

# Children of Fatima: “Boiling in Oil”

The following is an edited transcript of a speech given by Dr. Peter Chojnowski at our [Fatima: Your Last Chance Conference](#) in May 2012.

He reminds us of the strong faith and love and devotion the children of Fatima held for the Blessed Mother, even in the face of death.

by Peter Chojnowski, Ph.D.

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## The Initial Response to the Apparitions

It was the second week of August 1917. Everybody in Portugal seemed to have heard the news from Fatima. Catholic diocesan papers began to publish short articles in which a note of prudent reserve was evident, never endorsing, always hesitant; the headline of the one in *The Ouriense of Ourem*, for example was “Real Apparition or Supposed Illusion.” Editors of newspapers in the Jacobin tradition of 1789 flatly accused the clergy, and particularly the Jesuits, of having invented the revelation. The anti-clerical *O Seculo*, chief daily of Lisbon, printed a sarcastic and distorted account of the Fatima apparition of July 13, under the heading, “A Message from Heaven or Commercial Speculation?” Liberals of a more moderate tinge wrote of psychosis, epi-

lepsy and collective suggestion as possible explanations of the incredible tale from the Cova da Iria. A casual reader of the daily press might have concluded that the net result thus far had been to provoke a new and bitter attack upon the Church.

## Preparation for the 4th Apparition, August 1917

By August of 1917, the goings on in Fatima had become a sensation throughout Portugal, a Portugal which had been enduring the greatest attack on the integrity and life of the Catholic Church in her long national history. The illiterate children of Aljustrel, a village near Fatima, and their families could not escape easily from hordes of pilgrims, devotees, relic-hunters and mere sensation seekers that broke in more and more upon their peace. Some were sorry poor

wretches shattered by want or sickness or some incurable disease, who often walked barefoot over great distances, completing the last mile on bleeding knees, to ask their prayers for some favor, some cure from the Holy Virgin. The children and their families found it more difficult to be patient with some of the rich and well-fed persons, fashionably dressed and sporting furs and jewels, who would appear suddenly in carriages or even in automobiles, some from as far as Porto or Lisbon, either to beg some boon from Heaven or to divert themselves with a new marvel. Ti Marto, the father of Jacinta and Francisco, remembered them well. What questions would they ask? Some of them were terrible, in their triviality.

### **The Children's Suffering – Lucia's Persecution**

Unfortunately, the national fascination directed to the three children of the apparitions of Fatima – Lucia, Francisco, and Jacinta – did not bring about the conversion of Lucia's family. They had been more unsympathetic than ever since the apparition of July 13. Previously her father had shrugged off the whole affair with some muttering about "women's tales." But he had

passed from neutrality to open hostility on the day when he went to inspect his vegetable gardens at the Cova da Iria, and saw what the crowds had done to them. Thousands of feet had packed the soil so hard that there was no sense cultivating it anymore; horses had eaten or trampled his cabbages, beans, and potato vines; all his labor had been wasted. Antonio grumbled and fumed.

With a few exceptions, relatives and neighbors became even more hostile towards the children as the apparitions became publicized. Lucia, in particular, became a lightning rod for abuse. She was punched, kicked, threatened, and insulted when she appeared alone in public. Curiously, much of this ill treatment came from the women at St. Anthony's parish in Fatima. At home Lucia continued to get the business end of the broomstick from her mother. Even her father, previously indifferent to the events at Fatima, now turned against her. Antonio was understandably upset that the crowds at the Cova da Iria had not only destroyed the family's vegetable gardens but had trampled the ground so thoroughly that it was beyond cultivation. The appearances of Our Lady had indirectly hit the dos Santos



**The children of Fatima made acts of personal sacrifices on a daily basis, offering them up for reparation for the atrocities committed against the Blessed Virgin Mary and for the salvation of souls. Let us pick up their spirit and apply sacrifices of reparation in our own daily lives.**

family hard in the pocketbook.

Consequently, when Lucia dared to ask for a piece of bread at meal times her sisters would snap, "Go and eat what you find growing at the Cova da Iria!" And Maria Rosa (her mother) would add, "Yes, ask that Lady to give you something to eat."

