

Sister Maria Lucia of Jesus and of the Immaculate Heart

How I see the Message

in the course of time
and in the light of events

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Introduction

In the year 1972, a story began which came to an end in the year 2000. It was in the year 1972 that the community of Carmelite Sisters in Coimbra chose me as their confessor. Here I met Sr Lucia for the first time. I had already met the other Sisters, including Sister Lucia, in the parlour several times. Nevertheless, this meeting was different. This was a meeting in faith.

At the time I was still a novice in these things. To approach a Carmelite was, for me, to approach our Holy Mother Saint Teresa. But this Sister had a special aura attached to her — she was one of the Fatima visionaries. However, since, for her, everything was very simple and completely natural, — she was simplicity itself — the task was made much easier. We understood each other perfectly. Trust was mutual. Whenever Sr Lucia met a Carmelite who was devoted to Our Lady and interested in Fatima, I won't say that she lost her head, but she was delighted, and she never stopped until she had involved him, too, in her task, which was to communicate the Message of Our Lady. And this is what happened.

As a Carmelite and master of novices, which was my mission in the Order at the time, I was captivated by all things Carmelite and I had a special interest in all those who displayed an affection for Carmel. As Sr Lucia had come from the Sisters of St Dorothy, and had entered Carmel at a mature age, I did not expect to find her so centred on Carmelite spirituality and such a friend of the Order. This for me was a cause of admiration and made it easy for us to understand each other. As we spoke frankly to each other — indeed frankness was one of her

qualities — we spoke of what had happened and of the content of the Message.

Thanks to my own formation and to what I was able to observe, I saw that God intervenes at times in the lives of people in ways that they themselves do not understand and, in consequence, do not know how to communicate what they have experienced. Others, however, understand what is happening, but they do not know how to “express” it, while yet others both understand and are able to communicate what they have understood. At times, such understanding is somewhat “confused” and slow. With time, and the spiritual development of the person, the message becomes clearer.

We are faced in this case with three children who were strongly “touched” by the supernatural. Image follows image, which is normal. With children, this is how God works. Shortly afterwards, two of the children, Francisco and Jacinta, were taken to heaven. Only Lucia remained. It is only to be expected that the one who remained should gradually acquire an understanding of the message which she did not have before, and that she should gradually learn to decodify the images. If God’s revelation is dynamic and progressive, we can say the same of the understanding of it.

Years earlier, Sr Lucia had already written a text, at the request of the Father Master of the Order, later Cardinal Ballestrero, when he visited Coimbra in 1955. This text was sent to Rome by order of Pope Paul VI, but remained forgotten in the Vatican archives. In view of this situation, I suggested to Sister Lucia that, since she had not written all the details concerning the Message since the beginning, she should write: “How I now see the Message in the course of time and in the light of events.”

As I knew, more or less, both what was written in the book which was lying in the Vatican archives and the style in which it had been written, I suggested to her that she should write another in a different style. I felt it needed to be less doctrinal and more biographical. Since she was the first to have received the Message, she was also the first to have lived it. I therefore asked her to undertake this task illustrating it with her own experience. She displayed a certain reluctance to do this.

As, during our conversation, there were other more important matters that we felt we needed to discuss, such as Sister's Memoirs of her father and mother, and also her reply to a long questionnaire, this particular task was left for 'later'. This 'later' turned out to be much later. She then set to work with a will, as she delighted in everything that could contribute to the knowledge of the Message, but by this time she had little energy. She complained of being tired, and although her desire to see the task finished was great, her human limitations intervened. That's fine, Sister Lucia, it's best to stop. And the text ended at that point.

P. Jeremias Carlos Vechina,
Discalced Carmelite

Fatima, 13th February 2006.

Under Obedience

On 15th May, 1982, I was in the Carmel in Fatima, waiting to return to our Carmel in Coimbra on the 19th, after taking part in the great pilgrimage on the 13th of that month, and having had the privilege of speaking personally and in private with the Holy Father, Pope John Paul II. That same afternoon, our Rev Fr Provincial, Fr Jeremias Carlos Vechina, came to the Carmel to speak to me about various matters, including the significance of the Message, its spirituality and the way it has spread throughout the world.

At the end of our conversation Father Provincial asked me: *“Have you written down all the details concerning the Message since the beginning?”* I replied that I had not, because, when I wrote the Memoirs, I did so in a great hurry, and did not have time to go into great detail.

