

Fatima – Part I: The Event¹

By Jim Seghers

“God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise, God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong” (1 Cor 1:27).

During the horrors of World War I an amazing series of events unfolded in a backwater village in Portugal called Fatima. The town was named for Princess Fatima, the daughter of a powerful Muslim prince who became a Christian and married the knight Don Goncalo. The princess was named after Muhammad’s beloved daughter, Fatima. At the time of these remarkable events Portugal was ruled by a godless humanistic republic. The startling events encompassed three illiterate children: Lucia dos Santos, age ten and her two cousins Francisco and Jacinto Marto, who were only nine and seven. These simple children were the chosen instruments to deliver an important message from heaven to a fallen world immersed in war.

The amazing events began on a **Spring day in 1916**. The three children were tending their families’ flocks of sheep. Suddenly they saw, “a young man, about fourteen or fifteen years old, whiter than snow, transparent as crystal when the sun shines through it and of great beauty.” The angel spoke to the children: “Do not be afraid, I am the Angel of Peace. Pray with me.” Then he taught the children the beautiful Pardon Prayer:

“My God, I believe, I adore, I hope and I love you! I ask pardon of you for those who do not believe, do not adore, do not hope and do not love you.”

The angel repeated the prayer three times. When he arose he instructed the children, “Pray thus. The Hearts of Jesus and Mary are attentive to the voice of your supplications.” Then he disappeared.

In the **summer of 1916** the angel suddenly appeared beside the children. He asked, “What are you doing?” Then he said, “Pray! Pray very much! The Hearts of Jesus and Mary have designs of mercy on you. Offer prayers and sacrifices constantly to the most high.” When Lucia asked how they were to make sacrifices, the angel replied:

“Make of everything you can a sacrifice, and offer it to God as an act of reparation for the sins by which He is offended, and in supplication for the conversion of sinners. You will thus draw down peace upon your country. I am the Angel Guardian, the Angel of Portugal. Above all, accept and bear with submission, the suffering which the Lord will send you.”

In late **September or early October of 1916** the angel appeared for a third time. This time he was holding a chalice in his left hand. Over it was a Eucharistic Host. Drops of Jesus’ precious Blood fell from the Host into the chalice. Leaving the chalice and Host suspended in the air, the angel knelt down, bowed profoundly in adoration, and then taught the children another prayer after which he departed:

“Most Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, I adore You profoundly, and I offer You the most precious Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ, present in all the tabernacles of the world, in reparation for the outrages, sacrileges and indifference with which He Himself is offended. And

¹ This essay draws heavily on and to some extent is a summary of Fr. Andrew Apostoli’s fine work *Fatima For Today: The Urgent Marian Message of Hope*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, c. 2010. All the quotations, unless indicated otherwise, are drawn from this book. I hope what I have written here will motivate you to get and read the book.

through the infinite merits of His most Sacred Heart, and the Immaculate Heart of Mary, I beg of You the conversion of sinners.”

May 13, 1917

To end the terrible war that was tearing Europe apart, Pope Benedict XV began a novena (nine days of prayer) to the Queen of Peace on May 5, 1917. Our Lady responded to the Pope’s prayers on the eighth day of the novena, Sunday, May 13. After Mass the Fatima children were tending their flocks at a pasture called Cova da Iria. While playing their games, the children saw what seemed to be a flash of lightening. They started to hurry their flocks home when they witnessed another flash. Then on a small holmoak tree in front of them, the children saw a lady dressed in white. Lucia described her:

“She was more brilliant than the sun, and radiated light more clear and intense than a crystal glass filled with sparkling water, when the rays of the burning sun shine through it.”

