

Jacinta

(From Lucia's First Memoir)

Before the happenings of 1917, apart from the ties of relationship that united us, no other particular affection led me to prefer the companionship of Jacinta ... On the contrary, 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 — 'tethering the donkey' as we used to say.

Even the coaxing and caressing that children know so well how to give on such occasions, were still not enough to bring her back to play, she herself had to be allowed to choose the game, and her partner as well. Her heart, however, was well disposed. God had endowed her with a sweet and gentle character which made her at once lovable and attractive. I don't know why, but Jacinta and her brother Francisco had a special liking for me, and almost always came in search of me when they wanted to play. They did not enjoy the company of the other children, and they used to ask me to go with them to the well down at the bottom of the garden belonging to my parents.

Once we arrived there, Jacinta chose which games we were to play. The ones she liked best were usually 'pebbles' and 'buttons', which we played as we sat on the stone slabs covering the well, in the shade of an olive tree and two plum trees. Playing 'buttons' often left me in great distress, because when they called us in to meals, I used to find myself minus my buttons. More often than not, Jacinta had won them all, and this was enough to make my mother scold me. I had to sew them on again in a hurry. But how could I persuade Jacinta to give them back to me, since besides her pouty ways she had another little defect: she was possessive! She wanted to keep all the buttons for the next game, so as to avoid taking off her own! It was only by threatening never to play with her again that I succeeded in getting them back...

Her Love for the Crucified Saviour

In the evenings my mother used to tell stories. My father and my older sisters told us fairy stories about magic spells, princesses robed in gold and royal doves. Then along came my mother with stories of the Passion, St. John the Baptist, and so on. That is how I came to know the story of Our Lord's Passion.

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As it was enough for me to have heard a story once to be able to repeat it in all its details, I began to tell my companions, word for word, what I used to call Our Lord's Story. Just then, my sister passed by, and noticed that we had the crucifix in our hands. She took it and scolded us, saying that she did not want us to touch such holy things. Jacinta got up and approached my sister, saying:

'Maria, don't scold her! I did it. But I won't do it again.'

My sister caressed her, and told us to go and play outside because we left nothing in the house in its proper place. Off we went to continue our story down at the well ... When the little one heard me telling of the sufferings of Our Lord, she was moved to tears. From then on, she often asked me to tell it to her all over and over again. She would weep and grieve, saying: 'Our poor dear Lord! I'll never sin again! I don't want Our Lord to suffer any more!'

Her Delicate Sensibility

Jacinta also loved going out at nightfall to the threshing floor situated close to the house; there she watched the beautiful sunsets, and contemplated the starry skies. She was enraptured with the lovely moonlit nights. We vied with each other to see who could count the most stars. We called the stars Angel's lamps, the moon Our Lady's lamp and the sun Our Lord's. This led Jacinta to remark sometimes: "You know, I like Our Lady's lamp better, it doesn't burn us up or blind us, the way Our Lord's does."

In fact, the sun can be very strong there on summer days, and Jacinta, a delicate child, suffered greatly from the heat.

Jacinta the Little Shepherdess

... Jacinta loved to hear her voice echoing down in the valleys. For this reason, one of our favourite amusements was to climb to the top of the hills, sit down on the biggest rock we could find, and call out different names at the top of our voices. The name that echoed back most clearly was 'Maria.' Sometimes Jacinta used to say the whole Hail Mary this way, only calling out the following word when the preceding one had stopped re-echoing.

We loved to sing, too, interspersed among the popular songs — of which, alas! we knew quite a number — were Jacinta's favorite hymns: 'Salve Nobre Padroeira' (Hail Noble Patroness), 'Virgem Pura' (Virgin Pure), 'Anjos, Cantai Comigo' (Angels, sing with me). We were very fond of dancing, and any

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instrument we heard being played by the other shepherds was enough to set us off. Jacinta, tiny as she was, had a special aptitude for dancing.