Father Provincial then said: *“Then you will have to do it now, explaining how you see the Message now over time and in the light of events.”*

I explained the difficulties facing me, particularly the lack of time. His Reverence replied: *“You will have to do it now in whatever way you can manage, in order to complete the history of the Message and offer to God this further sacrifice, done for love of Him and of Our Lady, for they both well deserve it.”*

I thought about what Father Provincial had said and a doubt arose in my mind. In view of the rules laid down by the Holy See concerning me, could I do this work without its authorisation? I had been told not to speak about the Apparitions. Would not writing about them be even worse?

As, for the moment, I could not dedicate myself to this task in view of the numerous correspondence which had accumulated during my stay in Fatima, I put it aside until such time as I would be in a position to undertake it, and in the meantime have time to think, pray, and ask God's light, and the advice of others, concerning the doubt that had come into my mind as regards the rules laid down for me by the Holy See, and so on.

On 11th February, 1983, Father Provincial visited our Carmel in Coimbra. He spoke to me and asked me how I was getting on with the task that he had entrusted to me. I told him that I had done nothing about it yet, both through lack of time and also because of the doubt in my mind, which was as follows: in view of the rules laid down by the Holy See in my regard — namely that I should not speak about the Apparitions — should I undertake to write without their authorisation?

Father Provincial explained that I could do so, because to speak about something was one thing, to write about it was another. He also explained to me that the prohibition did not apply to my confessor or to my spiritual director, adding that the rules were not to be seen as an imposition but rather as a protection and a help.

On 13th March, 1983, our confessor, Fr Pedro Lourenço Ferreira, when I had finished my confession and was speaking to him of some matters connected with the Message, surprised me by giving me the same order, saying that it was necessary to write down in detail everything connected with the Message and how I see it now, in the light of the passage of time and events.

Although I took this order from my confessor and our Provincial Superior as an expression of the will of God, I still

wanted to be certain that I could do it. And having learned that His Eminence, Cardinal Eduardo Pironio, would be coming to give the annual community retreat, I waited to consult His Eminence about what I was being asked to do, and about what the Holy See's rules were, and what our Provincial Superior had told me. His Eminence replied saying that what the Provincial had said was correct, that it was true that *"to speak was one thing, and to write was another, therefore, not only was I free to write but I was under an obligation to do so. So go ahead and do it"* he said. *"I, too, order you to do so as director of these spiritual exercises and also as Major Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for Religious."* And he repeated: *"What the Provincial told you is correct: the rules say that you must not speak but they do not forbid you to write, for it is one thing to speak and another to write."* (9th September, 1983).

In view of this reply, I must no longer hesitate, but obey with faith, hope and love, certain that this is God's will. Hence, Lord, I will go to the foot of your altar to offer this flower, too, gathered in the garden of your Love, but gathered from a rose tree full of thorns, in order to scatter it in your ways and mine, even if the petals are despised, caught up and blown along the ground by the wind, trodden underfoot by the passer-by, like my own last remains.

I shall have to do this work little by little, according as I have a few minutes to spare to devote to it, trusting always in the help of the Divine Holy Spirit and in the maternal protection of the Immaculate Heart of Mary: *"My Immaculate Heart will be your refuge and the way that will lead you to God."*

St Iranaeus says that the life of man is the glory of God, and the life of man is the vision of God. If the manifestation of

God gives life to all the beings on earth, all the more does the manifestation of the Father, through the Word, give life to all those who see God.

It is on this vision of God, through faith, that I am going fix my gaze, because it is in God that I find the beginning that has no beginning, for in God there is neither past nor future, everything is present in the light of his immense Being, as if it were taking place that very moment.

Thus I see the Message ever present in the immense Being of God, to be sent to earth on the day and hour predestined by Him in the designs and plans of his infinite Mercy, in the form of yet another appeal for faith, hope and love.

This reminds me of a passage from the Song of Songs: *“Love is strong as death, and jealousy is as cruel as the grave. Its flashes are flashes of fire, a divine flame. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it.”* (Cant. 8, 6b-7).

It was the power of this love that once again drew God’s gaze towards us, in order to attract us and raise us up to Him. To drink from this spring of crystal-clear water, well-spring of life, grace, strength and light, which gushes down from Heaven to earth, calling on us to drink of this water and to eat of this bread, so that we shall no longer hunger and thirst. *“Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst”* (Jn 4, 13) *“anyone who eats of this Bread will never be hungry.”*

“Whoever believes in me has eternal life. I am the Bread of life... This is the Bread which comes down from heaven that whoever eats it may not die. I am the living Bread which came down from Heaven. Anyone who eats of this bread will live for ever; and the Bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh.” (cf. Jn 6, 47-52).

