

4. Training in the Faith

So we see that Lucia's early years, despite the appearance of hardship and poverty, were happy ones. She was a precocious child, intelligent and affectionate, with enough talents and friendliness to be sought after as a friend by her peers.

When Lucia was a child, Portugal did not have compulsory education. Consequently, her two classrooms were her family and the fields. We may trust her remarkable memory when she says the very first thing she learned was the Hail Mary prayer. Subsequent lessons — whether at home or in the fields — were variations on a theme.

Like the night her father, Antonio, took Lucia out by the threshing floor. They sat on stone seats in the cool evening air, and he pointed at the sky.

“Look, up above, it's Our Lady and the Angels; the moon is the lamp of Our Lady, the stars are the lamps of the Angels, which they and Our Lady light and place in the windows of Heaven, in order to light up our way at night.

“The sun (he continued), which you see come up every day, over there, at the back of the Serra, is Our Lord's lamp, which He lights every day to keep us warm and so that we can see in order to do our work.” “Because of this (Lucia said), I used to tell the other children that the moon was Our Lady's lamp, the stars the lamps of the Angels, and the sun the lamp of Our Lord.”¹

Lucia recalls many evenings with her father on the threshing floor, “where he continued to teach me the truths of the faith, to sing and to dance.” Not everything Antonio taught her was of the faith, however. Once he told Lucia that a thunderstorm was the sound of God scolding men for their sins. Yet in some of the homespun tales there were grains of truth.

“One day, my father was working near the well. I was there playing near him. Suddenly, the weather began to grow

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dark, to thunder and rain. My father threw down the hoe, grasped hold of me and ran to the house. Once at home, I asked him:

"It's Our Heavenly Father scolding someone. Who has sinned, was it you, father, or someone else?"

"My father responded, 'It was I and others also. Let's pray to St. Barbara, to deliver us from the thunder and lightning!' And he knelt down with my mother and my older sisters who were at home, in front of a crucifix which was on the wall of the outside room, to pray Our Father's and Hail Mary's."²

On another occasion Lucia asked her father what there was on their lands that was ready to eat. Antonio replied: "The fruits of the Holy Spirit (that is, the fruits that will be ready by Pentecost) are broad beans, peas, and cherries."

"I kept this reply in my head," wrote Lucia, until her next catechism class at St. Anthony's parish in Fatima. After Sunday Mass the priest asked the assembled children what the fruits of the Holy Ghost were. Insisting she knew the answer, Lucia stood up and confidently recited: "Broad beans, peas, and cherries."

That night, at supper, Maria Rosa told Antonio about Lucia's answer. He laughed and said gently, "It wasn't entirely wrong, as these are the fruits of the earth through the Holy Spirit." Lucia turned to her mother: "So you see, what I said was right."

"But my mother replied: 'No, you gave a list of the fruits of the earth, whereas the parish priest asked you what were the fruits of the Holy Spirit, which are different: they are charity, joy, peace, longanimity, meekness, faith, modesty, continence and chastity, patience, benignity and goodness.' And (wrote Lucia) she set about teaching them to me there and then, so that the next time I should be able to say what they were."³

Maria Rosa was the catechist of the dos Santos family. "The law of God and of His Church were the bedrock of my mother's great virtue," Lucia declared. "She seemed to have it engraved in her heart and mind. Thus she carried it out and taught her children and her acquaintances to do likewise."⁴

Maria Rosa's oldest daughter, Maria dos Anjos, recalled:

Sister Lucia

“Our mother knew how to read printed words but could not write. Every night during winter she used to read us some part of the Old Testament or the Gospels, or some story of Our Lady at Nazare, or at Lourdes. I clearly remember her saying to Lucia at the time of the apparitions: ‘Do you think that because Our Lady appeared at Nazare and at Lourdes that She has to appear to you?’

“Mother was never satisfied with our just being able to repeat the words of our catechism. She tried hard to explain everything so we would really understand the meaning of the words. She used to say that just repeating catechism without understanding was worse than useless. We used to ask her all kinds of questions and it seemed that she explained them even better than the priest in church.

“One day I asked her how it was that the fire of Hell did not destroy the damned like the wood in the fire. She asked if we had ever noticed how a cone cast into a fire could seem to burn and burn without being destroyed. This rather frightened us, and we made firm resolutions not to sin and fall into that fire ourselves.”⁵

Lucia remembered the Lenten catechism lessons Maria Rosa gave to her family and to others who came by to listen. She started with the Ten Commandments.

“First (Maria Rosa said), to love God above all things. This is the one that confuses me most because I never know whether I love God more than my husband and children, but God is so good that He will forgive me and have mercy on me.”⁶

Maria Rosa commented on the Sixth Commandment at length, and in a personal way.

“We have to be very careful about this, too, because there are many temptations and many dangers. And you (turning to my brother and sisters) must be very careful not to let yourselves be deceived, nor have any dealings with anyone who suggests such things to you... God gave me the grace of offering Him the pure flower of my chastity on the day I was married, when I placed it on His altar and received, in exchange, other flowers, namely the new lives which He wanted to give me. In this way, God has helped me and blessed me.”⁷

Lucia admitted that not all of her mother’s lessons were

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comprehensible to her:

"I would listen to, and repeat, everything, parrot-fashion, without understanding the words or the meaning. Nevertheless, they were being absorbed by my spirit and stored in my memory, so much so that today I remember them with an intense longing for those happy times when innocence takes in and stores up everything as happy memories for later times."⁸

There would be less happy memories as well. For all her zeal and charity — she spent herself helping the sick and poor outside of her family — Maria Rosa at times acted as if her personal applications of the faith to particular family members or situations were also dogma. "She wanted us to be humble and hard working," said Maria dos Anjos. "The least little lie would mean the broom handle for us."⁹

If a little lie meant the broom handle, imagine Maria Rosa's reaction when she believed Lucia was lying about the Blessed Virgin's apparitions at Fatima. Here was a persistent whopper of a lie that involved the faith and, in Maria Rosa's view, the deceiving of the public — not to mention the humiliation it brought her family in general, and her in particular.

Indeed, the coming of the beautiful Lady to the Cova da Iria would, at least for a time, put enmity between Lucia and her family, creating a sad human drama as fallen nature struggled to recognize and accept grace. It would become one of the bitterest sorrows of Lucia's young life.

Notes

1. Fifth Memoir, p. 25.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 26.
3. Sixth Memoir, pp. 112-113.
4. Sixth Memoir, pp. 48-49.
5. De Marchi, *op. cit.*, pp. 24-25.
6. Sixth Memoir, p. 48.
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*, p. 49.
9. De Marchi, *op. cit.*, p. 25.