

IX. Sixth Apparition

During the last three apparitions, Our Lady promised the children that the last time She would appear, in October, She would effect a miracle that everyone would see and thereby believe. Lucia had repeated this promise to others and the news of it had spread like wildfire throughout the whole country. Think of it, being warned ahead of time that a very great miracle would happen not a hundred years from now but within the next thirty days. The expectation, the anxiety of waiting for this tremendous sign weighed heavily on believers, especially on the children's families. Unbelievers sneered at the prediction and the enemies of the Church called it a huge hoax that the Church was trying to put over on the people. For them, October the thirteenth would be a day of great celebration, the day when the hoax would be revealed and the Church completely discredited.

The children were greatly saddened at the unbelief of so many, but they had full trust in the goodness of Our Lady; so they had no worries. Their families, however, were tormented, especially by the neighbors, so many of whom would not believe in the apparitions. They even threatened the family with severe penalties if this promise turned out to be a hoax.

"My family was extremely worried," Maria dos Anjos, Lucia's oldest sister, stated. "The closer the day came, the more we insisted with Lucia that she give up this dream of hers. We would all have to suffer because of her imaginings. Father scolded her often, though he never struck her. Mother was not so easy. One rumor was going around that they would place bombs at the Cova da Iria to scare everyone that went there. Some people suggested that their mothers lock the children in a room until they denied the whole story. We did not speak of it in front of Lucia, but we were frightened and we wondered what was going to happen to us. Some others suggested we take Lucia away some place where no one could find her. We didn't know what to do.

"Mother wanted to do what was right, but she didn't understand. 'If it were Our Lady,' mother lamented, 'She could have performed a miracle already, start a spring or something else. Oh, how will all this end?' But the children showed no fear at all. I went to the children one day as they were speaking together at the well. 'Have you decided yet that you saw nothing? They are warning us that they will throw bombs at our homes,' I said. 'Tell it only to me and I'll tell the Pastor. Do you want me to tell him? Do you?' Lucia frowned but did not speak. Jacinta, with tears in her eyes, said very softly, 'Yes, you may do as you wish, but we have seen!'"

Lucia's mother was so panic-stricken by the thought of impending disaster that on the morning of the twelfth, she jumped out of bed, ran into Lucia's room and begged her to go to Confession. "People say we're going to die tomorrow; they'll kill us if the miracle doesn't happen."

"If you want to go to Confession, mother, I'll go with you," she answered very calmly, "but I'm not afraid. I am positive that the Lady will do what She promised to do tomorrow." After this, nothing more was said about confession.

Things were different in the Marto home. Nothing could shake the belief of Senhor Marto. He tells how the Pastor of Porto de Mós came with one of his parishioners, a few days before the thirteenth. He wanted to make the children contradict themselves. He questioned Francisco and got nowhere. He wanted to talk to Lucia and Jacinta but they had gone with a donkey to Boleiros to bring home some lime. The priest wouldn't wait

for them to return, but went after them with the older boy, John. He was going to force the children to deny their story, or else he would do something drastic.

“Listen, good girl,” the priest said to Lucia, “you are going to tell me that it is all an invention. Even if you don’t admit it, I’ll say it is and I’ll have it spread everywhere, and you won’t escape either.”

Lucia did not say a word, but Senhor Marto spoke up, “The best thing to do is to telegraph everywhere immediately.”

“Exactly what we should do! No one will come here on the thirteenth,” the priest said triumphantly.

The man with him said, “This is nothing but witchcraft.”

Senhor Marto became very angry at this, so Jacinta vanished because she abhorred any display of anger. Then her father said to the priest, “If you’re going to do that, leave the children alone. No one will stop you from doing what you please.” Senhor Marto took Lucia and John home, followed by the priest and his companion. They saw Jacinta sitting on the porch combing another little girl’s hair.

“Listen, Jacinta,” said the priest, “so you did not want to tell us anything. Lucia has told the whole story. It’s a lie.”

“No, Lucia told nothing,” she answered very firmly. He kept insisting but Jacinta was just as insistent. They were baffled by the firmness of the child, so much so that Senhor Marto thought they would come to believe in the apparitions. Then the man took a coin out of his pocket to give to Jacinta.

Senhor Marto reached out his hand to stop the man, “Stop. That should never be done!” he said.

“Can’t I at least give your son John something?”

“It is not necessary,” the father answered, “but if you wish, you may.”

As they were going, the priest turned to Senhor Marto and said, “You have played your role well.”

“Well or not, I don’t know. But here in my house, this is the way we do things. You did not succeed in making the children contradict themselves. Even if you did, I would have stuck to my belief that they have been speaking the truth.” Senhor Marto was a good father, loyal always to his children even as they were loyal to him, because they all believed implicitly in God and His Holy Mother Mary.

On the morning of October 13, 1917, fear and panic prevailed in Fatima. Rain was pouring from the heavens, a sad beginning for the glorious day promised by Our Lady and the children. The rain, however, did not dampen the spirits of the many thousands of people who came from every section of Portugal to witness the miracle promised. Even the daily newspapers, until now so inimical to the happenings at Fatima, sent reporters to the scene, and since for days afterwards they carried long articles on the unusual events, we will use excerpts from the newspaper accounts to give an authentic history of the occasion.

