

8. Visits of the Angel

A year passed. The mysterious “figure in a sheet” did not reappear, and the ridicule Lucia was subjected to waned as the townspeople of Aljustrel found other forms of entertainment. Although the apparitions “made a certain impression” on Lucia, which she found hard to explain, “little by little, this impression faded away, and were it not for the events that followed, I think I would have forgotten it completely.”¹

Lucia was now an experienced shepherdess, but her companions had changed. Now she shepherded with her two cousins, Francisco and Jacinta Marto. Both were too young to be shepherds, but Jacinta had pestered her mother so insistently that Olympia Marto finally gave in and allowed the two to accompany Lucia with their own flock.

Although the three would become inseparable, Lucia was not pleased at her change in companions. “I sometimes found Jacinta’s company quite disagreeable, on account of her oversensitive temperament. The slightest quarrel which arose among the children when at play was enough to send her pouting into a corner.”²

Francisco, on the other hand, was too passive for Lucia. “I must confess that I myself did not always feel too kindly disposed towards him, as his naturally calm temperament exasperated my own excessive vivacity.”³ Sometimes Lucia took advantage of him by ordering him to sit on the ground and stay there, an order he obeyed until Lucia felt sorry for him and took his hand. Then Francisco would rise as if nothing had happened.

The three began shepherding together mostly because of Jacinta’s unusually strong attachment to Lucia. Francisco’s feelings on this matter were not strong, but he seems to have preferred Jacinta’s company to that of his older brother, and drifted along in his younger sister’s wake.

One warm clear day the three children led their flocks to

Sister Lucia

graze on a property owned by Lucia's father, called Couza Velha.⁴ Unexpectedly the sky darkened and a light drizzle fell – weather from the invisible ocean on the other side of the mountain. The children headed up the hill to shelter themselves in the grotto at the Cabeco. There, surrounded by olive trees, they ate their lunch and prayed the Rosary. The sun came out again and the children gazed down at the valley.

Two things happened at once. A sudden gust of wind startled the children, and they saw a figure moving through the air below them. Only Lucia knew it was the same figure she had seen the year before. Today, however, the figure was moving towards them. "We were surprised, absorbed, and struck dumb with amazement," Lucia said.⁵

Now the figure was beside them. Lucia beheld "a young man, about fourteen or fifteen years old, whiter than snow, transparent as crystal when the sun shines through it, and of great beauty. On reaching us he said:

'Do not be afraid. I am the Angel of Peace. Pray with me.' Kneeling on the ground, he bowed down until his forehead touched the ground, and made us repeat these words three times:

'My God, I believe, I adore, I hope, and I love you! I ask pardon of You for those who do not believe, do not adore, do not hope and do not love You.'⁶

"Then rising, he said: 'Pray thus. The hearts of Jesus and Mary are attentive to the voice of your supplications.' Then he disappeared.

"The supernatural atmosphere which enveloped us was so intense," wrote Lucia, "that for a long time we were scarcely aware of our own existence, remaining in the same posture in which he had left us, and continually repeating the same prayer. The presence of God made itself felt so intimately and so intensely that we did not even venture to speak to one another."⁷

The lives of Lucia, Francisco, and Jacinta had changed forever. Whether they realized this or not, they began to act as if their lives had changed.

"His words," Lucia recalled, "engraved themselves so deeply on our minds that we could not forget them. From

Apostle of Mary's Immaculate Heart

then on we used to spend long periods of time prostrate like the Angel, repeating his words, until sometimes we fell, exhausted. I warned my companions, right away, that this must be kept secret and, thank God, they did what I wanted.”⁸

It was an unusual silence for such young children to keep. No doubt Lucia remembered the ridicule about the previous appearances of the Angel; perhaps Francisco and Jacinta did too. But their silence was due to more than fear of ridicule. The Angel had overwhelmed them with the power and beauty of his presence, and they were filled with awe. Even chattering Jacinta was at a loss for words. They may have been even more awestruck if they knew that the Angel given the title 'Angel of Peace' is the Archangel St. Michael (*Angelus pacis Michael*).⁹

The Angel appeared to them again, in the height of the Summer of 1916. Nine-year-old Lucia did not yet know the months of the year, or the days of the week, so she is vague as to the dates of the Angelic apparitions. She remembered a day so hot that she and her cousins brought their sheep home before noon. The three shepherds relaxed in the shade behind the well near Lucia's home. In an instant the Angel was among them.