The Lady addressed the startled children: “Do not be afraid. I will do you no harm.” “Where are you from?” asked Lucia. The Lady replied, “I am from heaven.” Then Lucia asked, “What do you want of me?” The beautiful Lady asked the children to return there at the same time on the thirteenth of each month for the next six months. She added, “Later on I will tell you who I am and what I want. Afterwards I will return here yet a seventh time.” Lucia asked if they would go to heaven. The Lady said they would, but Francisco would need to say many rosaries. Lucia also inquired about the fate of two friends who had recently died. “Is Maria Nevers already in heaven?” The reply was, “Yes, she is.” Then Lucia asked about Amelia. The Lady gave the startling answer, “She will be in purgatory until the end of the world.” It was subsequently learned that Amelia died in circumstances involving immoral behavior.

Next the visionaries were asked, “Are you willing to offer yourselves to God and 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?” These young children responded enthusiastically, “Yes, we are willing.” The Lady told them, “Then you are going to have much to suffer, but the grace of God will be your comfort.” Lucia described what happened next:

“Our Lady opened her hands for the first time, communicating to us a light so intense that, as it streamed from her hands, its rays penetrated our hearts and the innermost depths of our souls, making us see ourselves in God, Who was that light, more clearly than we see ourselves in the best of mirrors. Then, moved by an interior impulse that was also communicated to us, we fell on our knees, repeating in our hearts: “O most Holy Trinity, I adore you! My God, my God, I love You in the most Blessed Sacrament.”

After a few moments, the Lady requested, “Pray the Rosary every day to obtain peace for the world, and the end of the war.” The Lady gradually rose until she disappeared.

Suffering followed quickly. Little Jacinta could not contain her great joy, so she told her mother everything about “the beautiful Lady from heaven.” Her father, To Marto, became the first believer in the Fatima apparitions. Lucia’s experience was quite different. Her mother, Maria Rosa, thought the whole thing was a fraud, perhaps even a blasphemy. The whole family turned against Lucia, who was cut to the heart.

June 13, 1917

About fifty people gathered with the children at the Cova saying the Rosary. The Lady appeared to the children after the Rosary was finished. She told Lucia that she wanted her to learn to read. When

Lucia requested the cure of a sick person, the Lady responded, "If he is converted he will be cured during the year." Lucia asked the Lady if she would take them to heaven, she replied:

"Yes, I will take Jacinto and Francisco soon. But you are to stay here some time longer. Jesus wishes to make use of you to make me known and loved. He wants to establish in the world devotion to my Immaculate Heart."

Lucia would live nearly eighty-seven more years. When Lucia asked her if she would be alone after her dear cousins went to heaven, the Lady replied:

"No, my daughter. Are you suffering a great deal? Don't lose heart. I will never forsake you. My Immaculate Heart will be your refuge and the way that will lead you to God."

Once again an immense light enveloped the children. The children saw themselves submerged in God. Francisco and Jacinto appeared in the light that was rising to heaven. Lucia was in the light spreading over the earth. Then the children saw the heart of the Lady surrounded with piercing thorns, which represented the offenses committed against her.

July 13, 1917

About four thousand people were present in the Cova. Lucia again asked the Lady what she wanted her to do. The Lady again instructed her to pray the Rosary daily, then added, "in honor of Our Lady of the Rosary ... because only she can help you. Subsequently, Lucia revealed that Jesus told her that he has placed the peace of the world into the hands and heart of his mother! Lucia was also instructed that the Lady would reveal her identity and perform a miracle in October.

In order to prepare the children for what they would see next, the Lady charged the children:

"Sacrifice yourselves for sinners, and say many times, especially whenever you make any sacrifices: O Jesus, it is for love of You, and for the conversion of sinners, and in reparation for the sins committed against the Immaculate Heart of Mary."

Then opening her hands, the Lady gave the children a frightening vision. Lucia described this **First Secret**:

"The rays of light seemed to penetrate the earth, and we saw as it were a sea of fire. Plunged in this fire were demons and souls in human form, like transparent burning embers, all blackened or burnished bronze, floating about in the conflagration, now raised into the air by the flames that issued from within themselves together with great clouds of smoke, now falling back on every side like sparks in huge fires, without weight or equilibrium, amid shrieks and groans of pain and despair, which horrified us and made us tremble with fear.... The demons could be distinguished by their terrifying and repellent likenesses to frightful and unknown animals, black and transparent like burning coals. Terrified and as if to plead for succour [sic.], we looked up at Our lady, who said to us, so kindly and so sadly: 'You have seen hell where the souls of poor sinners go. To save them, God wished to establish in the world devotion to my Immaculate Heart. If what I say to you is done, many souls will be saved and there will be peace.'"