Thus I beseech You, my Lord and my God, that this work may be for You yet another hymn of eternal gratitude and praise of your love for me.

It is difficult to write, today, about how I see the Message in the light of all the events that have taken place and the time that has passed. But I will try to do so out of obedience, trusting in the Divine Holy Spirit and in the maternal protection of the Mother of Heaven who, as if I were a little child, will take hold of my hand and guide my pen so that I write only what is in accordance with God's will, for the praise of his glory.

If I follow the divine Master who said: "*I am the Way, the Truth and the Life*" He will guide my steps and will not allow me to wander away from the path of Truth and Life which He is.

How I see the Message over time and without time, because in God's plans, in the Light of his immense Being, it always was as if it were happening now, at this very moment, in the precise moment predestined by Him for that day, hour and moment, because, in the immense mirror of his Divine Being, everything is present without either past or future.

Thus since before all time, when the world itself did not exist, the Lord already had present to Him that inhospitable place, which He alone could have chosen for the House of God and Ark of the Covenant between God and all people of good will. As the Angels said when Jesus was born: "*Peace on earth to all those of good will*".

If it were to be chosen by men, it would have been the first to be rejected. Think of it: for such a message, a rural hillside, a stony place, devoid of any natural beauty, with no means of transport, without a shelter of any kind to protect people from

the hot sun in the summer or the torrential rain, cold and storms accompanied by thunder and lightning in the winter, from the early morning dew on rainy days.

Most people would have considered it utter madness; no-one would go there!

But in fact, what men reject is what God chooses, because his is the power, the wisdom, the grace and the energy that is at work in souls, moving them and carrying them where He wishes; He alone can raise up children to Abraham (cf. Mt. 3,9) so that they are his People, coming from the ends of the earth to prostrate themselves at his feet, united in the same prayer, doing penance, asking for forgiveness, graces and consolation for themselves and for their distant friends and relatives; forgiving, and singing hymns of gratitude, supplication and praise to our Supreme God and Lord of all that exists, and to his and our Mother, whom He sent as a messenger of peace, grace, pardon and love to travel throughout the world, like a Shepherdess and Mother of her People, to carry in her Heart the light of faith, hope and love which burns for us in the Heart of our God, Lord and Saviour.

So we can see how He transformed that rural spot into a land of peace, penance and prayer, to which multitudes of people flock thirsting for faith, hope and love, in order to drink from the fount of living Water which satisfies and overflows for eternal life. It is the channel of grace which waters the whole earth that yearns for peace, purity, light and love; it is the water of which Jesus spoke to the Samaritan woman: *“Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give will never thirst. Whoever eats of this Bread will never hunger, because he will have eternal life within him.* (Cf. John 4, 14 and 6, 51).

So I pray and sing with the psalmist. "*The Lord looks down from heaven to the earth*" (cf. Ps. 32).

May the Lord bless his people with peace" (Ps. 28, 11).

What I have said about God's choice of place, I also say of the Lord's choice of the instruments that He chose to use in the accomplishment of his plan of immense mercy for fallen humanity.

He chose children who were so poor and ignorant that men would have rejected them as being incapable of accomplishing such a mission. But God's ways are not man's ways; He chooses to make use of what is useless, for his is the wisdom, the knowledge, the power and the desire, to communicate to whoever He chooses. What He wants are pure hearts, in which to accomplish his pleasure: "*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.*" It is to these that the Lord reveals Himself, manifests Himself, both in order to transform them according to the plans of his Mercy, and also to show that it is not they, but the grace of God at work in them. In this way, the Lord shows that the work is his and not that of the weak instruments which He has chosen; for God it is enough that these instruments allow themselves to be moulded, transformed and moved by the grace at work within them, engraving in their pure and innocent hearts the reflections of his presence, the touches of his grace, and the impulses of his love. It is all his work. He is the artist who designs and paints this beautiful picture which the whole world sees, observes and contemplates in astonishment, some with faith and others without it, but unable to deny — in all sincerity — the reality before them that our eyes see, and which is yet another proof of the existence of one true God, who is greater

than all that exists and that was created by Him for our benefit, and of all this He is the one supreme Lord, governing, ruling and preserving all things within the laws which, since the beginning, He prescribed for each one of the creatures that exist. Here we see the omnipotence of his immense Being.

It is what the Lord told Moses to say to the people when he asked Him his Name: *“Tell them that I am who I am.”*

Only God can say who He is, because He always was, He is today and forever.

