

Part III

After the Apparitions at Fatima

21.

Francisco Dies Smiling

The war did end, and the soldiers came home, as Our Lady had told Lucia. An influenza epidemic racked Europe, and Portugal was not spared. Even though the war was over, people kept dying.

Her family's persecution of Lucia eased after the healing of Maria Rosa. But she suffered at the hands of townfolk, and from her parish priest. As time went on, his displeasure over the 'disruptive' events at the Cova da Iria caused him to be on unfriendly terms with Lucia, Francisco, and Jacinta.¹ For their part, the children began dreading Sunday Mass and Confession, because they knew Father thought they were lying about the apparitions.

Lucia bore Father Ferreira no ill will: "He was a zealous priest and much beloved among the people." But when Father Ferreira left Fatima a rumor began that he left because of Lucia,² "and so I had much to suffer as a result. Several pious women, whenever they met me, gave vent to their displeasure by insulting me; and sometimes they sent me on my way with a couple of blows or kicks."³

Then there were the Freemasons. A group of enlightened individuals from a Masonic lodge in nearby Santarem desecrated the apparition site and, blaspheming merrily away, performed their own sacrilegious procession.

Government troops set up camp near the Cova and tried to prevent people from going there to pray. Lucia was in a group of women heading for the Cova when they were confronted by soldiers.

"Two cavalymen gave their horses a smart crack of the whip and advanced at full speed towards the group. They pulled up beside us and asked where we were going. The women boldly replied that 'it was none of their business.' They whipped the horses again, as though they meant to charge forward and trample us all underfoot. The women ran in all directions and, a moment later, I found myself alone

Sister Lucia

with the two cavalymen.

“They then asked me my name and I gave it without hesitation. They next asked if I were the seer, and I said I was. They ordered me to step out onto the middle of the road between the two horses, and proceed in the direction of Fatima.”

The soldiers made Lucia stop just outside Aljustrel. There was no one around, just Lucia and the two mounted soldiers. One said to the other, “Here are some open trenches. Let’s cut off her head with one of our swords, and leave her here dead and buried. Then we’ll be finished with this business once and for all.”

“When I heard these words,” remembered Lucia, “I thought that my last moment had really come, but I was as much at peace as if it did not concern me at all.” Eventually the soldiers made Lucia walk to her home with them. “All the neighbors were at the windows and doors of their houses to see what was going on. Some were laughing and making fun of me, others lamenting my sorry plight.”

Unable to find Lucia’s parents, the soldiers ordered her to stay in her house for the rest of the day, but by sunset Lucia “was praying my Rosary in the Cova da Iria, accompanied by hundreds of people.”⁴

Despite their blasphemies and highhanded attitudes, the Freemasons were taking Fatima very seriously (as evidenced by a strident pamphlet reproduced in “Masonic Pamphlet circa 1918” on pages 256-257 of this book). They had good reason to try to stamp out devotion to the beautiful Lady. Within a few years their government – which was already highly unstable due to factional infighting and ongoing coups and revolutions⁵ – would topple, and credit would be given to Our Lady of Fatima for the fall.

In the Fall of 1918 the influenza epidemic struck the Marto home, and Ti Marto was the only one left standing. Jacinta and Francisco were gravely ill, and neither would recover. Lucia said Francisco “suffered with heroic patience, without ever letting the slightest moan or the least complaint escape his lips.”⁶

Before he died he gave Lucia the rope he had tied around his waist so his mother wouldn’t see it. He longed to receive

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Holy Communion before he died, but was afraid he wouldn't be able to as Father Ferreira hadn't allowed Francisco to receive First Communion. Ti Marto went to St. Anthony's parish to ask Father Ferreira to come; he did not expect the priest to agree. As fate would have it, however, Father Ferreira was away, and the replacement priest, Father Moreira, immediately came to see Francisco, and promised to return the next day to give him Communion.