"We didn't make them go," said loyal Jacinta from the doorway. "They went there themselves!" But Maria Rosa felt too strongly to listen to reasoning. There were days when Lucia feared to ask her for so much as a piece of bread and went to bed hungry. Lucia got

used to going to bed hungry. From time to time her mother would take her to the Prior for another interrogation, hoping each time that he would find a way to break her stubborn will. At the end, the clergyman always shook his head and said, "I don't know what to say about all this." No wonder Maria Rosa still doubted, when a man, so learned, confessed that he could make nothing of it.

### **God's Infinite Goodness; His Justice and Mercy**

It was only on the hills near the Cova da Iria that Lucia

could find any peace or solace at all. And even there the discussions of the three children had taken on a somber and more thoughtful tone since the breathtaking revelations of July 13. The fires of hell; the damnation of many souls; a second world war with millions of people starving, homeless, tormented, butchered, tumbling unprepared into eternity – how could the world ever look the same to childish eyes after Divine Wisdom had disclosed such horrors! The two girls could think of nothing else. Francisco, for some reason, was much less shaken by the experience. Instead of brooding on the countless souls he had seen rising and falling like sparks in the flames under the taunts of fallen angels, he would fix his thoughts upon God, upon His Goodness and His Glory.

“How wonderful God is!” he would cry ecstatically. “There is no way to say it. All you can say is that nobody can say it. But isn’t it too bad that He is so sad! If I could only console Him!”

### **Jacinta’s Profound Meditations**

Jacinta did not find it so easy to put out of mind the horror of eternal death. If a world

war could be both incredible and painfully real, so much the more so was hell. But what does a child of seven know of the enormity of sin? She was shocked and profoundly puzzled. A few days after the apparition of hell, which was the first part of the great Secret revealed on July 13, Jacinta asked Lucia: “That Lady said that many souls go to hell. What is hell?” Lucy, perhaps quoting her mother, said: “It is a pit full of worms and a very big bonfire, and people go there who commit sins and don’t confess them, and they stay forever and burn.” “And never get out anymore?” “No.” “Not after many, many years?” “No. Hell never ends. And Heaven doesn’t either. Whoever goes to Heaven never gets out of it, and whoever goes to hell doesn’t either. Don’t you see that they are eternal, because they never end?”

Jacinta found this concept of endlessness at once baffling and tantalizing. She could never put it wholly out of mind. Often in the midst of some game she would stop suddenly and say: “But look here, doesn’t hell end even after many, many, many years?” “No.” “And those people who have to burn there never die? Never? And they

never turn into ashes? And if people pray a great deal for sinners, Our Lord will save them from that? And with sacrifices too? Poor souls, we have to pray and make many sacrifices for them!"

### **Jacinta's Noble Pity**

When the thought of the burden of sin became almost unbearable, she would remember the consolation that had been granted with it. "How good that Lady is! Yes, She has promised to take us to Heaven!" Jacinta was too unselfish to be able to dwell long or complacently on her own good fortune when there were so many others who would never share it. To her the sight of hell was like a gate opening upon a steep road of asceticism. "I think I would lay down a thousand lives to save one soul of the many I saw being lost," wrote St. Teresa of Avila after a similar experience. And from this Jacinta was so stricken with the same noble pity that she acquired a thirst for penance to which Lucia could apply only the word "insatiable." Other Christians accepted hell on faith, because Christ had said repeatedly and with solemn emphasis that there is a hell, but Jacinta had seen it.

### **We Must Save Souls**

And once she grasped the idea that God's justice is a counterpart to His mercy, and that there must be a hell if there is to be a Heaven, nothing seemed important to her except to save as many souls as possible from the horrors she has glimpsed under the radiant hands of the Queen of Heaven. Nothing could be too hard, nothing too small or too great to give up.

More and more, however, she brooded on the lost souls. "Jacinta, what are you thinking of?" asked Lucia one day. "Of that war that is going to come and of so many people who are going to die and go to hell. What a pity there must be war and they must go to hell because they won't stop sinning!" Time and again this thought recurred with sickening impact. She would say, with a look of terror: "Hell! Hell! How sorry I am for the souls that are going to hell!" Then she would fall on her knees, clasp her hands and repeat over and over the prayer Our Lady had taught them to add to each decade of the Rosary. "Oh my Jesus, forgive us our sins, save us from the fires of hell, lead all souls to Heaven, especially those most in need."

### **Masonry's Intervention: The Administrator**

The fathers of the children received formal notice, a few days before the 13th of August, the date of the next promised apparition, that the Administrator of the Ourem City Council ordered them to present the children, the ones that had disturbed the public peace so notoriously, at the town hall of that city for trial, at the hour of noon on Saturday, August 11, 1917.