We had been told to say the Rosary after our lunch, but as the whole day seemed too short for our play, we worked out a fine way of getting through it quickly. We simply passed the beads through our fingers, saying nothing but 'Hail Mary, Hail Mary, Hail Mary ...' At the end of each mystery, we paused awhile, then simply said 'Our Father', and so, in the twinkling of an eye, as they say, we had our Rosary finished!

Jacinta also loved to hold the little white lambs tightly in her arms, sitting with them on her lap, fondling them, kissing them, and carrying them home at night on her shoulders, so that they wouldn't get tired. One day on her way back, she walked along in the middle of the flock.

"Jacinta, what are you doing there," I asked her, "in the middle of the sheep?"

"I want to do the same as Our Lord in that holy picture they gave me. He's just like this, right in the middle of them all, and He's holding one of them in His arms."

Conversion of Sinners

Jacinta took this matter of making sacrifices for the conversion of sinners so much to heart, that she never let a single opportunity escape her ... "Let's give our lunch to those poor children, for the conversion of sinners."

And she ran to take it to them. That afternoon, she told me she was hungry. There were holm-oaks and oak trees nearby. The acorns were still quite green. However, I told her we could eat them. Francisco climbed up a holm-oak to fill his pockets, but Jacinta remembered that we could eat the ones on the oak trees instead, and thus make a sacrifice by eating the bitter kind. So it was there, that afternoon, that we enjoyed this delicious repast! Jacinta made this one of her usual sacrifices, and often picked the acorns off the oaks or the olives off the trees. One day I said to her: "Jacinta, don't eat that; it's too bitter!"

"But it's because it's bitter that I'm eating it, for the conversion of sinners."

... Jacinta's thirst for making sacrifices seemed insatiable. One day a neighbor offered my mother a good pasture for our sheep. Though it was quite far away and we were at the height of summer, my mother accepted the offer made so generously,

and sent me there ... On the way, we met our dear poor children, and Jacinta ran to give them our usual alms. It was a lovely day, but the sun was blazing, and in that arid, stony wasteland, it seemed as though it would burn everything up. We were parched with thirst, and there wasn't a single drop of water for us to drink. At first, we offered the sacrifice generously for the conversion of sinners, but after midday, we could hold out no longer.

As there was a house quite near, I suggested to my companions that I should go and ask for a little water. They agreed to this, so I went and knocked on the door. A little old woman gave me not only a pitcher of water, but also some bread, which I accepted gratefully. I ran to share it with my little companions, and then offered the pitcher to Francisco, and told him to take a drink.

"I don't want to," he replied.

"Why?"

"I want to suffer for the conversion of sinners."

"You have a drink, Jacinta."

"But I want to offer this sacrifice for sinners too."

Then I poured the water into a hollow in the rock, so that the sheep could drink it, and went to return the pitcher to its owner. The heat was getting more and more intense. The shrill singing of the crickets and grasshoppers coupled with the croaking of the frogs in the neighboring pond made an uproar that was almost unbearable. Jacinta, frail as she was, and weakened still more by the lack of food and drink, said to me with that simplicity which was natural to her:

"Tell the crickets and the frogs to keep quiet! I have such a terrible headache."

Then Francisco asked her: "Don't you want to suffer this for sinners?"

The poor child, clasping her head between her two little hands, replied, "Yes. I do. Let them sing!"

Love for the Holy Father

Two priests who had come to question us recommended that we pray for the Holy Father. Jacinta asked who the Holy Father was. The good priests explained who he was and how much he needed prayers. This gave Jacinta such love for the

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Holy Father that every time she offered her sacrifices to Jesus she added: 'and for the Holy Father.' At the end of the Rosary she always said three Hail Mary's for the Holy Father, and sometimes she would remark:

"How I'd love to see the Holy Father! So many people come here, but the Holy Father never does!" In her childish simplicity she supposed that the Holy Father could make this journey just like anybody else!

In Prison at Ourem

When, some time later, we were put in prison, what made Jacinta suffer most, was to feel that their parents had abandoned them. With tears streaming down her cheeks, she would say: "Neither your parents nor mine have come to see us. They don't bother about us any more!"

"Don't cry," said Francisco, "we can offer this to Jesus for sinners."