We cannot say who we are, because today we exist and tomorrow we shall cease to be and will disappear into the nothingness of the tomb even though, when we leave the earth, we shall continue to be in eternity, happy or unhappy, depending on what we have merited with our good works or our bad ones, practised with faith, hope and love, or with our incredulity, materialism, egoism, dishonesty, hatred, rancour, taking of revenge, injustices, lack of loyalty and of charity towards others, etc. All this can prepare an unhappy eternity for us, and one for which each one of us is personally responsible.

God is always a compassionate and merciful Father, good towards those who sincerely repent, ask pardon and, doing penance, change their lives.

God made us free; hence each one goes wherever the path he or she has freely chosen takes them.

This is what Christ tells us in his Gospel: *“Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.”* (Mt. 7, 13-14).

“If anyone would come after me, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.” (Mt. 16, 24)

It was by this road that the Lord led those whom He had chosen.

Just as a guitar player tunes his strings in order to play harmoniously, so God prepares the instruments that He has chosen so that the echo of his Message will reach tunefully to the ends of the earth.

God began the preparation of the instruments that He had chosen when they, utterly carefree, were praying and playing, by causing to pass before their eyes, gently and slowly, what seemed to be a little white cloud of snow, but brighter than the sun, and in the shape of a human being, which had descended, appearing out of the firmament, drawing their eyes to it and attracting their attention. *“What is that?”* The children asked one another what it might be: *“I don’t know”*.

And in fact, even today I don’t know. But the events that followed make me believe that it must have been our Guardian Angel who, without showing himself clearly, was preparing us for the accomplishment of God’s plans.

Then, one day, God sent his Angel with a message of peace and prayer, thereby introducing us into the climate of the supernatural, of faith, hope and love. Saying: *“Do not be afraid. I am the Angel of Peace. Pray with me”*, and kneeling on the ground, he bowed down until his forehead touched the earth. Led by a supernatural impulse, we did the same, and repeated after him the words which we heard him say:

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

Having repeated this prayer three times, he stood up and said:

“Pray thus. The Hearts of Jesus and Mary are attentive to the voice of your supplications.”

In this message I see God in his Angel, beginning by introducing us into the way of faith: *“My God, I believe.”* For faith is the foundation of our entire spiritual life, the root from which springs the sap that feeds us and gives us life. It is by faith that we see God and meet with Him, as the prophet Elijah said: *“The Lord God lives in whose presence I stand.”* If we live convinced of this truth, this reality, our faith increases, grows stronger, and enables us to enter into the immensity of the supreme Being of God.

St Paul says that we are the temple of God. Yes, but also more than this, as God is our temple where we find ourselves immersed in the immense Being of God who sees all, penetrates all, and gives to each one being and life. Just as a fish cannot live without water, we cannot live without God. God is the great Ocean where we live, move and breathe the breeze of the divine Breath which God bestows on us every moment.

It is in this sea that I live, herein I plunge, never more to emerge. He took me in his Fatherly arms and led me where He wished me to go. In Him I believed, to Him I dedicated myself until He chooses to transport me and carry me to that new day where I am to serve Him, to adore Him, and to love Him for ever and ever.

Pray thus: with faith and trust, humbly adoring and loving so that the Hearts of Jesus and Mary may receive your prayer and carry it to the Father, as the humble fruit of his redeeming work.

It is a Message of peace, peace with God by keeping his commandments, the commandments of the law of God, keeping them in mind and engraved in our heart, because it is they that mark out our way to heaven: *“If you want to be saved, keep the commandments”* is what Jesus Christ said to the young man who questioned him.

In the Old Testament, we read what God said to his people after he had given them the commandments: *“Honour your father and your mother. You shall not kill. Neither shall you commit adultery. Neither shall you steal. Neither shall you bear false witness against your neighbour. Neither shall you covet your neighbour’s wife, nor his house ... nor anything at all that belongs to him.”* (Dt 5, 16-21) *“And these words which I command you this day shall be (engraved) upon your heart; and you shall teach them to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. And you shall bind them as a sign upon your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.”* (Dt 6, 4-7).

God’s insistence that we should keep his commandments in mind shows us how important they are in our lives, both for time and for eternity. And if we meditate on them and think about them, we will see that the serious evils afflicting humanity all come from failure to observe them.

Love is the first and the last of the commandments, the basis of all the others, the reason why we have to observe them all, which holds them all within itself, and we shall not fail to keep any one of them without at the same time failing in the commandment of love for God and for our neighbour.

In Deuteronomy, God said: *“Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might. And these words which I command you this day shall be engraved upon your heart.”* (Dt. 6, 4-6).