The Administrator for the 7-year-old Masonic revolutionary republican government of Portugal was Arturo de Oliveira Santos. Baptized Catholic, at one time he made his living in a smithy. He joined the Grand Orient Lodge in Leiria (a little north and west of Fatima) just as the Masonic revolution of 1910 was toppling the Portuguese monarchy. Robbing the Church has often been a profitable business, and so it was with the Tinsmith. After seizing Church property and imprisoning or exiling hundreds of priests and nuns, the revolution rewarded the promising Arturo by making him chief administrator of the Portuguese district that included Fatima.

At 26, Santos had joined the Grand Orient Lodge in Leiria.

He became indoctrinated with the esoteric lore of a syncretistic and naturalistic religion which has been the chief opponent of the Catholic Church in modern times, and which already boasted that, by planning and carrying out the Portuguese revolution of 1910, it had taken a long step toward the total elimination of Christianity in the Iberian Peninsula.

### **Portuguese Masonry's 1917 Tactics Against the Church**

In 1911 the Grand Orient chief, Magalhaes Lima, felt confident enough to predict that, in a few years, no young man would wish to study for the priesthood, and Alfonso Costa could assure all his brethren, and some delegates from the French lodges, that one more generation would see the finish of the "Catholic religion, the principal cause of the sad condition into which our country has fallen."

During Santos' time as administrator, fewer and fewer went to Mass and to the Sacraments; there were more divorces, not many children; and when he arrested six priests and held them incommunicado for 8 days, the leading Catholic laymen in the Council and the Chamber were so busy making profitable compromises that they did not have

time to protest loudly enough to be heard. To the blacksmith and his friends the fight for progress and enlightenment, as they preferred to describe their conflict with the Church, was all but won.

What a challenge must it have been to the vigilance and zeal of such a man to hear that two or three thousand of his people had gone to the Cova da Iria to hear a couple of children converse with an invisible woman, and that other thousands everywhere were talking of a new apparition of Mary. To such misguided idealists it was axiomatic that the Virgin belonged to the Middle Ages, and had no place in modern life. She was part of the supernatural order on whose grave so many earnest liberals and radicals had laid the stone of unbelief. It was not to be tolerated that She should arise from that darkness into the light of the 20th Century. The whole Masonic press resounded with a clarion call against what liberal editors called "an invasion of mysticism," "a revival of reaction and superstition," "a wanton act of aggression on the part of the clergy." Moved to indignation by these and similar protests, the Administrator of Ourem decided to take a firm

stand. Hence the order to the parents of the children to present them for trial.

### **Via Dolorosa: The First Interrogations**

The two fathers acted characteristically. "There's no sense in taking such young children before a court of that kind," said Ti Marto, father of Jacinta and Francisco. "Besides, it's three leagues, and that's too far for them to walk. And they don't know how to ride on a beast. I'm not going to do it. And I'll go over and tell the Administrator why." Olimpia agreed that he was perfectly right. His brother-in-law, Antonio, father of Lucia, was more complacent. "They can arrange things to suit themselves over there," he grumbled. "I don't know what it's all about." He was inclined to agree with his wife, Maria Rosa, that if Lucia was lying, it would be a good thing to have her taught a lesson; while if by any chance she was telling the truth – though they both doubted this – Our Lady would take care of her.

Lucia heard these discussions and thought bitterly: "How different my father is from my uncle and aunt! They put themselves in danger to defend their children, but my

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If we follow the fundamental liturgical principle reiterated in the Encyclical *Mediator Dei*, "*Legem credendi lex statuat supplicandi*" – "Let the law of belief determine the rule of prayer", we should expect from a Catholic liturgy that its content, the prayers and gestures, not only corresponds with the truths of the Faith, but, in fact, strengthens them, and makes us more receptive to them.

But if we compare the traditional Roman rite with the new rite of Paul VI, can we say in good conscience that they both convey the same attitude

towards the meaning of sacrifice? Do they express identically the Catholic teaching defined at the Council of Trent and reiterated by Pius XII in *Mediator Dei*? Cardinal Ottaviani did not think so when he stated in 1969 (i.e., long before the various experimental deviations, criticized even by the past and present Popes, occurred in the daily life of the Church): "*the Novus Ordo represents, both as a whole and in its details, a striking departure from the Catholic theology of the Mass as it was ... definitively fixed*" by the Council of Trent.