... After being separated for awhile, we were reunited in one of the other rooms of the prison. When they told us they were coming soon to take us away to be fried alive, Jacinta went aside and stood by a window overlooking the cattle market. I thought at first that she was trying to distract her thoughts with the view, but I soon realized that she was crying. I went over and drew her close to me, asking her why she was crying.

"Because we are going to die," she replied, "without ever seeing our parents again, not even our own mothers!" With tears running down her cheeks, she added: "I would like at least to see my mother."

"Don't you want, then, to offer this sacrifice for the conversion of sinners?"

"I do want to. I do!" With her face bathed in tears, she joined her hands, raised her eyes to Heaven and made her offering:

"O my Jesus! This is for love of You, for the conversion of sinners, for the Holy Father, and in reparation for the sins committed against the Immaculate Heart of Mary!"

The prisoners who were present at this scene sought to console us. "But all you have to do," they said, "is to tell the Administrator the Secret! What does it matter whether the Lady wants you to or not!"

"Never!" was Jacinta's vigorous reply, "I'd rather die."

The Rosary in Jail

Next we decided to say our Rosary. Jacinta took off a medal that she was wearing round her neck, and asked a prisoner to hang it up for her on a nail in the wall. Kneeling before this medal, we began to pray. The prisoners prayed with us, that is, if they knew how to pray, but at least they were down on their knees. Once the Rosary was over, Jacinta went over to the window and started crying again.

“Jacinta,” I asked, “don’t you want to offer this sacrifice to Our Lord?”

“Yes, I do, but I keep thinking about my mother, and I can’t help crying.”

As the Blessed Virgin had told us to offer our prayers and sacrifices also in reparation for the sins committed against the Immaculate Heart of Mary, we agreed that each of us would choose one of these intentions. One would offer for sinners, another for the Holy Father, and yet another in reparation for the sins against the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Having decided on this, I told Jacinta to choose whichever intention she preferred.

“I’m making the offering for all the intentions, because I love them all.”

And Finally ... the Dance

Among the prisoners, there was one who played the concertina. To divert our attention, he began to play and they all started singing. They asked us if we knew how to dance. We said we knew the fandango and the vira. Jacinta’s partner was a poor thief who, finding her so tiny, picked her up and went on dancing with her in his arms! We only hope that Our Lady has had pity on this soul and converted him.

... Jacinta dearly loved dancing, and had a special aptitude for it. I remember how she was crying one day about one of her brothers who had gone to the war and was reported killed in action. To distract her, I arranged a little dance with two of her brothers. There was the poor child dancing away as she dried the tears that ran down her cheeks. Her fondness for dancing was such that the sound of some shepherd playing his instrument was enough to set her dancing all by herself. In spite of this, when Carnival time of St. John’s Day festivities came round, she announced: “I’m not going to dance any more.”

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"And why not?"

"Because I want to offer this sacrifice to Our Lord."

Jacinta's Illness

The evening before she fell sick she said: "I've a terrible headache and I'm so thirsty! But I won't take a drink, because I want to suffer for sinners."

... On another occasion, her mother brought her a cup of milk and told her to take it. "I don't want it, mother," she answered, pushing the cup away with her little hand. My aunt insisted a little, and then left the room, saying, "I don't know how to make her take anything, she has no appetite." As soon as we were alone, I asked her: "How can you disobey your mother like that, and not offer this sacrifice to Our Lord?" When she heard this, she shed a few tears which I had the happiness of drying, and said, "I forgot this time." She called her mother, asked her forgiveness, and said she'd take whatever she wanted. Her mother brought back the cup of milk, and Jacinta drank it down without the slightest sign of repugnance. Later, she told me:

"If you only knew how hard it was to drink that."

Another time, she said to me: "It's becoming harder and harder for me to take milk and broth, but I don't say anything. I drink it all for love of Our Lord and of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, our dear heavenly Mother."

Again, I asked her: "Are you better?"

"You know I'm not getting better," she replied, and added: "I've such pains in my chest! But I don't say anything. I'm suffering for the conversion of sinners."

