

The Marian Pilgrimage: Day Seven: Wednesday 13May 2020

The Shrine of Our Lady of Fatima, Portugal



On 13 May 1917, three children were working as shepherds in a field near Fatima when it is said that the Virgin Mary appeared to them. She told the children that she would appear at noon on the 13th of every month for the next six months, during which time she asked them to pray for the world. She also shared three important secrets. That is the main thrust of the Fatima story, which has had interesting developments.

At first, no one believed the children and they were even jailed at one point, believed to be causing trouble. Then, on October 13, 1917, members of the public who did believe their story, followed them and gave witness to another apparition in the sky: a dancing sun that could be looked at directly without hurting their eyes. In 1930, the Catholic Church announced that these apparitions were worthy of belief.

The children in this story were siblings **Francisco and Jacinta Marto**, and their cousin, **Lúcia dos Santos**. The brother and sister died two and three years after the apparitions, aged ten and nine years respectively. **They both succumbed to the international flu pandemic which began in 1918.**

At this time of the Coronavirus Pandemic there is a special resonance in recalling the short lives and holiness in these young people.

The Third visionary, Lúcia, lived until the age of 97, dedicating her life to the church as a nun. She died in 2005. Lucia shared the three secrets at different times during her life. Two were events in the night sky that would signify the onset of World War II. The third was described as an assassination attempt on Pope John Paul II, which happened in 1981.

The Centenary of the Apparitions: 2017 Pope Francis visited Fatima on 13 May 2017, marking the centenary of the Marian apparitions in Fatima.



The story developed in three parts:

First, the initial reporting of events 1917, and information which became available later through the memoirs of Sister Lúcia's [one of the three children] which she wrote years later, after the Church ruled that the events in Fatima were "worthy of belief." Her memoir was not subject to the same scrutiny. The early messages focused on the need to pray the rosary for peace and an end to World War I. The supernatural events in Fátima were not widely known outside Portugal and Spain until Sr Lúcia published her memoirs.

Second, In the mid-1930s the Bishop of Leiria encouraged Lúcia (at that time

named Sister Maria Lúcia das Dores) to write her memoirs, so that she might reveal further details of the 1917 apparitions. Her first memoir, published in 1935, focused on the holiness of Jacinta Marto. This girl now dead, was by then popularly considered a saint. In her second memoir, published in 1937, Lucia wrote more about her own life, the apparition of 13 June 1917, and she also revealed the earlier apparitions of the Angel of Peace.

Between 1935 and 1993, she wrote six memoirs. The first four, written between 1935 and 1941 during World War II, were published under the title *Fatima in Lucia's Own Words* (1976). The fifth and six memoirs, written in 1989 and 1993, are published as *Fatima in Lucia's Own Words II*.

Third, Finding herself inundated with constantly repeated questions concerning the Marian apparitions occurred in Fátima, Portugal, and the visionaries, the message they received and the reason for some of the requests contained in that message, and feeling that it was beyond her to reply individually to each questioner, Sister Lúcia asked the Holy See for permission to write a text in which she could reply in general to the many questions that had been put to her. This permission was granted and a new book was published entitled *Calls from the Message of Fatima*.

In outline **Three Secrets of Fátima: First secret**

This was a vision of hell, which Lúcia said they experienced on 13 July 1917.



Whatever form this insight took, of people abandoned to Hell, we need perhaps to look at the 'idea of Hell'

"St. Augustine and St. Gregory the Great taught that Hell was a particular place inside the earth. Modern theologians however have moved on from such a literal understanding. Instead of speaking of Hell as a place they refer to it as a state of being.

In Ludwig Ott's work *The Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, 'Hell is a place or state of eternal punishment inhabited by those rejected by God.'

This echoes papal teaching on Hell. The Catechism published by Pope Pius X in 1908 defined Hell by using the word "state" alone: "Hell is a state to which the wicked are condemned, and in which they are deprived of the sight of God for all eternity, and are in dreadful torments."

In July 1999 Pope St. John Paul II also said, "the Bible uses 'a symbolic language,' which must be correctly interpreted ... Rather than a place, Hell indicates the state of those who freely and definitively separate themselves from God, the source of all life and joy."

Pope Benedict was less ambiguous, saying in a homily of March 2007, "Jesus came to tell us that he wants us all in heaven and that Hell, of which so little is said in our time, exists and is eternal for those who close their hearts to his love."

The theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar said that "we must see that Hell is not 'created' by God but by the free individuals who choose it." C.S.Lewis famously observed that "the doors of Hell are locked from the inside." In other words, those souls who are in Hell have chosen to reject God.

In his book *The Great Divorce*, Lewis affirms the ironic truth that souls who reject God would not be happy in heaven. Having first rejected everything that is beautiful, good and true, they have come to hate what is beautiful, good and true.