Afterward the Lady taught the children another prayer they were to recite after each mystery of the Rosary:

"O my Jesus, forgive us our sins, save us from the fires of hell. Lead all souls to heaven, especially those most in need of Your mercy."

The **Second Secret** involved war, communism and the antidote – devotion to the Immaculate Heart. The Lady informed the children that the War would end (the armistice was signed on November 11, 1918), and God desire to establish devotion to her Immaculate Heart as a means to save souls from Hell. The Lady said:

“If what I say to you is done, many souls will be saved and there will be peace. The war is going to end, but if people do not cease offending God, a worse one will break out during the pontificate of Pius XI. When you see a night illuminated by an unknown light,² know that this is the great sign given you by God that he is about to punish the world for its crimes, by means of war, famine, and persecutions of the Church and of the Holy Father.”

At the same time a promise of Hope was given:

“In the end My Immaculate Heart will triumph. The Holy Father will consecrate Russia to me, and she will be converted, and a period of peace will be granted to the world. In Portugal, the dogma of the Faith will always be preserved.”

The **Third Secret** was a prophetic vision of events that occurred during the Second World War and the Cold War that followed. It was publically announced at the Beatification Mass of Francisco and Jacinto offered by Pope John Paul II in the Cova da Iria on May 13, 2000. The first thing the children saw was an angel with a flaming sword.

“[A]t 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 splendor 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!’”

Lucia described what they saw next:

“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, men and women Religious 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 steps, afflicted with pain and sorrow, he prayed for the souls of the corpses he met on the 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, men and women Religious and various laypeople of different ranks and positions.”

Lucia reported that they also saw in the vision the blood of the martyrs:

“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.”

After she confided these secrets to the children, the Lady informed them that a great miracle would occur in October.

August 13, 1917

By the time of the July apparitions Portuguese newspapers carried articles about the apparitions which they dubbed as “childish fantasies,” “religious fanaticism,” or “clerical deceptions.” Criticism was also directed to Arturo de Oliveira Santos, the leader of the administrative council that controlled the area that included Fatima. He determined to stop the spread of this religious “hoax”. He arranged to question the children in order to pry the secrets out of them. When he interrogated Lucia he threatened to have her killed, but she would not comply.

² This sign occurred between January 25 and 26, 1938 when an extraordinary aurora borealis illuminated the night skies of Europe and parts of America for almost five hours.

Early on August 13 Administrator Santos claimed he came to witness the apparition and wished to drive the children to visit their pastor so the priest could question them. However, this was a ruse so he could take the children to his headquarters at Ourem. The children spent the night in his home, but the next day the children were locked in jail with prisoners who were thieves. Lucia recorded their reception:

“The prisoners who were present ... sought to console us: ‘But all you have to do,’ they said, ‘is to tell the Administrator the secret! What does it matter whether the Lady wants you to or not!’ ‘Never!’ was Jacinta’s vigorous reply, ‘I’d rather die!’”

“Jacinta took off a medal that she was wearing around her neck, and asked a prisoner to hang it up for her on a nail in the wall. Kneeling before this medal, we began to pray. The prisoners prayed with us, that is, if they knew how to pray, but at least they were down on their knees. ... While we were saying the Rosary in prison, [Francisco] noticed that one of the prisoners was on his knees with his cap still on his head. Francisco went up to him and said, ‘If you wish to pray, you should take your cap off.’ Right away, the poor man handed it to him and he went over and put it on the bench on top of his own.”

The angry Administrator threatened each of the children that they would be thrown alive into a vat of boiling oil. He began with the youngest, Jacinto. She wouldn’t yield and was led from the room apparently to her death. Francisco and Lucia followed. Each was ready to die, but to their surprise they later met together, alive and well. Finally, on August 15, the feast of the Assumption of Mary, the defeated Santos had the children brought back to Fatima.

