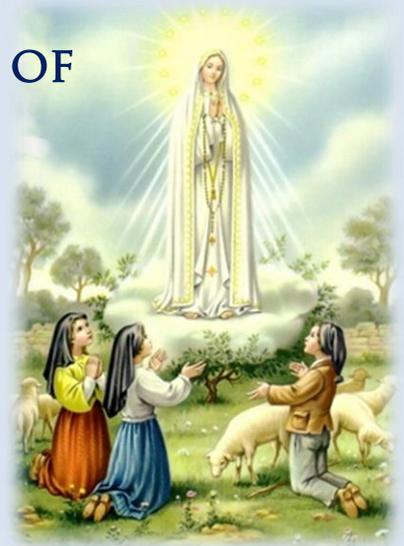


CELEBRATING THE 100TH ANNIVERSARY OF *Our Lady of Fatima*

June 17, 2017

The Mission of Lucia



Each of the three Fatima children gleaned a unique spirituality from the same apparitions of the Angel and the Blessed Virgin Mary. Jacinta offered sacrifices so that souls would be converted and not go to hell. She also intensely prayed for the Holy Father. Francisco taught us how to love the Eucharist and make reparation for the sacrileges and indifferences by which He is offended. Lucia teaches the world today to accept the daily sufferings that the Lord sends and to have recourse to the Immaculate Heart of Mary in all situations and circumstances of life. Lucia lived out the Fatima message before she proclaimed it. In order to appreciate better her example to the world, it is good to know her family life.

Lucia's parents, Antonio and Maria Rosa dos Santos raised seven children in a loving, joyful family atmosphere. They were not afraid to witness to their mutual love in front of the children. Lucia remembered a time when her mother was too busy to help her with spinning the wool and so her father offered to help. Apparently, Antonio did not do it quite right because Maria Rosa saw what he was doing and came up from behind him, embraced him and said very kindly, "What a good man you are! But look, you can't wind wool like you wind cotton" (Silva, 8) and proceeded to demonstrate how to prepare the wool correctly.

On other occasions, Lucia's mother would come with a refreshing drink of honey prepared with cool, fresh water from the well for her husband. Maria Rosa would then sit beside Antonio, happily conversing and laughing, feeling so content (ibid).

Not only did Lucia's parents often show appropriate affection for one another, they also expressed love for the children. Maria Rosa often told Lucia that she came from heaven surrounded by roses and flowers in a little wicker basket they had in the house (ibid).

Maria Rosa and her husband taught the children their catechism and prayers as well as formed their children in the practice of virtue. They curbed Lucia's fierce determination. One day at lunch, the family had beans, sausage and potatoes. Lucia ate everything but the beans because she did not like them. Like any good parent, her mother did not let Lucia eat anything else until she ate everything that was on her plate. In fact, Maria Rosa put food Lucia liked up high so she could not get to it until she finished her meal. Lucia thought she could outsmart her mother by finding figs and berries on the trees outside. Much to Lucia's dismay, it was too early in the season and she spent the whole afternoon rather hungry. Supper time came and there on the table was her plate of beans from lunch. Reluctantly Lucia ate them. When she was half-finished, her mother took the plate away and gave her what everyone else had (Silva, 23). Lucia learned her lesson.

The family regularly spent the evenings together sharing the events of the day while others laughed or contributed to the conversation. In wintertime, Maria Rosa cleaned the kitchen while Lucia and her sisters worked the loom and sewed, and her brother took care of the animals, giving them their last meal for the day. Her father, Antonio, cut and roasted the chestnuts and sweet acorns as a nighttime snack. Antonio played the guitar as the rest of the family sang folk songs and ballads. The family spent summertime outside husking corn or peeling beans, enjoying the weather and each other's company.

They prayed the family Rosary together every day in May and it was common to find other villagers gathered at the dos Santos home for various prayer groups and catechism lessons. As the adults gathered for various activities, they put Lucia in charge of minding the younger children because the neighbor children felt an affinity towards her. She joyfully planned skits, dances and games of tag and hide-and-seek (Silva, 33-34).

The dos Santos home was a close-knit family. Their strong bonds helped them through the trying times connected with the apparitions Lucia experienced from 1915-1917. At the same time the familial bonds added to her personal suffering.

