

XI. Francisco Leads the Way

What is often overlooked by those who read of Fatima now is the fact that for years nothing was revealed of the content of the revelations as given in the foregoing pages. Only the urgency to pray and do penance, and the promise of a miracle, were mentioned by the children. After the first apparition of Our Lady, the children pledged one another to secrecy for fear of being ridiculed. But since the Message of Fatima was intended by Our Lady not merely for the children but for the whole world, God used Jacinta's enthusiasm to make known the fact of the apparition to the world. After the second apparition, however, that of June 13th, their secrecy was of a different order. As Lucia says in her Memoirs, "When we said (before the apparition of July the 13th) that Our Lady had revealed a secret to us, we referred to this (reparation to the Immaculate Heart). Our Lady did not tell us at this time to keep (this revelation) secret, but we felt that God moved us to it." (*Memoirs*, Dec. 8, 1941) This inclination of the children to silence was confirmed by Our Lady when, on July the 13th, She told them what Lucia calls, and what is known as, the Secret proper. It was only after many years that any of the substance of this secret revelation was made known by Lucia; and even to this date there are important words of Our Lady yet undisclosed.

After the last apparition on October 13th, 1917, the three children tried to return to their ordinary routine life; Francisco and Jacinta to await the day when Mary would come to take them to Heaven; Lucia hoping soon to begin her work of spreading devotion and love for the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Henceforth, however, they were marked children, marked by men as well as by God. People flocked to see and speak with them, the poor, the rich, even priests came. They asked a thousand different questions, but the answers were always the same. The innocence, seriousness and simplicity of the three were solid proof to both learned and unlearned alike of their utter truthfulness. To see them was to believe in them.

Francisco testified that he saw Our Lady, that Her radiant beauty was blinding to the eyes, but that he never heard Her speak. Jacinta could tell more, but she candidly admitted that sometimes she had not heard Our Lady very well and had forgotten many things. If the people wanted to know more, they should ask Lucia. Lucia would repeat the story word for word every time; but sometimes and in fact very often people would try to make her reveal the secret of the revelations. Then Jacinta and Lucia kept silence sometimes to the point of being impolite. What saddened them and confused them terribly was when priests came and tried to pry the secret out of them. They did not want to be rude with God's priests, yet they felt they had to keep the secret.

Mary helped them in their dilemma. The Reverend Faustino Ferreira, pastor of the neighboring village and dean of the district, met them on one of his official visitations, and thenceforth seized every opportunity of speaking with them. The children were very much drawn to this priest since they were free to ask him all the questions they wanted to ask. They loved him for his kind ways and they followed his counsels faithfully. He was never too busy for them and would put their minds at ease about everything. He well realized that it was not so much his words that were influencing the children as the Mother of God. She was the artist, gently though firmly molding their souls to the model of Her First Born, the Child Jesus.

Our Lady had instructed Francisco, through Lucia, that She would take him to Heaven soon, but that he must say many Rosaries. He never forgot these words and like

Saint Dominic he became a real apostle of the Rosary. He had no other interest in life than to fulfill these words of Our Lady of the Rosary. One day, two fine ladies came to his house and asked him what he would like to be when he grew up.

“Do you want to be a carpenter?”

“No, ma’am.”

“A soldier?”

“No.”

“A doctor? Wouldn’t you like to be a good doctor?”

“No.”

“I know what you would like to be, a priest! You would like to say Mass, hear confessions, and give sermons. Is that it?”

“No, ma’am, I don’t want to be a priest either.”

“Then what do you want to be?”

“I don’t want to be anything. I just want to die and go to Heaven.”

Francisco’s father, who was listening to this conversation, said “That is really his heart’s desire.”

Francisco took to separating himself from Lucia and Jacinta after they reached the hills. More and more he appeared to want to meditate on all that Our Lady had told the children. He would say afterwards: “I liked to see the Angel so much, but I liked Our Lady much more. What I liked best about the apparitions was seeing Our Lord in that light that the Blessed Virgin put into our hearts. I love God very much. He is so sad because of so many sins. We must not commit even the smallest sin.”

The children gradually gave up all thoughts of play. Sometimes in the company of the others they would sing and dance as usual, but only so as not to appear singular. Jacinta and Francisco, knowing they were soon to die, gave themselves more and more to mortification and prayer. They could not get interested in school because to them it served no purpose. It was but time wasted, when they could be spending it more profitably in the presence of Our Lord in the Eucharist.