“Nearby communities, towns and villages, emptied of people,” said the reporter for *O Dia*, a Lisbon newspaper. “For days prior to the thirteenth, groups of pilgrims traveled towards Fatima. They came on foot, buskins on their brawny legs, food bags on their heads, across the pine groves, where the cowberries seem like drops of dew upon the verdure, along the sands, where the windmills rotate. A slow and swaying gait swung the hems of their skirts from side to side and waved orange kerchiefs upon which sat their black hats.

“Workers from Marinha; farmers from Monte Real, Cortes and Marrazes; women from distant hills, the hills of Soubio, Minde and Lourical; people from everywhere

whom the voice of the miracle had reached, left their homes and fields and came on foot, by horse or by carriage. They traveled the highways and the roads, between hills and pine groves. For two days these came to life with the rolling of the carriages, the trot of the donkeys and the voices of the pilgrims.

“Fall gave tints of red to the vineyards. A chilly and piercing northeaster, forerunner of winter, waved the transparent poplars along the margins of the rivers.

“Over the sands, the white sails of the windmills rotated. In the woods, the green tops of the pines bowed to the wind. Clouds slowly closed the skies, while the fog rolled in with light, soft puffs. In the vast beach of Vieira, the sea foamed, roared and coiled in high waves, as the sinister howl of its voice traveled over the fields.

“All night long and into early morning, a light persistent rain fell. It soaked the field, saddened the air, and chilled to the bone the men, women and children and the beasts plodding their way towards the hill of the miracle. The rain kept falling, a soft, unending drizzle. Drops trickled down the women’s skirts of coarse wool or striped cotton, making them as weighty as lead. Water dripped from the caps and broad-brimmed hats onto the new jackets of their suits for seeing God. The bare feet of the women and the hobnailed shoes of the men sloshed in the wide pools of the muddy roads. They seemed not to notice the rain.

“They went up the hills without stopping, illuminated by faith, anxious for the miracle promised by Our Lady to the pure and simple children who watched sheep, for the thirteenth at approximately 1:30 p.m., according to the legal time.” But it was actually noon in Fatima because the sun at that moment was at its highest point in the sky.

“A murmur drifting down from the hills reached us. It was a murmur like the distant voice of the sea lowered faintly before the silence of the fields. It was the religious songs, now becoming clear, intoned by thousands of voices. On the plateau, over a hill, or filling a valley, there was a wide and shuffling mass of thousands upon thousands of souls in prayer.”

O Século, another Lisbon newspaper, carried an extensive article on the occurrences of the day. Their reporter chose for his observation point the road between Chão de Maçãs and Ourém.

“Along the road, we met the first groups going to the holy place, many walking more than ten miles, men and women, most of them barefoot, with the women carrying bags on their heads, topped with their heavy shoes, while the men leaned on their sturdy staffs and carried their umbrellas as a precaution. They seemed unaware of all that happened around them, disinterested in either the landscape or the other wayfarers, saying the Rosary in a sad rhythm, as if immersed in a dream. A woman broke out with the first part of the *Hail Mary*, the hailing; her companions took up in chorus the second part, the supplication. With slow cadenced steps, they threaded along the dusty road, among pine groves and olive orchards, so that they might arrive before nightfall at the place of the apparition. There in the open, under the cold light of the stars, they planned to sleep and get the best places near the blessed holm oak to enable them to have a better view.

“As they entered the town, some women, already infected by the environment with the virus of atheism, joked about the great event. ‘Aren’t you going tomorrow to see the saint?’ one asked. ‘Me? No! Not unless she comes to see me!’ They laughed heartily but the devout went on indifferent to anything which was not the motive of their pilgrimage. All night long, the most varied vehicles moved into the town square carrying the faithful and the curious, and also old ladies, somberly dressed, weighted by the years. The ardent fire of faith shining in their eyes gave them heart to leave for a day the little corner in the home from which they were inseparable.

“At dawn, new groups surged undauntedly and crossed through the villages, without stopping for a moment, breaking the early morning silence with their beautiful religious hymns. The delicate harmony of the women’s voices made violent contrast with their rustic appearance.

“The sun was rising, though the skies presaged a storm. Dark clouds loomed directly over Fatima. Nothing would stop the crowd converging from every road on towards the holy place. Though some came in luxurious automobiles, gliding swiftly along the road, continually sounding their horns, oxcarts dragged slowly alongside them. There were carriages of all types: victoria chaises, landaus, and wagons fitted out for the occasion with seats, and crowded to the limit.

“Almost all brought besides food, a bundle of straw for the animals, which the poor man of Assisi called our brothers, and which carried out their tasks so bravely. Once in a while, one could see a small wagon trimmed with ornaments, small bells jingling softly as it moved along, yet the festive mood was discreet, manners were reserved, and the order perfect. Though little donkeys trotted along the side of the road, there were great numbers of cyclists who had to perform real feats to keep from tumbling.