After the angel visions in 1916, the dos Santos family experienced great difficulties. Antonio “fell into a bad crowd and let his weakness get the better of him”, which resulted in the loss of some family property. Lucia’s two oldest sisters were married and left home and two other sisters worked as servants to help make ends meet. Her brother took care of the remaining fields and Lucia looked after the family sheep. Lucia commented, “My poor mother seemed just drowned in the depths of distress. When we gathered round the fire at nighttime, waiting for my father to come in to supper, my mother would look at her daughters’ empty places and exclaim with profound sadness: ‘My God, where has all the joy of our home gone?’ Then, resting her head on a little table beside her, she would burst into bitter tears. My brother and I wept with her. It was one of the saddest scenes I have ever witnessed. What with longing for my sisters, and seeing my mother so miserable, I felt my heart was just breaking. Although I was only a child, I understood perfectly the situation we were in” (Memoirs, 81).

Lucia continued in her memoirs, “Then I remembered the Angel’s words: ‘Above all, accept submissively the sacrifices that the Lord will send you’. At such times, I used to withdraw to a solitary place, so as not to add to my mother’s suffering.... This place, usually, was our well. There, on my knees,

leaning over the edge of the stone slabs that covered the well, my tears mingled with the waters below and I offered my suffering to God.” (Memoirs, 81)

Lucia’s daily sufferings only increased with the Marian apparitions in 1917. June was particularly trying because her mother and sisters waited to see if she would go the Cova or the parish fiesta in honor of St. Anthony. She said, “[They] persisted in their contemptuous attitude, and this cut me to the heart, and was indeed as hurtful to me as insults” (Memoirs, 84).

The longest enduring suffering that Lucia experienced was her mother’s claim that she lied about the Blessed Mother’s appearances. Maria Rosa never believed Lucia. She told Lucia, “‘I’ve seen to it, that my children always told the truth, and am I now to let the youngest get away with a thing like this? If it were just a small thing...! But a lie of such proportions, deceiving so many people and bringing them all the way here’” (Memoirs, 84)! Maria Rosa held this belief until the day she died.

“Her sisters sided with her mother, and all around Lucia the atmosphere was one of utter scorn and contempt” (Memoirs, 84)! Most of the family could not understand why such an event would happen to them. They tried to make sense of it all, but did not realize it is okay not to understand. Sometimes God calls His people to accept without understanding.

After this particular episode Lucia recalled the old days, and asked herself, ‘Where is all that affection now, that my family had for me just such a short while ago?’ My one relief was to weep before the Lord, as I offered Him my sacrifice. It was on this very day that, in addition to what I have already narrated, Our Lady, as though guessing what was going on, said to me: ‘Are you suffering a great deal? Don’t lose heart. I will never forsake you. My Immaculate Heart will be your refuge and the way that will lead you to God.’” (ibid.)

Lucia’s sisters not only called her names, but also blamed her for many things that transpired during and after the apparitions. Pilgrims damaged family crops. Their mother’s health deteriorated and

she was on the brink of death. Lucia's sisters forbade her to see Maria Rosa because they were afraid their mother would die prematurely.

Fearful for Maria Rosa's life, they told Lucia that if she really saw the Blessed Virgin Mary to go back to the Cova and promise the Lady whatever Lucia wished and they would comply and believe. Lucia asked for the cure of her mother and in return, she would go there for nine consecutive days with her sisters; they would pray the Rosary and go on their knees from the roadway to the holmoak tree where Mary appeared. Our Lady granted Lucia her request and Lucia's sisters followed through with their promise to pray and do the penance with Lucia. Maria Rosa experienced a miraculous cure and commented, "How strange! Our Lady cured me, and somehow, I still don't believe! I do not know how this can be" (Memoirs, 109).

Notice that Maria Rosa believed that Mary cured her but she had an exceedingly difficult time believing that her daughter was telling the truth about the apparitions. Maria Rosa was a very devout, faithful and convicted Catholic. She could not accept this one event. Maria Rosa's doubt was truly a cross for both mother and daughter.

In contrast to Lucia's mom, Jacinta and Francisco's parents supported and believed their children. This knowledge added to Lucia's anguish. "How different my parents are from my uncle and aunt. They risk themselves to defend their children, while my parents hand me over with the greatest indifference, and let them do what they like with me!" (Memoirs, 90) She quickly reminded herself "in [her] inmost heart, 'that **this means I have the happiness of suffering more for love of You, O my God, and for the conversion of sinners.**' This reflection never failed to bring [her] consolation" (Memoirs, 90; emphasis added). Lucia wrote elsewhere in her memoirs, "By a special grace from Our Lord, I never experienced the slightest thought or feeling of resentment regarding [my mother's] manner of acting towards me. As the Angel had announced that God would send me sufferings, I always saw the hand of God in it all. The

love, esteem and respect which I owed her, went on increasing, just as though I were most dearly cherished. And now, I am more grateful to her for having treated me like this, than if she had continued to surround me with endearments and caresses” (Memoirs, 91 with emphasis added).