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### **Boiling in Oil**

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parents turn me over with the greatest indifference, that they may do with me what they will. But patience!" She argued with herself. "I expect to have to suffer more for Thy love, O my God, and it is for the conversion of sinners!"

On the morning of Saturday, August 11, her father set her on the back of a burro, and they started up the hill. Stopping on the way, they found Ti Marto getting himself a bit to eat, as unconcerned as ever; and he repeated with emphasis that he had no intention of

taking his young children before a court, for it was all nonsense. However, he would go and speak for them, and if Antonio was in a hurry, let him go ahead and he would meet him in Ourem. Lucia meanwhile had slipped off the burro and had gone to look for Jacinta, whom she told, weeping, what had happened. "Never mind," said the little girl, though she was evidently frightened. "If they kill you, you just tell them that I am like you, and Francisco even more so and that we want to die too. And now I will go with Francisco to the well to pray very hard for you."

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Ourem lies sprawled along both sides of the main road, under the terraced and cultivated hill crowned with the noble ruins of an old castle thrust like a dark threat against the cobalt sky. Antonio knew where the administration building was. It was closed, however; not a soul was stirring anywhere about, the heat was suffocating. He prodded the beast along to the marketplace, hoping to find someone to direct him. There he saw the slight figure of a man who had just dismounted from a horse. It was his brother-in-law.

### **The Tinsmith Meets Lucia**

Arturo Santos angrily berated Ti Marto for his negligence in not bringing his children and Antonio for being late. Then he turned brusquely to Lucia. Had she seen a lady at the Cova da Iria? Who did she think it was? Was it true that the lady told her a secret? Well then, Lucia must tell the secret and promise never to return to the Cova da Iria.

Lucia looked straight ahead and said nothing. "Will you tell me the secret?" he asked again.

"No."

The Administrator glared at Antonio, who, sheepish and sleepy as usual, had been

standing with his hands in his pockets, waiting. "You there, do they believe these things over in Fatima?"

"Oh no, senhor," said Lucia's father. "All this is just women's tales." "And what do you say?" The Administrator was looking at Ti Marto.

"I am here at your command," replied the father of Jacinta and Francisco, "and my children say the same thing I do." "Then you think it is true?" "Yes, senhor, I believe what they say."

All the bystanders laughed heartily at this. Ti Marto regarded them with unruffled composure. He was not afraid of these small politicians. As for Santos, it was clear to him by this time that nothing was to be gained by questioning these two clodhoppers. The Administrator dismissed them. The Administrator followed them to the door and said pointedly to Lucia: "**If you don't tell that secret, it will cost you your life!**"

The frightened child glanced back at the dark frowning face at the doorway. He looked as if he meant it.

### **Let Us Remember**

With regard to this first interrogation of one of the children, we can make the follow-

ing statement: Never once, according to the records of the events, was there any claim that the children's accounts contradicted each other. Those surely would have been exploited if any contradictions or variations of their testimonies existed. Never did one of the children try to get out of the terrifying circumstances that they found themselves in, by denying the story of the others or putting the blame on another. Their evil captors, who learned their tactics and forms of intimidation and terror from much experience – remember, Santos had jailed dozens of religious in his young career – could not break the children from their resolve to assert the truth of the apparitions and to not reveal the Secret. This was not a child-like game of make-believe. They kept the Secret because of the personal command, which they understood to morally bind them in an absolute way. Note, also, that the children, by all accounts, always referred to “the Lady” rather than Our Lady or the Blessed Virgin Mary, since “the Lady” had not yet revealed Her complete identity to them. Even though they clearly believed that “the Lady” appearing to them was the Virgin, they were prepared

to be faithful to the Lady and Her requests to them, because of Her Majestic Presence, Her apparent love for them and for all men, and most importantly, because the Lady was an undeniable objective reality. Just as the Apostles faced martyrdom after encountering the reassuring presence of the Risen Christ, the children of Fatima faced the terror and threats of death because they had seen the Lady, for sure.

### **The Children Are Reunited**

When Lucia got back to Aljustrel, she ran to the well to see the praying Jacinta and Francisco. “Your sister told us that they had killed you!” Even if this statement had been meant as a jest, the two children had believed her. But here was Lucia alive, and the children laughed and played as the cold wind freshened the parched fields and the stars began to come out.