When Father Moreira arrived at the Marto home he rang a little bell announcing that the Blessed Sacrament was near. Francisco tried to rise from bed, but fell back heavily. The priest assured him he could receive Communion lying down, which Francisco did. He remained silent for a long time. While Jacinta spent herself for the conversion of sinners, Francisco sacrificed to console the hearts of Jesus and Mary.

A lover of solitude and prayer, Francisco would steal off behind a wall, or a blackberry bush, "to think of Our Lord, who is so sad on account of so many sins." Once Lucia asked him which he liked better: to console Christ or to convert sinners. Francisco replied:

"I would rather console Our Lord. Didn't you notice how sad Our Lady was that last month, when She said that people must not offend Our Lord any more, for He is already much offended? I would like to console Our Lord, and after that, convert sinners so that they won't offend Him any more."⁷

Francisco would skip school to spend time in front of the Blessed Sacrament, "close to the hidden Jesus." One of his sufferings after he became ill was not having the strength to go to church to console the hidden Jesus. "Go to church and give my love to the hidden Jesus," he would tell Lucia. His physical sufferings were offered "to console Our Lord and Our Lady, and then, afterwards, for sinners and for the Holy Father." Near the end Lucia found Francisco happy in bed. She asked if he was feeling better. He replied

"No. I feel worse. It won't be long now till I go to Heaven. When I'm there, I'm going to console Our Lord and Our Lady very much. Jacinta is going to pray a lot for sinners, for the Holy Father and for you. You will stay here, because Our Lady wants it that way.

Sister Lucia

Listen, you must do everything that She tells you."⁸

Now, at the end of his young life, Francisco Marto was able to receive the One he so wished to console. One could imagine him, after receiving Communion, trying to console the God he had just received, the God who had come to console him.

Later Lucia visited Francisco. "I am happier than you are," he told her, "because I have the Hidden Jesus within my heart. I'm going to Heaven, but I'm going to pray very much to Our Lord and Our Lady for them to bring you both there soon."⁹

Lucia and Jacinta spent the day at his bedside. Jacinta told her brother, "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."¹⁰ In the evening Lucia bid him a tearful good-bye: "Goodbye then, Francisco. Till we meet in Heaven, goodbye!"

The next morning he died quietly in his bed. There was no final struggle, no death agony. "He seemed to smile," his mother said, "and then he stopped breathing." Ti Marto just said: "He died smiling."¹¹

Lucia said, "He took his flight to Heaven the following day in the arms of his heavenly Mother. I could never describe how much I missed him. This grief was a thorn that pierced my heart for years to come. It is a memory of the past that echoes forever unto eternity.

"Twas night: I lay peacefully dreaming
That on this festive longed-for day
Of heavenly union, the Angels above

Vied with us here in holy emulation.
"What golden crown beyond all telling,
What garland of flowers garnered here below
Could equal the crown heaven was offering
Angelic beauty, all earthly longing stilled.

"The joy, the smile, of our loving Mother
In the heavenly realms, he lives in God
Ravished with love, with joys surpassing,
Those years on earth were so swift, so fleeting...

Farewell!"¹²

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Notes

1. Lucia relates incidents in her Memoirs where Father Ferreira acted unreasonably towards her (e.g., Second Memoir, pp. 84-85). Father de Marchi also relates that Father Ferreira seemed unduly rigorous in not allowing Francisco or Jacinta to receive First Communion.
2. This was not true.
3. Second Memoir, pp. 85-86.
4. This episode is from Second Memoir, pp. 88-89.
5. "In the sixteen years following the Revolution of 1910 there were sixteen bloody revolutions and forty-three changes of ministry at Lisboa." (Walsh, op. cit., p. 191.)
6. Second Memoir, p. 91.
7. Fourth Memoir, p. 136.
8. Ibid., p. 137.
9. Ibid., p. 145.
10. First Memoir, p. 43.
11. Frère Michel de la Sainte Trinité, *The Whole Truth About Fatima*, Volume II, *The Secret and the Church*, Immaculate Heart Publications, 1989, p. 104. Hereinafter this work will be cited as TWTAFF, Vol. II, op. cit.
12. Fourth Memoir, pp. 145-146.