Both of them had made their first Confession in the year of the apparitions, but their First Communion was deferred for another year. When the time came for them to receive the Eucharist, Francisco failed to pass the catechism test, and so he had to wait longer. So heartbroken was the poor boy when his sister approached the altar rail that he could not enter the church. He remained outside, leaning against the stones of the church sobbing his eyes out.

Although the public apparitions ended with that of October 13th, Our Lady by no means abandoned the three chosen ones after that. We have it on Jacinta’s testimony to her pastor that three times in the following year She appeared to the little girl; and as we shall see later on, She continued to appear to Lucia, long after her childhood. Moreover, the power of Our Lady of Fatima was manifest in the favors granted through the special intercession of the children. To cite but one instance, there was the man for whose safe return home Jacinta was asked to pray. The man, who had just escaped from jail and was tramping aimlessly about, found himself quite hopelessly lost in the hills and in great distress at the time of Jacinta’s intercession. Kneeling down on the ground to pray, he saw Jacinta standing before him. The little child led him safely to the road home and then vanished from his sight. Jacinta, however, had no knowledge of the remarkable incident until the man returned to report it.

Of Lucia’s power little is known since she is reluctant to discuss herself in that way. But it is an established fact that her mother was brought remarkably through a grave illness through Lucia’s faith in Our Lady. The requests placed before the children for

prayers were endless, and the wonderful answers to their prayers attest to the favor in which they stood before the Mother of God.

Towards the end of October, 1918, the whole Marto family came down with influenza. The father alone escaped, so he was able to take care of the rest. He could not do his ordinary work for he had to take care of the house, cook the meals, and watch over each one of his large family. "I was bowed down with heavy burdens," he said, "but the finger of God was in this. He helped me. I never had to borrow money. There was always enough."

Francisco was in a very serious condition. He could not move out of bed. At this time, Our Lady appeared to Francisco and Jacinta, telling them that She would come for Francisco very soon and that Jacinta would follow him not long after. They were so happy at this good news that Jacinta confided in her cousin, "Look, Lucia, Our Lady came to see us and said that She was coming soon for Francisco. She asked me if I still wanted to convert more sinners. I said yes. Our Lady wants me to go to two hospitals but it is not to cure me. It is to suffer more for the love of God, the conversion of sinners and in reparation for the offenses committed against the Immaculate Heart of Mary. She told me that you would not go with me. My mother will take me there and afterwards I am to be left there alone." How courageous was this little girl to offer herself as a victim of love and reparation to God and Mary.

Francisco had this selfsame spirit of love and sacrifice. He was a very sick boy and some of the medicines he had to take were not particularly agreeable. "Yet he would take any medicine we gave him," his mother said. "He never fussed. I could never find out what he liked. If I gave him a glass of milk, he took it; and when I gave him an egg, he sucked it. Poor child! He took any bitter medicine without making a face. This gave us hope that he would recover, but he always repeated that it was useless since Our Lady was going to come for him. He knew well what was in store for him."

Francisco improved enough to allow him to take short walks, and he always turned his steps towards the Cova da Iria. Once there, he would kneel near the stump of the holm oak, his eyes seeking the blue sky beyond which dwelt Our Lady. His eyes sparkled with new life as he thought of the joy that would soon be his when Our Lady came to take him up to Heaven. He would return from the Cova da Iria somewhat refreshed; so much so that his father said, "You are going to get better. You are going to grow up to be a fine big man." "Our Lady will come soon for me," he replied with utter certitude.

Tired and saddened by the long vigils of caring for his sick family, the father would reply, "God's will be done." And tears would burst from his eyes.

Francisco's godmother once said, "If Our Lady will cure you, I promise to offer your weight in wheat."

"That is useless. Our Lady will not do you this favor." Francisco was right. As the days went on, he lost the strength to get up from his bed. He was sinking very fast under the weight of a persistently high fever. However, his ready smile and continual cheerfulness misled everyone as to his true condition.

The influenza epidemic did not by-pass Lucia's family. Most of them were taken sick though Lucia was spared. She helped nurse the sick in her family and every chance she had, she ran over to the Marto house to see if she could help them, but especially she wanted to be with Francisco and Jacinta. She knew they would leave her soon. She divided her time between their two rooms. Sitting on a footstool next to their beds, she exchanged with them the confidences of their hearts.

"Have you made any sacrifices today?" Lucia asked Jacinta.