“What are you doing?” he asked. “Pray! Pray very much! The hearts of Jesus and Mary have designs of mercy on you. Offer prayers and sacrifices constantly to the Most High.”

“How are we to make sacrifices?” Lucia asked.

“Make of everything you can a sacrifice, and offer it to God,” he answered, “as an act of reparation for the sins by which He is offended, and in supplication for the conversion of sinners. You will thus draw down peace upon your country. I am its Angel Guardian, the Angel of Portugal.¹⁰ Above all, accept and bear with submission the suffering which the Lord will send you.”

The Angel disappeared. Later Lucia reflected on the second apparition:

“These words were indelibly impressed upon our minds. They were like a light which made us understand who God is, how He loves us and desires to be loved, the value of sacrifice, how pleasing it is to Him and how, on account of it, He grants the grace of conversion to sinners.

Sister Lucia

“It was for this reason that we began, from then on, to offer to the Lord all that mortified us, without, however, seeking out other forms of mortification and penance, except that we remained for hours on end with our foreheads touching the ground, repeating the prayer the Angel had taught us.”¹¹

The grotto at Cabeco had become a favorite place for Lucia, Francisco, and Jacinta to pray and to play. One day (in late September or early October) they were there, prostrate amid the rocks and boulders, praying the prayer the Angel had taught them at his first appearance at the grotto: “My God, I believe, I adore, I hope and I love You...”

“I don’t know how many times we repeated this prayer,” Lucia wrote, “when an extraordinary light shone upon us. We sprang up to see what was happening, and beheld the Angel. He was holding a chalice in his left hand, with the Host suspended above it, from Which some drops of Blood fell into the chalice. Leaving the chalice suspended in the air, the Angel knelt down beside us and made us repeat three times:

‘Most Holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, I adore You most profoundly and I offer You the most precious Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity, of the same Son Jesus Christ, present in the tabernacles of the world, in reparation for the sacrileges, outrages, and indifferences by which He Himself is offended. And through the infinite merits of His most Sacred Heart, and the Immaculate Heart of Mary, I beg of You the conversion of poor sinners.’

“Then, rising, he took the chalice and the Host in his hands. He gave the Sacred Host to me, and shared the Blood from the chalice between Jacinta and Francisco, saying as he did so:

‘Take and drink the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, horribly outraged by ungrateful men! Make reparation for their crimes and console your God.’

“Once again he prostrated on the ground and repeated with us: ‘Most Holy Trinity...’, and then disappeared.

“We remained a long time in this position,” said Lucia, “repeating the same words over and over again. When at last

Apostle of Mary's Immaculate Heart

we stood up, we noticed that it was already dark, and therefore time to return home.”¹²

Notes

1. Fourth Memoir, p. 150.
2. First Memoir, pp. 21-22.
3. Fourth Memoir, p. 119.
4. “The Old Garden,” Barthas, op. cit., p. 7.
5. Fourth Memoir, p. 151.
6. Or as the three children heard the prayer in Portuguese: “*Meu Deus! Eu creio, adoro, espero e amo-vos; peço-vos perdao para os que nao creem nao adoram nao esperam e vos nao amam.*” See Walsh, op. cit., fn on p. 37.
7. TWTAf, Vol. I, op. cit., pp. 70-71.
8. Second Memoir, p. 62. In her Fourth Memoir Lucia recalls things differently: “It did not occur to us to speak about this apparition, nor did we think of recommending that it be kept secret. The very apparition itself imposed secrecy. It was so intimate that it was not easy to speak of it at all. The impression it made upon us was all the greater perhaps, in that it was the first such manifestation we had experienced.” (p. 151)
9. Walsh, op. cit., fn on p. 39, from the old Roman Breviary, Hymn for Lauds on September 29, feast day of St. Michael the Archangel.
10. Here is another indication that the Angel, who chose not to name himself directly, may indeed have been St. Michael the Archangel. Portuguese King Alfonso Henriques chose St. Michael as the protector of his armies and his kingdom, and dedicated the chapel of the royal palace to him. In 1514 Pope Leo X granted Portugal a special feast day in honor of St. Michael, calling him “The Guardian Angel of Portugal.” See TWTAf, Vol. I, op. cit., pp. 93-94.
11. Fourth Memoir, pp. 151-152.
12. Second Memoir, p. 62.