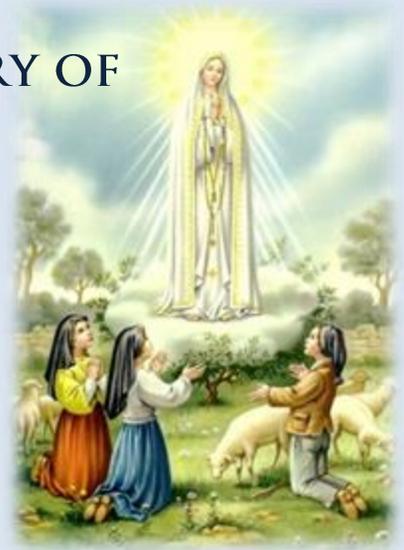


# CELEBRATING THE 100<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF *Our Lady of Fatima*



**June 16, 2017**

## **The Personal Holiness of Saints Jacinta and Francisco**

On May 13<sup>th</sup>, 2017 Francisco and Jacinta Marto were declared the youngest non-martyr saints in the entire history of the Catholic Church. Francisco and Jacinta are not saints because they were visited by an angel or the Blessed Virgin, but because they put the messages they received into practice. This gives all of us who have not yet seen any heavenly visitors great hope. We too can become saints.

Before the apparitions, Francisco and Jacinta were normal children. They both wanted to receive the Eucharist and prayed with their family, but there was nothing that really made them stand out from other children. Francisco was gentle, obedient, usually had a smile on his face, and he never lied. He loved nature—including playing with and bringing home lizards and snakes, playing his flute, and playing cards (Gorny & Rosikon, 2017; Higgins & Higgins, 2010; Kondor, 2005; Silva, 2008).

Like many children, Francisco had hiding places, which is why his mother sometimes could not find him when she needed him. Francisco also liked playing practical jokes—such as the time when his brother John was sleeping. Francisco found a piece of wood, and wanted to put it in his brother's mouth (Kondor, 2005, pp. 138-141, 158; Shepherds, 2008, 43-50)!

Francisco could also be annoying and indecisive. Lucia said that “if he had lived to manhood, his greatest defect would have been his attitude of ‘never mind’” (Kondor, 2005, p. 139). He often lost at games, and when he won he would let others believe they won. Jacinta was gentle, sweet, lovable, vivacious, capricious, full of passion, and the center of her was her heart (Gorny & Rosikon, 2017; Higgins & Higgins, 2010; Kondor, 2005; Silva, 2008).

She would show her feelings spontaneously and sometimes could be overly sensitive (Rengers, 1986). She loved dancing! She would often begin dancing as soon as she heard someone playing an instrument. She also liked having her way at games—which means she liked choosing which game to play and always winning. She was not a gracious loser, was prone to pout, and did not like to return the spoils she had won (Gorny & Rosikon, 2017; Higgins & Higgins, 2010; Kondor, 2005; Rengers, 1986; Silva, 2008). Lucia recounts,

Playing ‘buttons’ often left me in great distress, because when they called us into 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! (Kondor, 2005, p. 37)

Luckily for them and for us, Our Lord and Our Lady do not want anyone to continue to grow in their defects. Instead, Jesus and Mary want us to grow in holiness and they give us the opportunities necessary for us to become saints. In 1916, the children received three apparitions from the Angel of Peace and their lives began to change.

The angel taught them the importance of having a personal relationship with Our Lord, primarily through prayer and Eucharistic Adoration (Gorny & Rosikon, 2017; Higgins & Higgins, 2010; Kondor, 2005; Silva, 2008).

The angel also showed them the importance of reparation, which is “a prayer or devotions with the intent to expiate the ‘sins of others’” ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Acts\\_of\\_reparation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Acts_of_reparation)) – (Which is why we can hear the word “repair” in reparation). The angel also taught them how to pray and make sacrifices for others.

The children felt God’s presence intimately and intensely during the apparitions. Francisco could not hear what the angel said, but he still saw the angel and felt God’s presence. This deep sensing of God’s presence lasted for days. As a result, Lucia and Jacinta could not speak the first day, so Francisco had to wait until the next day to find out what the angel said. Then, because they were still under the strong influence of the apparition, Francisco had to wait another day to have them explain what the angel said (Kondor, 2005; Silva, 2008). May the Lord give us all Francisco’s heroic patience – but may the Lord give it to us gently – especially since we know that those who pray for patience are usually soon given opportunities to practice the virtue!

The children put the angel’s message into practice. They would often prostrate themselves and repeat the prayers taught to them by the angel until they were tired. They began offering sacrifices, making reparation, and focusing on their relationship with Our Lord instead of playing (Kondor, 2005).