On Sunday, August 19 around four o’clock in the afternoon, the Lady again appeared to the children. The Lady reminded the children:

“I want you to continue going to the Cova da Iria on the 13th, and to continue praying the Rosary every day. In the last month [October], I will perform a miracle so that all may believe.”

Lucia informed her pastor that the Lady also said, “Had they not taken you to Ourem, the miracle would have been greater.” The Lady also instructed them:

“Pray, pray very much, and make sacrifices for sinners, for many souls go to hell, because there are none to sacrifice themselves and to pray for them.”

September 13, 1917

A crowd of about twenty-five thousand people arrived for the apparition. The Lady said,

“Continue to pray the Rosary in order to obtain the end of the war. In October Our Lord will come, as well as Our Lady of Dolours [sorrows] and Our Lady of Mount Carmel. St. Joseph will appear with the Child Jesus to bless the world.”

October 13, 1917

Enormous opposition was building as the promised miracle approached. The secular press throughout Portugal carried out a bitter campaign of mockery to discredit the apparitions. The majority of the children’s neighbors were skeptical about the visions and hostile toward the children and their families. Lucia’s mother remained a resolute unbeliever. However, on the morning of October 12, “Maria Rosa jumped out of bed and went to wake her daughter saying, ‘Lucia, we had better go to confession. Everyone says that we shall probably be killed tomorrow in the Cova da Iria. If the lady doesn’t do the miracle the people will attack us, so we had better go to confession and be properly prepared for death.’”

On the morning of October 13, Maria Rosa declared, "If my child is going to die, I want to die with her!"

The crowds were enormous. The estimates ran from forty thousand to eighty thousand in the Cova itself. Another twenty thousand people were watching from about twenty-five miles around. The rain poured, everyone was drenched, and the ground was a quagmire. When the Lady appeared she said:

"I want to tell you that a chapel is to be built here in my honor. I am the Lady of the Rosary. Continue always to pray the Rosary every day. The war is going to end, and the soldiers will soon return to their homes."

Then looking very sad, the Lady said:

"Do not offend the Lord our God anymore, because He is already so much offended."

Lucia describes what happened next:

"After our Lady had disappeared into the immense distance of the firmament, we beheld St. Joseph with the Child Jesus and Our Lady robed in white with a blue mantle, beside the son. St. Joseph and the Child Jesus appeared to bless the world, for they traced the Sign of the Cross with their hands. When a little later, this apparition disappeared, saw Our Lord and Our Lady; it seemed to me that it was Our Lady of Dolours [Sorrows]. Our Lord appeared to bless the world in the same manner as St. Joseph had done. This apparition also vanished, and I saw Our Lady once more, this time resembling Our Lady of Carmel."

The Miracle of the Sun followed. Mary Allen, an eye-witness, described what she saw:

As we approached the hillside upon which the appearances were supposed to have taken place, I saw a sea of people. (Some newspapers said there were 70,000 people there.) I didn't count, but it was more people than I have ever seen in my life, even to this day. . . . We had just arrived there when suddenly my attention was drawn to a sudden bright light from the heavens, lightening up the whole countryside. Suddenly the rain ceased, the clouds separated and I saw a large sun, brighter than the sun, yet I could look at it without hurting my eyes, as if it were only the moon. This sun began to get larger and larger, brighter and brighter until the whole heavens seemed more brilliantly lighted than I have ever seen it. Then the sun started spinning and shooting streams of light, which changed it to all colors of the rainbow. . . At the same time, it started getting bigger and bigger in the sky as though it were headed directly for us, as though it were falling on the earth. Everyone was frightened. We all thought it was the end of the world. Everyone threw themselves on their knees praying and screaming the Act of Contrition. Suddenly the sun stopped spinning and returned to its place in the sky. Everyone started shouting: 'Miracle! This is a miracle!' Just then I noticed that both the ground and my clothes were bone dry."