"I have made a lot. My mother went out and many times I wanted to get out of bed and go to Francisco's room but I didn't."

Lucia told Jacinta what she herself was able to do to prove her love for Our Lady. She told about her little prayers and sacrifices. "I did that too," little Jacinta spoke up. "I love Our Lord and Our Lady and I never get tired of telling Them that I love Them. When I tell that to Them, it seems sometimes that I have a fire burning in my breast, a fire that does not consume ... Oh, how I would like to be able to go again to the hills to say the Rosary in the Cave. But I can't any more. When you go to the Cova da Iria, pray for me, Lucia! I'm sure I'll never go there again. Now you go to Francisco's room because I want to make the sacrifice of being alone."

As she sat next to Francisco's bed, Lucia gently whispered to him, "Francisco, are you suffering a great deal?"

"Yes, I am. I suffer it all for the love of Our Lord and Our Lady. I want to suffer more and I can't." He lifted himself up a little to see if the door was closed tight. He fumbled under the pillow for his rope of penance and handed it to Lucia. "You keep it for me. I'm afraid mother will see it. If I get up again, I want it back." Our Lady had told them that God did not want them wearing the rope in bed but they kept it nearby just in case they ever got up.

Francisco knew well that he would not recover. "Look, Lucia, I'm going soon to Heaven. Jacinta is going to pray a great deal for sinners and for the Holy Father and for you. You're going to stay here below because Our Lady wants you to. Do whatever She wants."

"Jacinta seemed to be interested only in the conversion of sinners; she wanted to save people from Hell," Lucia said later, "but Francisco's only desire was to console Our Lord and Our Lady Who seemed to him so sorrowful."

"I feel very sick," he confided to Lucia, "but I'll be in Heaven soon."

"Then make sure you pray very much for sinners and for the Holy Father, Jacinta and me."

"Yes, I'll pray. But you should rather ask Jacinta for that. I'm afraid I'll forget everything when I see Our Lord. After all, I would rather console Jesus and Mary."

Lucia's visits seemed to lighten the sorrows of sickness in the Marto home. "It made me sorry to watch Jacinta in bed, covering her face with her hands and not moving for hours at a time," said her mother. "She said she was thinking. When I asked her what she was thinking about, she smiled and said, 'Nothing, mother.' She kept no secrets, however, from her cousin Lucia. Lucia brought joy and happiness to everyone. When the two girls were alone, they talked continually and in such a way that none of us could catch a word of what they said no matter how hard we tried. When anyone went near them, they lowered their heads and kept quiet. No one could penetrate their mysterious confidences."

"What did Jacinta tell you?" Senhora Olimpia once asked Lucia, as she was leaving for her home. Lucia smiled and sped away. "But I do know that they used to say Rosary after Rosary, at least seven or eight every day and there was no end to their short prayers."

Francisco, however, in his last days, was not able to recite his prayers. "Mother, I can't say the Rosary, I can't even say the Hail Mary without being distracted."

"If you can't pray with your lips, do it with your heart. It will make Our Lord happy just the same." He understood and felt better.

As his fever rose and his appetite failed, he realized the end was near. "Father," he said to his dad, "before I die, I want to receive Our Lord." He had not yet received his First Holy Communion.

Francisco's words were a sword in the heart of his loving father. He hated the

thought of losing his little boy, but with manly courage he spoke up, "I'll take care of that right away. I'll go right now to see the priest." The father remembered so well that sad journey. He tells how he took some of the other children with him and on the way back, they said their Rosary together, but because he forgot his beads, he had to count them on his fingers.

Meanwhile, Francisco called his sister Teresa and asked her to call Lucia right away. When Lucia came, he asked his mother and brothers to leave his room because he wanted to talk to Lucia alone. When they went out he said, "Lucia, I'm going to make my Confession now and die. I want you to tell me if you ever saw me commit any sins."

"Sometimes you disobeyed your mother when she wanted you to stay home. You sneaked away to be with me or to hide yourself."

"It's true. I committed that sin. Now go and ask Jacinta if she remembers any."

Lucia went to ask her. After some thought Jacinta answered, "Yes, look. Tell him that before Our Lady appeared to us, he stole ten cents. And when the boys threw stones at the boys from Boleiros, he helped them."