The next day, August 12, was Sunday, but it was not a very quiet one at Aljustrel. In every village in the area, there was already a tense expectation of what might happen on Monday, the 13th, and everyone was on the march. All day these poor wayfarers, and with them a scattering of more prosperous ones

in carriages and automobiles, kept arriving at the houses of the children, to ask questions, to take photographs, and to ask favors of Our Lady. Jobs, love, money, cures, conversions, promotions – all the desires of the human heart were poured out upon the three bewildered children. Maria Rosa was almost beside herself. The insolence of these strangers! And the iniquity of a girl who would cause such a commotion with her lying tongue! At one stage of the confusion Lucia was tempted to accept the invitation from an aunt from a neighboring village to smuggle them all out and keep them at her house until all had blown over. But they had promised the Lady that they would be at the Cova on the 13th and at the Cova they would be.

### **Interrogated Again**

Towards evening Lucia's cottage was surrounded by a noisy crowd. "In the hands of these people, we were like a ball in the hands of a little girl," said Lucia. "Each pulled us in his direction and asked his question, without ever giving us time to answer anybody." In the midst of all this who should appear but three policemen from Ourem, to

summon them to the house of Ti Marto, where the Administrator in person was waiting, and to drop more than one dark hint that death might be the penalty for further SILENCE on their part.

"Never mind," said Jacinta. "If they kill us, so much the better, for then we will see Jesus and Our Lady."

In the interrogation that followed, Santos demanded the Secret and their promise not to return to the Cova da Iria.

### **Masonic Treachery**

When the children refused on the ground that they could not disobey the Lady, he took another tack and suggested, with unexpected affability, that, after all, the man to look into matters of this sort was the Senhor Prior, Father Ferreira. He wanted to know whether the parents of the little ones would have any objection to their going to the rectory the next morning before keeping their rendezvous at the Cova. Fatima, after all, was on the way to the place of the apparition. It would take only a few minutes to see the priest. With this he took his leave amidst general relief.

Early the next morning, Ti Marto found the Administrator at his door again. "It's true.

I also want to go to the miracle." Ti Marto's heart gave a thump. There was something that made Santos nervous, and he kept glancing about the cottage, now here, now there, and he spoke rapidly:

"Let's all go together. I will take the little ones with me in the wagon! See and believe like Saint Thomas! Where are the children, by the way? Time is getting on. You'd better have them called."

"It isn't necessary to invite them," answered the other drily. "They know when they have to fetch the cattle and get ready to go." Just then the children came in, and the Administrator, all smiles and benignity, invited them to ride with him to the Cova da Iria. "No, thank you, senhor," said Francisco. "We can walk alright," added Jacinta. "But, we'll have more time to stop at Fatima, at the house of the Prior. He wants to ask them some questions, you know!"

As none of them could think of an answer to that, the children, with many misgivings, piled into the wagon, Francisco sitting in front with the Administrator, the two girls behind, while Ti Marto and Antonio followed on foot. It was only a minute or two to the church at the top of the

hill. Arriving there, Santos dismounted, and going up the rectory steps, shouted: "First!" "First what?" demanded Ti Marto, who had managed to keep up to the wagon. "Lucia!" called the Administrator.

The Prior was waiting in his study. It seems plain enough that he had changed from cautious and kindly reserve to something like hostility. Perhaps he had been disturbed by the growing notoriety of the affair and the opposition of the public authorities and wanted to spare the Church from further persecution at a time when she was harassed and straitened enough.

"Who taught you to say the things you are going about saying?" he inquired.

"That Lady whom I saw at the Cova da Iria."

The Prior's face was severe.

"Anyone who goes around spreading such wicked lies as the lies that you tell will be judged, and will go to hell if it isn't true. More and more people are being deceived by you."

"If anyone who lies goes to hell, I will not go to hell," said the 10-year-old girl, looking him in the eyes, "for I don't lie and I tell only what I have seen and what the Lady has

said to me. And as for the crowd that goes there, they only go because they want to. We don't call anybody."

"Is it true that Lady confided a secret to you?" "Yes, Senhor Prior." "Tell it then." "I can't tell it. But if Your Reverence wants to know it, I will ask the Lady, and if She gives me permission, I will tell you." "Come," interrupted the Administrator, "these are supernatural matters. Let us be going." With that he led Lucia outside and brusquely ordered her into the wagon. As the child obeyed, Santos jumped in after her, seized the reins and cracked the whip.

