Lucia, "and this cut me to the heart, and was indeed as hurtful to me as insults."

After Mass Lucia rounded up Francisco and Jacinta, and with the group of strangers, headed for the Cova.

"All these people followed us (wrote Lucia), asking a thousand questions. On that day, I was overwhelmed with bitterness. I could see that my mother was deeply distressed, and that she wanted at all costs to compel me, as she put it, to admit that I had lied. I wanted so much to do as she wished, but the only way I could do so was to tell a lie. From the cradle, she had instilled into her children a great horror of lying, and she used to chastise severely any one of us who told an untruth.

"'I've seen to it,' she often said, 'that my children always told the truth, and am I now to let the youngest get away with a thing like this? If it were just a small thing...! But a lie of such proportions, deceiving so many people and bringing them all the way here!' After these bitter complaints, she

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would turn to me, saying: 'Make up your mind which you want! Either undo all this deception by telling these people that you've lied, or I'll lock you up in a dark room where you won't even see the light of the sun. After all the troubles I've been through, and now a thing like this to happen!' My sisters sided with my mother, and all around me the atmosphere was one of utter scorn and contempt.

"Then I would remember the old days (Lucia continued), and ask myself: 'Where is all that affection now, that my family had for me just a short while ago?' My one relief was to weep before the Lord as I offered Him my sacrifice...When Jacinta saw me in tears, she tried to console me, saying, 'Don't cry. Surely, these are the sacrifices which the Angel said that God was going to send us. That's why you are suffering, so that you can make reparation to Him and convert sinners.'"<sup>5</sup>

Lucia kept plodding up to the Cova, surrounded by people she didn't know, and two cousins she had initially had mixed feelings about. Perhaps those feelings still existed, but they were crowded out by the confusion of events: expectation of the appearance of the beautiful Lady – what Lucia had called "the longed for moment" – which itself was mixed in with sadness over the mockery of her neighbors, and grief over the unyielding opposition of her mother.

What had happened to her life, young Lucia may have asked herself. Heaven had happened, and in the divine economy, Lucia was about to discover friends unlooked for.

### Notes

1. De Marchi, op. cit., pp. 52-53.
2. First Memoir, p. 33.
3. De Marchi, op. cit., p. 58.
4. They were not from Fatima proper, but the surrounding area; some had come as far as fifteen miles.
5. Second Memoir, pp. 65-66.