Heaven would therefore not be a source of pleasure for them, but a place of torture.

Again Lewis: *"Hell begins with a grumbling mood, always complaining, always blaming others but you are still distinct from it. You may even criticise it in yourself and wish you could stop it, But there may come a day when you can no longer. Then there will be no 'you' left to criticise the mood, or even to enjoy it, but just the grumble itself, going on forever like a machine.*

It is not a question of God 'sending us to Hell'. In each of us there is something growing which will BE Hell unless it is nipped in the bud."

The theologian Karl Rahner suggested that the everlasting mercy of God would not allow Hell to be populated, but that all would eventually be saved. Von Balthasar does not go that far, in his famous book *Dare We Hope* he argues that one has at least the Christian duty to hope that all might one day be saved.

Thinking about HELL, here we may begin a meditation, reflection on the Warnings of Jesus. The people who populate Hell are those who do not come with loving kindness to the afflicted, sick, downtrodden, those held captive, those who are overburdened.

In his visit to Fatima Pope Francis warned the half million member **congregation to avoid a life that "profanes God in his creatures...Such a life...risks leading to Hell."**

In a secular age in which many dismiss the reality of Hell, Saint Padre Pio's acerbic remark is memorable. When asked what he thought of modern people who do not believe in Hell he replied, **"They will believe in Hell when they get there."**

"The teaching of the Church affirms the existence of Hell and its eternity. Immediately after death the souls of those who die in a state of mortal sin descend into Hell, where they suffer the punishments of Hell. The chief punishment of Hell is eternal separation from God...." (CCC, para.1035)

SO : A suitable subject for a Meditation!

The Second secret: This was a recommendation for devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary as a way to save souls and bring peace to the world. It predicted an end to the Great War, but went further and prophesied a worse war if people did not cease offending God. To avert this, Mary would return to ask for the consecration of Russia to the Immaculate Heart, and the establishment of the First Saturdays Devotion. If her requests were heeded, Russia would be converted, and there would be peace; if not, Russia would spread her errors throughout the world, causing wars and persecutions of the Church. The vision culminated with a promise that in the end, "the Immaculate Heart would triumph. The Holy Father would consecrate Russia to Mary, and a period of peace would be granted to the world."

The third secret, a vision of the death of a Pope and other religious figures, was transcribed by the Bishop of Leiria and reads:

"After the two parts which I have already explained, at the left of Our Lady and a little above, we saw an Angel with a flaming sword in his left hand; flashing, it gave out flames that looked as though they would set the world on fire; but they died out in contact with the splendour that Our Lady radiated towards him from her right hand: pointing to the earth with his right hand, the Angel cried out in a loud voice: 'Penance, Penance, Penance!' And we saw in an immense light that is God: 'something similar to how people appear in a mirror when they pass in front of it' a Bishop dressed in White 'we had the impression that it was the Holy Father'. Other Bishops, Priests, Religious men and women going up a steep mountain, at the top of which there was a big Cross of rough-hewn trunks as of a cork-tree with the bark; before reaching there the Holy Father passed through a big city half in ruins and half trembling with halting step, afflicted with pain and sorrow, he prayed for the souls of the corpses he met on his way; having reached the top of the mountain, on his knees at the foot of the big Cross he was killed by a group of soldiers who fired bullets and arrows at him, and in the

same way there died one after another the other Bishops, Priests, Religious men and women, and various lay people of different ranks and positions. Beneath the two arms of the Cross there were two Angels each with a crystal aspersorium in his hand, in which they gathered up the blood of the Martyrs and with it sprinkled the souls that were making their way to God."

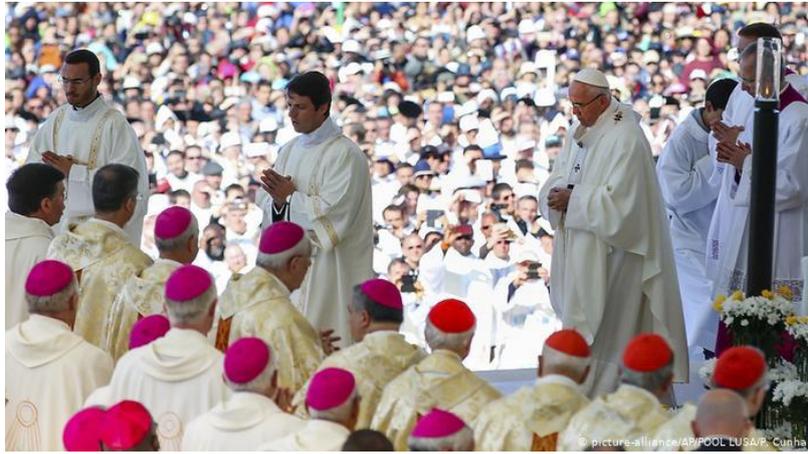
Controversy around the Third Secret

Lúcia declared that the Third Secret could be released to the public after 1960. Some sources, including Canon Barthas and Cardinal Ottaviani, said that Lúcia insisted to them it must be released by 1960, saying that, "by that time, it will be more clearly understood", and, "because the Blessed Virgin wishes it so." Instead, in 1960 the Vatican published an official press release stating that it was "most probable the Secret would remain, forever, under absolute seal."

