

Various Documents

Father Ferreira's Public Letter Regarding the Fatima Apparitions

Father Ferreira, the parish priest of St. Anthony's church in Fatima, was suspected of helping the Administrator of Ourem to kidnap Lucia, Francisco, and Jacinta on August 13, 1917. This was a plausible theory, given that Father Ferreira was skeptical of and relatively negative towards the events at the Cova da Iria. Moreover, the Administrator, Arturo Santos, had taken the children to Father Ferreira, and kidnapped them as they left the rectory after talking to the priest.

After a short appearance by Our Lady on August 13, a large, angry crowd confronted Father Ferreira with their suspicions. In hindsight, it does not appear that Father Ferreira was involved in the kidnapping. He was merely used as a foil by the Administrator to seize the children.

But tempers remained hot, and Father Ferreira was threatened numerous times. This prompted his public letter, in which he sought to exonerate himself from complicity in the kidnapping. In doing so, he inadvertently affirmed the apparitions, something he had never done, publicly or privately. The letter was published in the *Ordem*, of Lisbon, and the *Ouriense*, of Ourem.

TO BELIEVERS AND NON-BELIEVERS:

Reluctantly, as a Catholic priest, I beg to make known and to declare the following before all those who may know or hear rumors – infamous and damaging to my reputation as parish priest – that I was an accomplice in the imprisonment of three children in my parish who assert that they have seen Our Lady.

I make this statement on the authority of the parents and for the satisfaction of the 5,000 to 6,000 persons who came many miles and with great sacrifice to see and speak with them. I deny this infamous and insidious calumny, and declare before the whole world that I had nothing whatever to do, directly or indirectly, with this impious and sacrilegious action.

The Mayor (Arturo Santos, also known as the Administrator, and "the Tinsmith") did not confide his intentions to me. And if it was providential – which it was – that he acted secretly and without any resistance on the part of

the children, it was no less than providential that the excitement to which this diabolical rumor gave rise was calmed, or the parish would certainly have had to mourn the death of its priest as an accomplice in the crime. That the Devil did not succeed in this, was due certainly to the Virgin Mother. The Mayor, after a protracted interrogation in their own houses, had the children brought to mine under the pretext of collecting more accurate information about the secret which they had refused to reveal to anyone. Then, at the time when he judged it opportune, he ordered them into the carriage, and telling the parents that he was taking them to the Cova da Iria, in fact took them to Vila Nova de Ourem. Why did he choose my house from which to act? In order to escape the consequences of his action? In order that the people should riot, as they did, and accuse me of complicity? Or for some other reason?

I do not know. I only know that I deny all responsibility in the matter, and leave judgment to God. No one can prevent a work of God.

Thousands of eyewitnesses can attest that the presence of the children was not necessary for the Queen of Heaven to manifest Her power. They themselves will attest to the extraordinary phenomena which occurred to confirm their faith. But now, it is not a trio of children, but thousands of people of all ages, classes and conditions who have seen for themselves. If my absence from the Cova, as parish priest, gave offense to believers, my presence as a witness would have been no less objectionable to unbelievers. The Blessed Virgin has no need of the parish priest, in order to manifest Her goodness and the enemies of religion need not tarnish their benevolence by attributing the faith of the people to the presence or otherwise of the parish priest. Faith is a gift of God and not of the priests. This is the true motive of my absence and apparent indifference to such a sublime and marvelous event. This is why I have not replied to the thousand questions and letters, which have been directed to me. The enemy is not asleep, but like a roaring lion. The Apostles were not the first to announce the Resurrection. I abstain from any narration of the above-mentioned facts on account of the length of this letter, and because the Press will most certainly have given its own accounts.

I am, yours faithfully,

Fr. Manuel Marques Ferreira

Apostle of Mary's Immaculate Heart

Note: Father Joseph Pelletier remarks: "Notwithstanding the tone of this letter, all authors agree that the pastor did not believe in the apparitions. If the letter is read carefully it will be found that it does not contain one single explicit affirmation of belief in the reality of the apparitions. It was carefully worded because of the explosive nature of the situation, so as not to indicate his disbelief" (Pelletier, *op. cit.*, p. 152, fn 5).