Lucia told this to Francisco and he said, "I have confessed those already, but I'll confess them again. Maybe they are the reason why Our Lord is so sad. As for me, even if I were not to die, I wouldn't do it again. I'm sorry. My Jesus, forgive us," he began to pray, joining his hands, "forgive us; save us from the fire of Hell." Then turning to Lucia again, "Look, Lucia, you too ask Our Lord to forgive me my sins."

"I will, don't worry. If Our Lord had not forgiven you, Our Lady would not have told Jacinta that She was coming for you soon. I'm going to go to Mass to pray for you."

That afternoon, the priest came to hear Francisco's Confession and promised to bring him his First Holy Communion in the morning. He was so happy and he asked his mother to be sure not to give him anything to eat or drink after midnight. He wanted to fast like everyone else. The next morning, when he heard the tinkling of the bell announcing the coming of Our Lord, he tried to sit up in bed but his strength failed him and he fell back on the pillow. He received Jesus into his heart, closed his eyes in prayer, abiding in Jesus as He abode in him. As the feeling of the presence of God pervaded him, he recalled that other day when the Angel came and together they adored Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. This faithful boy had given his life to make reparation to the Hearts of Jesus and Mary for the sins of men. He had spent hours, whole days, dreaming of his loved Ones, Jesus and Mary, scorning the absorbing pleasures of childhood to comfort their loving Hearts. With Christ within him, Francisco offered himself again and again as a victim of love, consolation and reparation. He finally opened his eyes and saw his mother tearfully looking upon him. He said, "Mother, will the priest bring me Communion again tomorrow?" But this was his first and last Communion; tomorrow he would be with Jesus and Mary in Heaven.

Lucia came to attend Francisco's First Communion. Jacinta also was allowed to get up and visit with her brother. "I can't pray anymore," he confided to them, "you pray for me." The two girls knelt and prayed. "Lucia, maybe I'm going to miss you very much. I'd like Our Lord to take you to Heaven very soon."

"You're going to miss me? Oh no! As if it were possible when you are near Our Lord and Our Lady Who are so good."

"You are right. Maybe I won't remember you."

Francisco lingered on until evening, failing faster every minute. He was extremely thirsty. Lucia and his mother, staying faithfully with him, tried occasionally to give him a spoonful of water, but he was too weak even to swallow. They asked him how he felt. To spare his mother worry and grief, he managed to say, "I'm fine. I've got no pains." But when he was alone with Lucia and Jacinta, they realized what he was going through; it

gave him much relief to open up his heart to them. "I'm going to go to Heaven, and I'm going to ask Our Lord and Our Lady to take you there soon."

"Give my best wishes, my very best wishes to Our Lord and to Our Lady," Jacinta interrupted; "and tell Them that I'll suffer all that They want me to, for the conversion of sinners and in reparation for the sins committed against the Immaculate Heart of Mary."

His mother came in to watch over her little boy. Though her constant prayer was "God's will be done," it did not lessen the sorrow of her heart as she watched little Francisco die before her eyes. All was darkness on the hills and in the Marto home. Suddenly Francisco aroused himself to speak, "Mother, look! What a beautiful light — by the door!" His eyes opened wide with new life. "Now it's gone; I can't see it anymore."

Morning came; the end would come any moment. He asked them all to bless him, pray for him and to please forgive him all his faults. Their eyes filled with tears as they said they would. About ten, as the morning sun shone brightly into the room, his face brightened, an angelic smile parted his lips as he breathed his last breath. Without any agony, with utmost peace, he made his exit from this world. This boy had finished the work God had given him to do. Friday morning, the fourth day of April, in the year 1919, Our Lady came to claim him for Her own.

The following day, his mortal remains were taken to the cemetery in prayerful procession. First there was the crucifix, followed by a group of men dressed in green robes, then the priest, while behind the priest, four boys in white robes carried the body. Lucia and the Marto family, with many friends, walked along, tears streaming from their saddened eyes. Little Jacinta was so sick she had to stay at home in bed. A simple wooden cross was placed over his grave. As long as Lucia remained in the village, never a day went by without her going to visit the grave of her beloved Francisco. She knew he was happy with Jesus and Mary in Heaven and that he would not forget his promise always to pray for Jacinta and herself. Nothing could separate them on earth and nothing would separate them in death.



Francisco Marto

June 11, 1908 - April 4, 1919

On March 13, 1952 the remains of little Francisco were carried from the Fatima cemetery to be interred in the transept of the great Fatima basilica. Three of his brothers were pallbearers.