One day when I arrived, she asked, "Did you make many sacrifices today? I've made a lot. My mother went out, and I wanted to go and visit Francisco many times, and I didn't go."

Visit from the Blessed Virgin

"Our Lady came to see us," Jacinta said. "She told us She would come to take Francisco to Heaven very soon, and She asked me if I still wanted to convert more sinners. I said I did. She told me I would be going to a hospital where I would suffer a great deal, and that I am to suffer for the conversion of sinners, in reparation for the sins committed against the Immaculate Heart of Mary, and for love of Jesus. I asked if you would go with me. She said you wouldn't and

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that is what I find hardest. She said my mother would take me, and then I would have to stay there all alone”

When the moment arrived for her brother to go to Heaven, she confided to him these last messages: “Give all my love to Our Lord and Our Lady, and tell them that I’ll suffer as much as They want, for the conversion of sinners and in reparation to the Immaculate Heart of Mary.”

After this, she was thoughtful for awhile, and then added: “If only you could be with me. The hardest part is to go without you. Maybe the hospital is a big dark house, where you can’t see, and I’ll be there suffering all alone. But never mind! I’ll suffer for love of Our Lord, to make reparation to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, for the conversion of sinners and for the Holy Father.”

Jacinta suffered keenly when her brother died. She remained a long time buried in thought, and if anyone asked her what she was thinking about, she answered: “About Francisco. I’d give anything to see him again!”

Renewed Visits from the Blessed Virgin

Once again the Blessed Virgin deigned to visit Jacinta, to tell her of new crosses and sacrifices awaiting her. She gave me the news, saying:

“She told me that I am going to Lisbon to another hospital, that I will not see you again, nor my parents either, and after suffering a great deal, I shall die alone. But She said I must not be afraid, since She Herself is coming to take me to Heaven.” She hugged me and wept, “I will never see you again! You won’t be coming to visit me there. Oh please, pray hard for me, because I am going to die alone!”

Jacinta suffered terribly right up until the day of her departure for Lisbon. She kept clinging to me and sobbing: “I’ll never see you again! Nor my mother, nor my brothers, nor my father! I’ll never see anybody ever again! And then, I’ll die all alone!”

“Don’t think about it,” I advised her one day.

“Let me think about it,” she replied, “for the more I think the more I suffer, and I want to suffer for love of Our Lord and for sinners. Anyway, I don’t mind! Our Lady will come to me there and take me to Heaven.”

At times, she kissed and embraced a crucifix, exclaiming: “O

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my Jesus! I love You, and I want to suffer very much for love of You." How often did she say: "O Jesus! Now You can convert many sinners, because this is really a big sacrifice!"

From time to time, she asked me: "Am I going to die without receiving the Hidden Jesus? If only Our Lady would bring Him to me, when She comes to fetch me."

One day I asked her: "What are you going to do in Heaven?"

"I'm going to love Jesus very much, and the Immaculate Heart of Mary, too. I'm going to pray a lot for you, for sinners, for the Holy Father, for my parents and my brothers and sisters, and for all the people who have asked me to pray for them."

... On one occasion I found her clasping a picture of Our Lady to her heart, and saying, "O my dearest heavenly Mother, do I have to die all alone?" The poor child seemed so frightened at the thought of dying alone. I tried to comfort her, saying: "What does it matter if you die alone, so long as Our Lady is coming to fetch you?"

"It's true, it doesn't matter, really. I don't know why it is, but I sometimes forget Our Lady is coming to take me. I only remember that I'll die without having you near me."

The day came at last when she was to leave for Lisbon. It was a heartrending farewell. For a long time, she clung to me with her arms around my neck, and sobbed, "We shall never see each other again! Pray a lot for me, until I go to Heaven. Then I will pray a lot for you. Never tell the Secret to anyone, even if they kill you. Love Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary very much, and make many sacrifices for sinners."

From Lisbon, she sent me word that Our Lady had come to see her there; She had told her the day and hour of her death. Finally Jacinta reminded me to be very good.