### **Kidnapped**

The fathers of the children saw the beast turn sharply and bolt down the road, not toward the Cova da Iria, but in the opposite direction. "You're going the wrong way!" cried Lucia. "It's all right," Santos assured her cheerfully. "We'll stop and see the Prior at Ourem a moment. Then I'll take you to the Cova da Iria by automobile. You'll be there in time!" And he hid them from the pilgrims by throwing blankets or mantles over their heads.

### **The Scene at the Cova: August 13, 1917**

When the two fathers had

reached the Cova about a half hour later, they were astonished to find more than 6,000 persons gathered there. Some had come walking barefoot for three or four days, from distant villages, at enormous inconvenience, to present their petitions to Our Lady; others had arrived on mules, horses, bicycles, a few in carriages, and some in automobiles. All were asking where the children were, for it was close upon noon.

But where were the children? At about 12 o'clock some of those around the Cova began saying the Rosary and gradually the whole throng joined in. Then a faint murmuring sound was heard, followed by what seemed to be a rumble of thunder – some thought in the road, others in the tree, still others in the far horizon. Here and there a frightened cry was heard: "We all are going to die!" and a few ran away. Most of them stood silent and rather fearful. Presently they saw a flash of light, and then, far over their heads to the east, something like a little cloud – frail, white, transparent, filmy – floated slowly down until it came to rest over the tree. A moment later it rose again and melted away into the blue sky. As the people

stared at one another and all about in wonder and surprise, many noticed a strange fact: their faces were richly tinted with the various colors of the rainbow and even their garments were red, yellow, blue, orange, etc. Meanwhile, the foliage of the trees and bushes seemed like brilliant flowers instead of leaves, and the dry earth itself was checkered with different gorgeous hues.

### **What Happened Next?**

But where were the children? Some people arrived that had news of the children being taken to Ourem by the Administrator, first to the Prior and then to Ourem.

So the Administrator was the one who had spoiled the apparition and disappointed the Mother of God! And the Prior! There must have been a conspiracy amongst them! Bitter voices began to wrangle and expostulate throughout the mass. Some cried, "Down with the Prior!" "Down with the Administrator!" "To Fatima and settle with the Prior!" "To Ourem and have it out with the Administrator!" shouted another. Ti Marto had the presence of mind to stand in front of them and try to cool their anger. The mob – and a mob it was – wavered and

broke into groups. Ti Marto went home, and found his wife weeping.

### **Imprisoned**

The Administrator would leave the children alone for a while and let terror do its work. He was not wrong in calculating that the children would be frightened. When the clocks of Ourem began, one after another, to announce the hour of twelve with long and solemn strokes, they exchanged looks of utter consternation. It was the moment when they had promised to meet the Lady at the Cova da Iria. Francisco was the first to recover. "Perhaps Our Lady is going to appear to us here!" he said hopefully. Perhaps! They waited for some sign, a flash of light, a movement, a heavenly voice. But nothing happened. The noonday hour passed and there was no word from Her. Jacinta began to cry. Francisco said, almost tearfully, "Our Lady must be sad because we didn't go to the Cova da Iria, and She won't appear to us anymore." He glanced imploringly at Lucia. "Will She?" "I don't know." The older girl was stolid and composed again. "I think She will." "Oh, I want so much to see Her!"

It was Jacinta who burst into

tears when the last hope of a visit from Our Lady forsook them. "Our parents will never see us again!" she wailed. "They will never hear any more about us." "Don't cry, Jacinta," said her brother. "Let's offer this to Jesus for poor sinners, as that Lady told us to do." After that the little girl kept a brave mien until night-fall, when the darkness made her think of her mother.

### **The Second Day**

The next morning at 10 o'clock the Administrator came to conduct them to the town hall, where he put them through another long and tiresome examination. The result was the same as before: they insisted that they had seen a beautiful Lady, all in white radiance, and that She had told them a secret. And they refused to tell this secret even when he threatened them with life imprisonment, torture, and death. At noon they were so exhausted that it was a relief to return to the Administrator's house, especially when they discovered that Senhora Santos had prepared a good luncheon for them. Santos told them that since good treatment and tolerance had no effect, he was going to throw them into jail. And this he proceeded to do.

