

12.

Lucia's Calling as Immaculate Heart Apostle (June 13)

Everyone reached the Cova. Lucia, Francisco, and Jacinta walked up to the small holm oak tree and stopped before it. Lucia looked to the east. She saw an immense, beautifully blue sky, and nothing else.

"Which is the oak tree where Our Lady appeared?"

The question pulled Lucia from her thoughts. She looked at the speaker, Maria dos Santos Carreira, and then pointed: "This one."

Maria looked at the holm oak tree. It was a strong young sapling, "very well shaped with regular branches," she said later. She looked back to Lucia, but the girl had walked over to a large tree, and was sitting in the shade. After a moment, Francisco and Jacinta followed her, and sat on either side.

Maria Carreira and her family were parishioners of St. Anthony's parish in Fatima. She had walked from Moita, not to the St. Anthony festa, but to the Cova, with her crippled son, John, who hobbled up the hill on a stick. Maria was also ill. She had been ill for years, and the doctors had given up on her, but yet she lived. A simple, pious peasant, Maria was one of the very few who believed early on that something special was happening at the Cova.¹ She would become Lucia's friend and ally.

Many of the people at the Cova had brought food, which they now ate. Someone offered oranges to the children, which they held but did not eat. The Rosary was prayed. Maria Carreira began the Litany of Loreto but Lucia interrupted, saying there wasn't enough time for the prayer. Maria saw Lucia stand up, and call: "don't you see the lightning? Our Lady must be coming!"

"The three children ran for the holm oak tree," Maria remembered, "while the rest of us hurried after them, and knelt down on the stony ground. I watched Lucia raise her hands, as though in prayer. We heard her speak to someone,

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who, if there at all, was not visible. There was only one mysterious effect to support our impression of another presence there. We heard something like a small, small voice, but could not understand what it was trying to say."²

Other bystanders noticed that the sun, high in the cloudless sky, seemed dimmed for the next few minutes. Still others noticed that the top leaves of the holm oak tree curved away, as if under some weight. Lucia saw the beautiful Lady on top of the holm oak, "exactly the same as in May."

"What do You want of me?" she asked the Lady.

"I wish you to come here on the 13th of next month, to pray the Rosary every day, and to learn to read."³ Later, I will tell you what I want."

Lucia asked the Lady to cure a sick person she knew.

"If he is converted," the Lady answered, "he will be cured during the year."

"I would like to ask You to take us to Heaven," Lucia blurted out.

"Yes," replied the Lady. "I will take Jacinta and Francisco soon. But you are to stay here some time longer. Jesus wishes to make use of you to make Me known and loved. He wants to establish in the world devotion to My Immaculate Heart. *I promise salvation to those who embrace it, and those souls will be loved by God like flowers placed by Me to adorn His throne.*"

"Am I to stay here all alone?" Lucia asked. Without Francisco and Jacinta, who would be her friends?

"No, My daughter. Are you suffering a great deal? 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."

"As Our Lady spoke these last words," Lucia said, "She opened Her hands and for the second time, She communicated to us the rays of that same immense light. We saw ourselves in this light, as it were, immersed in God. Jacinta and Francisco seemed to be in that part of the light which rose towards Heaven, and I in that which was poured out on the earth. In front of the palm of Our Lady's right hand was a heart encircled by thorns which pierced It. We understood that this was the Immaculate Heart of Mary, outraged by the sins of humanity, and seeking reparation."⁴

The Lady said no more. Maria Carreira saw Lucia stand

Sister Lucia

quickly, point to the sky, and cry out: "Look, there She goes! There She goes!" "We saw nothing," Maria said, "except a little cloud a few inches from the tree which rose very slowly and went backwards, towards the east, until we could see it no more."

"The children stayed silently looking in that direction, until at last Lucia said: 'There, now we can't see Her anymore. She has gone back into Heaven, the doors are shut.' We then turned towards the miraculous tree, and what was our admiration and surprise to see that the shoots at the top, which had been standing upright before, were now all bent towards the east, as if someone had been standing on them."⁵

There was a sudden rush to pluck the top leaves and branches off the holm oak, but Lucia asked that only the bottom leaves be taken, and not the ones touched by Our Lady.

The small group returned to Fatima, praying the Rosary. They arrived just as the St. Anthony procession was starting. The newcomers were asked where they had come from. The Cova da Iria, Maria Carreira replied, adding: "and we were very glad we had gone there."⁶

The children were pestered with questions about what happened. Most of the questions were not asked with good will. Realizing this, the children gave short answers, or said, "it's a secret." The Lady had not told them to keep Her words a secret yet; She would do that at Her next appearance, July 13. But Lucia, Francisco, and Jacinta were still absorbed in the Lady's presence, and at their young age, probably could not have articulated what had happened, particularly to a rather hostile audience.

Later, Jacinta would jubilantly tell her mother she was going to Heaven soon. But Lucia kept Our Lady's words to herself, pondering them in her heart. For she was not going to Heaven with Jacinta and Francisco — at least not for a while. How long would it be? How could she be used to increase devotion to the exquisite heart of the Lady? Yet Lucia's doubts and fears were accompanied by an increased devotion to that Heart pierced with thorns, and the consolation of the Lady's promise that She would never forsake her. Lucia pondered it all silently. Her vocation had begun.

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Notes

1. Another was Ti Marto, father of Francisco and Jacinta Marto. William Thomas Walsh relates that Maria Carreira first heard of the Fatima apparitions from her husband, who had heard it working next to Lucia's father. Her original reason for visiting the Cova was the hope that the Blessed Virgin would cure her son John, who was a hunchback "with knees that crossed and knocked together as he walked." (Walsh, *op. cit.*, p. 68)
2. De Marchi, *op. cit.*, pp. 61-62.
3. When Father Ferreira questioned Lucia later, he wrote down that Our Lady told Lucia "to learn to read so I can tell you what I want." Frère Michel deduces that Our Lady's instruction was meant to prepare Lucia for the apparitions at Pontevedra and Tuy. See TWTAFF, Vol. I, *op. cit.*, p. 169.
4. The account of the second apparition is from Lucia's Fourth Memoir, pp. 160-161.
5. De Marchi, *op. cit.*, p. 63.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 64.