Not only did Lucia experience opposition from most of her family but also from the anti-clerical government. They went so far as to put the children into prison and threatened them with their very lives. Lucia learned to offer the daily sacrifices to God.

Emotionally, Lucia was in a state of confusion and helplessness. Within the first two months of the Marian apparitions, she began to think the visions were manifestations of the devil in order for her to lose her soul. Her faithful companions, Francisco and Jacinta, eased her conscience slightly by convincing her that her second thoughts were lies. She was not completely convinced and she lost enthusiasm for sacrifice and mortification and was resolved not to go back to the Cova. On the morning of July 13, God’s grace penetrated and dispelled the darkness in Lucia’s heart. She joyfully and enthusiastically enjoined her cousins to go with her to the Cova as planned.

Though there were some very dark moments for Lucia during this time, she rested in the support of a few companions. One such companion was her father who defended her. Whenever he heard his wife mention that Lucia lied, he promptly would say that they did not know if their daughter was actually lying or not. She also found comfort in the companionship of her two little cousins. They cried with her when she was upset, and offered up supplications to the Mother of God for their older friend. Let us not forget that after her father and two little companions died, Lucia remained on this earth to carry on her God given mission.

Most of all, the source of Lucia’s joy was in encountering Christ in every circumstance. God allows suffering in order to bring forth a greater good. Lucia knew this and was convicted of it. She

often quoted in her letters to the bishops and her spiritual directors, "I saw the hand of God in it all." She also wrote frequently, "Recourse to the Immaculate Heart of Mary was my only consolation."

Lucia knew that her two closest companions were going to leave her because Our Lady revealed to her in June and July that Lucia would "stay here sometime longer because God wished to use her to make the Blessed Virgin known and loved. He wanted to use her to establish devotion to Mary's Immaculate Heart in the world" (Silva, 86).

In the summer of 1921, Lucia began attending the Dorothean Sisters' school to learn how to read as Our Lady requested. She then joined the community as a postulant in Pontevedra, Spain in 1925. On December 10th of that year, the Virgin Mary and Child Jesus appeared to Lucia in the convent. "The Virgin rested her hand on Lucia's shoulder and showed Lucia a heart encircled by thorns, which she was holding in her other hand. At the same time, the Child said: 'Have compassion on the Heart of your most holy Mother, covered with thorns, with which ungrateful men pierce it at every moment, and there is no one to make an act of reparation to remove them.'"

Then the most holy Virgin said: "'Look, my daughter, at my Heart, surrounded with thorns with which ungrateful men pierce me every moment by their blasphemies and ingratitude. You at least try to console me and say that I promise to assist at the hour of death, with the graces necessary for salvation, all those who, on the first Saturday of five consecutive months, shall confess, receive Holy Communion, recite five decades of the Rosary, and keep me company for fifteen minutes while meditating on the fifteen mysteries of the Rosary, with the intention of making reparation to me'" (Memoirs, 194). The apparition of Pontevedra solidified exactly what Lucia spread throughout the world.

A year later, the Infant Jesus appeared to Lucia again and asked her if she had already spread devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. She told him of the many difficulties that she encountered with her superior and spiritual director.

In June of 1929 in Tuy, Spain, Sr. Lucia had a vision of the Most Holy Trinity and the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Our Lady said to her, “The moment has come in which God asks the Holy Father, in union with all the Bishops of the world, to make the consecration of Russia to my Immaculate Heart, promising to save it by this means” (Memoirs, 198).

In 1917, Mary indicated to Lucia her future work. With the last two apparitions in the convent, Our Lord and Our Lady gave her more detailed instructions, thus concretizing her mission in the Church. Sr. Lucia worked for the next 75 years carrying out her mission. In her lifetime within the convent, Sr. Lucia wrote six memoirs, finishing each one within a fortnight. Please keep in mind that she used the front and back of the paper with close handwriting and almost no corrections. One memoir was 38 pages long. She also wrote one book entitled “Calls from the Message of Fatima”. In addition, she wrote between 300,000 to 400,000 letters to people who wrote asking questions and requesting clarifications and prayers. Above all, she lived the Gospel generously. She practiced and promoted the heavenly message entrusted to her. Sr. Lucia faithfully lived her religious life. May she one day soon join her dear little companions Jacinta and Francisco among the ranks of the saints, if she is not already in heaven.

Bibliography

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