At the angel’s last visit, he brought them the Eucharist. It was Francisco and Jacinta’s First Communion. After they received it, they knew that they had God in them. At the same time, they also keenly felt that God’s love is “often met with man’s ingratitude [and they wanted to comfort him]”

(Gorny & Rosikon, 2017, p. 63). This deeply affected all three of the children and became an element of their spirituality, but especially for Francisco. As a result of this, he developed a greater love for the “hidden Jesus,” and consoling Our Lord became the defining element of his spirituality. Eventually, he would skip school to spend more time with the “hidden Jesus”. After all, he knew he was going to die soon and thus school was pointless for him – but adoring Our Lord was not.

This defining element of his spirituality was also a great source of sorrow and suffering for him. Despite his great love and thirst for the Blessed Sacrament, he was unable to receive Communion because he was very timid, and when questioned by the priest about his Catechism and prayers, he would often make mistakes. The only other time Francisco received our Lord physically was as Viaticum on his deathbed (Kondor, 2005; Silva, 2008). If every Catholic had Francisco’s great love for Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, how different this world would be!

The following year, the children saw Our Lady for the first time. On May 13, 1917, Our Lady appeared to the three children. Francisco was eight, Jacinta was seven. Just like the angel apparitions, Francisco saw the heavenly visitor, but could not hear Our Lady speak. Mary asked the children,

“Are you willing to offer yourselves to God to bear all the sufferings He wills to send you, as an act of reparation for the sins by which He is offended, and of supplication for the conversion of sinners?” [They replied yes.] “Then, you are going to have much to suffer, but the grace of God will be your comfort.” (Kondor, 2005, pp. 82-83)

Our Lady told them that they would all go to heaven. She requested that they come back on the 13<sup>th</sup> for six months, pray the Rosary daily for peace in the world and to end WWI. (During each of these visits, Mary asked them to pray the Rosary daily—it is that important.) Francisco was told he would have

to “say many Rosaries” before he went to heaven (Kondor, 2005, p. 175). Francisco said in reply, “Oh, my dear Our Lady! I’ll say as many Rosaries as you want” (Kondor, 2005, p. 143)! Francisco took this as his mission, and at every free moment, he would sneak off and pray the Rosary. He would choose to pray over playing or eating. Even when he was bedridden during his final illness, he still prayed over eight Rosaries a day as long as his health allowed him to (Silva, 2008, p. 163).

After the June 13<sup>th</sup> apparition, they were questioned by their parish priest. The priest told Lucia it could “be a deceit of the devil” (Kondor, 2005, p. 85). This put Lucia in anguish, and made it so that she did not want to go to the Cova on July 13<sup>th</sup>. Jacinta told Lucia it was not the devil because “They say that the devil is very ugly and that he’s down under the ground in hell. But that Lady is so beautiful, and we saw her go up to heaven!” (Kondor, 2005, p. 86). Francisco, for his part, turned to prayer. He spent the night of July 12<sup>th</sup> in prayer to Our Lady to make Lucia go to the Cova. By the next morning, Lucia changed her mind and went. This could be considered Francisco’s first miracle, and it is a great example of how both he and Jacinta often interceded for others—which is something that has continued even after their deaths (Rengers, 1986; & Silva, 2008).

During the July 13<sup>th</sup> apparition, the children saw hell. Lucia tells us that “we would have died of fear and terror” if they had not already been promised that they were going to heaven (Kondor, 2005, p. 123). While hell affected all three children and they daily sacrificed for the conversion of sinners, it affected Jacinta the most and became for her a defining aspect of her spirituality. After this apparition, she constantly prayed and sacrificed for poor sinners. While Francisco’s spirituality was primarily focused on consoling Our Lord for the many sins that offend him, Jacinta’s spirituality primarily focused on converting poor sinners so that they do not offend the Lord anymore (Gorny & Rosikon, 2017; Higgins & Higgins, 2010; Kondor, 2005; Rengers, 1986; Silva, 2008).

Jacinta was often deeply saddened when she thought about how many souls could have avoided going to hell if they had made just a little effort. Penance and sacrifices seemed like nothing to her now. At the promptings of Jacinta, the three children would often give away their lunch to poor children, and instead eat bitter acorns, olives, and other things they could find growing as a sacrifice for the conversion of sinners. The children would also give up drinking water—even in the heat of summer. This led them to be so dehydrated that they had horrible headaches and were weak from this sacrifice (Gorny & Rosikon, 2017; Higgins & Higgins, 2010; Kondor, 2005; Rengers, 1986; Silva, 2008).

Jacinta would frequently meditate on hell, and was especially struck by the terrible reality that it lasts for all eternity (Kondor, 2005, p. 46). We have TV and internet that frequently bombards us with all of the suffering that is going on in the world today, but how often do we allow it to inspire us to pray and sacrifice for the conversion of sinners?

In the third secret shown to them in the July apparitions, Jacinta was also deeply touched by the sufferings of the “Bishop dressed in white” (Shepherds, 2010, pp. 105-109). As a result, she developed a great love for the Pope and for priests. Her spiritual life reflected this deep love through her many and frequent prayers for the Pope and for priests. She also received two more visions of the Pope. These further motivated Jacinta to intensify her prayers for him (Kondor, 2005, p. 128-129).