“About ten in the morning, the skies became overcast. Soon it had turned to rain. Sheets of rain, driven by a chilly autumn wind, whipped the faces of the pilgrims, drenched the roads, and chilled the people to the bone. While some sought shelter under the trees, against the walls or in scattered houses, others continued their march with impressive endurance.

“The road to Leiria dominates to a great extent the wastes of Fatima where it is said the Virgin appeared to the little shepherds. Parked along this road were the carriages of the pilgrims and the sightseers. The majority of the pilgrims, the thousands that came from many miles around and from the provinces, gathered about the small holm oak, which, in the words of the children, the Vision chose for Her pedestal. This was the center of a great circle around which the devout and other spectators ranged themselves.”

Some estimated the crowd at the Cova da Iria this day to be at least seventy thousand persons. A professor of the University of Coimbra, Dr. Almeida Garrett, after careful consideration, placed the number at over one hundred thousand. “There were so many people there even on the twelfth,” said Senhora da Capelinha, “that the din could be heard even in our hamlet. The people spent the whole night in the open since there was no shelter for them. Before the sun rose they were already up, praying, weeping and singing. I came very early and was able to get close to the holm oak. The trunk was the only thing left of it but I had adorned it the night before with flowers and ribbons.”

Away at Lucia’s home, everyone was disturbed. Senhora dos Santos was sad as she never had been before. She feared that this was Lucia’s last day on earth. Tears running down her face, she looked at her daughter who tried to cheer her.

“Don’t fear, *mãezinha*, little mother,” Lucia said with a caress, “for nothing will happen to us. Our Lady shall do what She promised.”

When Lucia was ready, Senhora dos Santos decided to go also, “for if my daughter dies, I want to be at her side.” Accompanied by her husband, she took Lucia to Jacinta’s house.

The house overflowed with people; scores upon scores pressed outside, waiting for the children. “The curious and the devout filled the house to the limit,” Ti Marto recalls.

“It rained hard and the road was a mire; it was all thick slime. My wife was worried. There were people over the beds and the trunks, soiling everything. ‘My dear, don’t let it bother you,’ I calmed her. ‘When the house is full no one else can come in.’ When

the time came for me to leave after the children, a neighbor took me aside and said in my ear, 'Marto, you'd better not go for you may be mistreated. The children, as they are only children, no one will hurt them. But you are in danger of being harmed.' 'As to me,' I replied, 'I'm going in my good faith. I'm not afraid at all. I've no doubt as to the good outcome.' My Olimpia was very frightened, practically at her wit's end, recommending herself to Our Lady. She awaited the worst, as priests and many others presaged only evil.

"The children were as much at ease as they could be. Francisco and Jacinta hadn't a care in the world. 'Look' said Jacinta, 'if they hurt us, we'll go to Heaven, but pity them, for they shall go to Hell.'

"A lady from Pombalinho, no less than the Baroness of Almeirim, had brought two dresses for the girls, a blue one for Lucia and a white one for Jacinta. She dressed them herself and placed garlands of artificial flowers on their heads. It made them look like little angels. We left the house under torrents of rain. The road was oozing mud but it did not keep the women and even the fine ladies from kneeling before the children. 'Don't do that, women!' I had to repeat. They believed that the children had the power of the saints.

"After many struggles and interruptions, we came at last to the Cova da Iria. The crowds were so thick, that it was difficult to pierce through them. It was then that a chauffeur took my Jacinta in his arms and, pushing along, opened a way to the posts with the lanterns, continually shouting, 'make way for the children who have seen Our Lady.'

"I followed them close, but Jacinta seeing me pressed among the people, feared for me. 'Don't push my father,' she broke out, 'don't push my father.'

"The man set Jacinta on the ground near the holm oak, but the crush there was so great that the child began to cry. Francisco and Lucia placed her between themselves.

"My Olimpia was on the other side, I don't know where, but my comadre, Maria Rosa dos Santos, was close by the children. I was a little distance away and suddenly became aware of a fiendish looking man bearing down on my shoulder with his staff. 'The trouble begins,' I said to myself. The multitude swayed back and forth until the moment came when everyone stood still and quiet. The time had come for the apparitions, it was noon by the sun."

"There was a priest close by," Senhora da Capelinha tells, "who had spent the night near the holm oak and he was saying his breviary. When the children arrived, dressed as if for First Communion, he asked them about the time of the apparition. 'At noon,' Lucia responded. The priest took out his watch and said, 'Look, it is already noon.' 'Our Lady never lies. Let us wait.' A few minutes went by. He looked at his watch again. 'Noon is gone. Everyone out of here! The whole thing is an illusion!'

"Lucia did not want to leave so the priest began pushing the three children away. Lucia, almost in tears, said, 'Whoever wants may go away, I'm not going. I'm on my own property. Our Lady said She was coming. She always came before and so must be coming again.' Just then, she glanced towards the east and said to Jacinta, 'Jacinta, kneel down; Our Lady is coming. I've seen the flash.' The priest was silenced. I never saw him again." The hour of the apparition had arrived; the miracle that was promised had begun to take place.