The Vatican did not publish the Third Secret, a four-page, handwritten text, until 26 June 2000.

Despite some detractors who alleged that there was a more full text, not published, the Vatican maintained its position that the full text of the Third Secret had been published. According to a December 2001 Vatican press release (published in *L'Osservatore Romano*), Lúcia told then-Archbishop Bertone in an interview that the secret had been completely revealed when published.

During his apostolic visit to Portugal during 11–14 May 2010 on the 10th anniversary of the beatification of Jacinta and Francisco Marto Pope Benedict XVI explained to reporters that the interpretation of the third secret did not only refer to the attempted assassination of Pope John Paul II in Saint Peter's Square in 1981. He said that the third secret, "has a permanent and ongoing significance," and that, "its significance could even be extended to include the suffering the Church is going through today as a result of the recent reports of sexual abuse involving the clergy."



Pope Francis on Saturday proclaimed the two Portuguese shepherd children, Francisco and Jacinta Marto, to be saints at a Mass in Fatima, Portugal, marking the centenary of their reported sightings of the Virgin Mary.

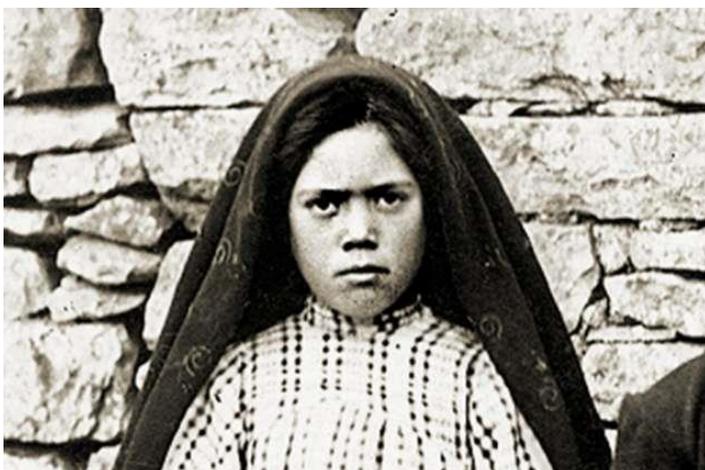
The two children have now become the youngest Catholic saints ever not to have died as martyrs.

The proclamation was made in front of hundreds of thousands of pilgrims who clapped at the announcement of the children's canonization.

'Terrible secret'

Francisco and Jacinta, then aged 9 and 7, and their 10-year-old cousin, Lucia, reported having seen the Virgin Mary for the first time on March 13, 1917, when she appeared to them while they were grazing their sheep. On one of five more apparitions, on July 13, she reportedly confided three secrets in them, foretelling apocalyptic visions of hell, war, communism and the death of a pope.

Lucia dos Santos was the youngest in a family of seven.



However, at 10, she was the oldest of the three shepherd children who witnessed apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary from May-October 1917. The other two were her cousins Francisco and Jacinta Marto, who were just 9 and 7, respectively.

While the Marto siblings died shortly after the apparitions, as Mary had predicted, Lucia outlived her cousins by many years, and was the one to write down accounts of everything they had seen.

Shortly after the deaths of her cousins, at age 14 Lucia was sent to attend school with the Dorothean Sisters of Villar, in 1946, she transferred to the convent of the Carmelite Sisters of Coimbra, Portugal taking the name Sister Maria Lucia of the Immaculate Heart.

Lucia died in 2005 at the age of 97, at the Carmelite convent of Santa Teresain Coimbra, where she had lived since 1948

Just in time for the 100th Anniversary of Fatima, the diocesan phase of the canonization process for Sister Lucia, one of the three seers who saw and conversed with Our Lady of the Rosary at Fatima, came to an official close on Feb. 13.

The announcement came from the Shrine at Fatima in Portugal and the Diocese of Coimbra where her cause began on April 30, 2008.

The date also marked the 11th anniversary of Sister Lucia's death. The first part of her canonization cause began in 2008, just three years after she died, thanks to the dispensation granted by Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI. (The Church normally requires a five-year waiting period before a cause can be opened.)It was the same privilege given to the Pope of Fatima — St. John Paul II. Benedict waived the normal five-year waiting period.