On August 13<sup>th</sup>, the children were tricked by the Administrator, Artur de Oliveira Santos to get into his car. While he had told them that he was going to take them to the Cova, in reality he took them prisoner. During their imprisonment, Francisco suffered greatly because he was worried that the Lady would never appear to them again because they were not in the Cova like she asked them to be on the 13<sup>th</sup>. Jacinta suffered greatly because she thought that they did not matter to their parents because their parents did not come to get them. Jacinta offered this suffering up for the conversion of sinners. In

addition to all this, they were told they would be fried alive in oil if they would not tell what the three secrets were. The children bravely chose to be fried in oil instead of telling the secrets. This could be considered a martyrdom for them because they were more willing to die than to disobey the Lady or say that she did not appear to them (Gorny & Rosikon, 2017; Higgins & Higgins, 2010; Kondor, 2005; Silva, 2008).

Soon after Mary appeared to them on August 19<sup>th</sup>, the children began to occasionally hit their legs with stinging nettle as a penance (Kondor, 2005, p. 93). Then, they found a thick, coarse rope. Lucia tied it around her arm for fun, and it soon began to hurt. They decided to cut it into three pieces and wear it around their waist as an act of penance. It hurt them so much that Jacinta would cry, but she refused to remove it. The rope was causing them to have sores, bleed, and not sleep. When Mary appeared in September, she told them they could wear the rope, but not at night. She was concerned for their health as any mother would have been (Gorny & Rosikon, 2017; Higgins & Higgins, 2010; Kondor, 2005; Silva, 2008).

In September, Mary also promised that the Lord was coming in October. Francisco was thrilled! He kept asking if it was many days away and was excited when he saw Our Lord in October. After the October apparition, Francisco said, "I loved seeing Our Lord...It's not long now, and Our Lord will take me up close to Him, and then I can look at Him forever" (Kondor, 2005, p. 149-150).

Around one year later, Francisco and Jacinta contracted the Spanish Influenza. They were never well again, but their final illnesses gave them more time to live the Fatima Message. In their final illnesses, they always tried to appear joyful and happy. They often ate and drank when they had no appetite as a sacrifice. Francisco always wanted to do good to all who visited him. What pained Francisco most was that he could not go and console the "hidden Jesus" (Kondor, 2005, p. 157).

During this time, Mary appeared to Francisco and Jacinta. Mary told them that:

she would come to take Francisco to heaven very soon, and she asked [Jacinta] if [she] still wanted to convert more sinners. [Jacinta] said [she] did. [Mary] told [Jacinta that she] would be going to a hospital where [she] would suffer a great deal; and that [she is] to suffer for the conversion of sinners, in reparation for the sins committed against the Immaculate Heart of Mary, and for love of Jesus. [Jacinta] asked if [Lucia] would go with [her]. [Mary] said [she] wouldn't, and that is what [Jacinta found the] hardest. (Kondor, 2005, pp. 59-60)

Hence, Jacinta chose to stay in the world longer so she could suffer more for the conversion of sinners. Long before she was taken to the hospital, she began to suffer the anguish that she was going to die alone. Dying alone is scary for many people, so it is understandable that a nine-year-old would be scared with the knowledge that she was going to die alone, but she still chose to offer this intense suffering up for the conversion of sinners (Gorny & Rosikon, 2017; Higgins & Higgins, 2010; Kondor, 2005; Rengers, 1986; Silva, 2008).

Mary did not leave her alone. She continued to appear to Jacinta, and even told her the day and time of her death. Because of this, Jacinta knew the surgery would not help her. Ten days before her death, Jacinta had surgery to remove two of her infected ribs on her left side. (Before the surgery, the infection smelled so bad that people did not want to be around her and refused to take her in because of the stench (Rengers, 1986).) Because Jacinta was so weak, the staff could not fully sedate her for the surgery, so she was not "out" during the surgery and she intensely felt the pain of the surgery. The surgery greatly increased her pain, but she only complained about it once to Mother Godinho (Shepherds, 2010, 184-185).

On February 20, 1920, Jacinta died alone. When the undertaker, Antonio Almeida, came to get her body, 'he noted the body now had a fragrant smell, rosy cheeks, and pink lips. He also "found blood stains on Jacinta's cheek and pillow, indicating that she had cried tears of blood before her death," which was something he had never seen previously nor did he ever see again' (Higgins & Higgins, 2010).

Francisco and Jacinta Marto are saints because they put the messages given to them by the angel and Our Lady into practice. The angel and our Lady taught them the importance of offering up their daily sufferings, having a prayer life that includes Eucharistic Adoration, praying the Rosary daily, making reparation for offenses committed against Our Lord and Our Lady, and offering sacrifices for the conversion of sinners. We too can incorporate these elements into our own prayer lives, and God-willing, become saints like Francisco and Jacinta.

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