### **Placed in Jail**

The town jail was not a very fragrant or attractive place. Its cells were dark. Most of the malefactors – probably pickpockets, drunkards, brawlers, the riffraff of the taverns and the marketplace – were herded together in a common room. Without ceremony the three children were thrust among them. They shrank away and went instinctively toward a barred window at one end of the room. Jacinta looked out upon the marketplace of Ourem and burst into tears. Lucia put her arms about her. "Why are you crying, Jacinta?" "Because we are going to die without ever seeing our parents again. I want to see my mother!" Francisco said: "If we never see our mother again, patience! Let us offer it for the conversion of sinners. The worst will be if Our Lady never comes back anymore."

"The easiest way for you to get out," said one prisoner, "would be to tell the Administrator the secret, since he wants to know it so much." "But the Lady doesn't want us to tell it!" "What is it to you if the Lady likes it or not?" "I would rather die!" answered Jacinta sharply, and the other two were of the same mind. "Let us say the Rosary." The three

brought forth their beads. Jacinta took from around her neck a chain with a medal on which there was an image of Our Lady. Handing this to a tall prisoner, she asked him if he would please hang it on a nail high up on the wall. He did so good-humoredly. All the men watched with curiosity and some amusement as the three children knelt on the floor and, earnestly fixing their dark eyes upon the medal, began to recite their prayers.

The look of their upturned faces and the sound of their high voices repeating the words so familiar in Portugal was more than hardened reprobates could resist, and presently some of the men were on their knees joining in the responses, while even those who remained standing were mumbling phrases that they had not spoken in many years.

When Jacinta again began to cry, this made the prisoners uncomfortable. One began to play the harmonica and they asked the children if they knew how to dance. "We know how to dance the fandango and the vira too!" Lucia records that Jacinta was thereupon the partner of a poor thief who found her so small that he ended by dancing with her around his neck. Soon everyone was in

hilarious commotion.

### **Boiling in Oil: White Martyrdom of the Children of Fatima**

This festive scene was interrupted by a noise outside and the sudden opening of the door. A policeman entered, "Follow me," he said to the three children. They did so and found themselves presently in the office of the Administrator. Santos made a final demand for the Secret. When the only answer was a defiant silence, he assumed the look of a man at the end of his patience and said coldly: "Very well. I have tried to save you. But since you will not obey the government, you shall be boiled alive in a cauldron of hot oil." He shouted a command. "Is the oil good and hot?" "Yes, Senhor Administrator." "Boiling?" "Yes, Senhor." "Take this one and throw her in." He pointed to Jacinta. The guard seized her and carried her away before she could say a word of farewell. So it had come at last! Lucia began to pray fervently. Francisco said an Ave Maria that her sister would have the courage to die rather than betray the Secret. Neither doubted that she was already in her last agony, and that they too had but a few more minutes to



live. They were resolved to die with her. Death was not as terrible to them as it would have been to other children. "What do we care if they kill us? We will go straight to Heaven."

The guard opened the door and said: "She's fried. Now for the next one." With that they laid hold of Francisco and dragged him off. Lucia was left alone with the Administrator. "It will be you next," he remarked. "You'd better tell me the Secret, Lucia." "I would rather die." "Very well. You shall."

The guard returned and led her away. He took her through a corridor, and into another room. And there she saw Jacinta and Francisco, both unharmed, and speechless with joy and surprise. For they had been told that she was being fried in oil. The play was over, the tragedy had turned into a farce.

### **Innocent Tears for Us!**

When hearing of the suffering of the children, when we hear about the tears of Jacinta, not weeping because she herself is going to die in what she expects to be an excruciating and horrible manner, but rather, weeping at the barred windows of a tawdry prison cell, weeping the innocent tears of

one who makes one more petition to God and man, to see the face of her mother one last time, we ask ourselves, "What does this mean?" "Why would God – Who is good, nay, Goodness Itself – and His Holy Mother, Who comforted the cries of the Child Jesus, ask for this?"

Here we encounter the ultimate mystery of the Fatima Message. Innocent tears shed for the love of others. The sadness of a child's heart that has seen the fate of souls who turn away with irrevocable coldness from the Mercy of God; tears which sought to wash away the crimes of godless wars for the establishment of godless systems; tears which cannot comprehend the indifference by which the most beloved of God can fail to implement the most basic requests of His Holy Mother.

But human tears are infallibly the sign of human hope. Her Immaculate Heart will triumph. Let the unclouded tears of Jacinta and the suffering of the children of Fatima remind us that beneath the sorrows predicted for man by the Fatima Message lies an infinite ocean of unfathomable joy, the joy of God, the Lover of Mankind. **FC**