Replying to a scribe who approached the Lord and asked him: *“Which commandment is the first of all?”* Jesus said:

“The first is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these.’ Then the scribe said to him: ‘You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that he is one, and there is no other but he; and to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength, and to love one’s neighbour as oneself, is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.’ And when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God”. (Mk 12, 28-34).

One of the principal purposes of this message is to bring us to a better understanding of the commandments of the Law of God, of their importance, of their value and of our responsibility with regard to the duty laid on us to observe them with fidelity and love, on earth, and happiness in eternal life.

It is a Message of faith *“My God, I believe.”* I believe that you are the one true God, the Creator of all that exists, the one Lord of Heaven and earth, the only one worthy of being served, adored and loved. Because I believe, I adore you and hope in you, and that all your good things will come about, and I entrust myself into your Fatherly arms and I trust in your love, because you are my Saviour. I love you because You are the only one worthy of my love, and I want to return to you the same love with which You love me.

It is a Message of prayer: *“What are you doing? 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!”*

The question : *“What are you doing?”* does not imply a reproof, merely a reminder of what is most necessary and important, namely prayer, our meeting with God in prayer, which must be a habitual dialogue of our soul with the Lord.

Even in the midst of our tasks, our work, our amusements, our occupations and recreations, the Lord must be always present in our spirit, in our heart and in our intentions, so that in everything we may give Him glory and pleasure, that is a proof of our love. In this way, we must give pleasure to the Lord, and so cause Him to look with mercy on us, so that the Lord will be at ease within us, will be at ease and rest within us, and so make us one with Himself. For this to come about, our prayer must be a true meeting with Him, regardless of whether we make use of vocal prayers composed by others, or allow our heart to speak, saying to Him whatever we feel, desire and hope from Him, with faith and trust, certain that the Lord sees us, watches over us, listens to us and pays attention to us. St Paul says that we are the house of God (cf. I Cor. 3, 9).

If we are God’s house, we are the place where He dwells. We must not leave Him alone in our house, forgotten, abandoned, still less must we allow Him to be offended by us in our own house!

“The Hearts of Jesus and Mary have designs of mercy on you.”

God’s designs of mercy are not restricted to the humble little shepherds. He has designs of mercy, grace, forgiveness and love for each one of us, provided we place no obstacle in

the way with our sins, faults and ingratitude, thereby preventing the Lord from accomplishing his designs of mercy in us.

It is what is required of us in order to correspond to God's will for us:

“Offer prayers and sacrifices constantly to the Most High!”

Sacrifice is the bulwark of our prayer, it is the power that sustains it. First the sacrifice of ourselves, of our illegitimate pleasures, the renunciation of our sinful appetites derived from our sensuality, egoism, self-indulgence, ambition. Then, the sacrifices voluntarily accepted and sought in order to offer them to the Lord as a humble offering of our love and gratitude.

It is to this prayer and these sacrifices that the Hearts of Jesus and Mary are attentive, in order to receive them and carry them to the Father, as the on-going fruit of his redeeming work, for the salvation of the whole of humanity.

It is what St Paul says to us: To complete in ourselves what is lacking in the Passion of Christ.

What was lacking was what each one of us must contribute, as members of the mystical Body of Christ, by uniting our prayer to his and our sacrifice to the sacrifice of Christ the Redeemer.

The third apparition of the Angel is an incentive to our adoration of God in the mystery of the most Holy Trinity:

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

This prayer was for me a great link in my union with God, a link which grasps me, takes hold of me, indissolubly engraved in my heart: Holy Trinity, one true God, in whom I believe, in Thee I hope; I adore Thee and I love Thee; accept my love and my humble adoration. I have so little to give You that I beg you to accept, in place of my unworthiness, the infinite merits of the Heart of Jesus and of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, and in exchange I beg of You the conversion of poor sinners.

The Angel then stood up and once again took the chalice and the host in his hands — he had left them suspended in mid-air — and he gave Communion to the three little shepherds saying at the same time: *“Take and drink the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ horribly outraged by ungrateful men and women. Repair their crimes and console your God.”*

Then, he once again prostrated on the ground and repeated with the children three times more the same prayer, the children repeating the words after him.

What is the meaning of this Communion?

To me it means God wishing to stir up our faith in the real presence of Jesus Christ in the Divine Eucharist, and in the efficacy of his words when he said: *“This is my Body, this is my Blood.”* And it also means that by being identified with Christ, we could offer to the most Holy Trinity a worthier reparation more pleasing in his eyes.

Thus those little hosts, consecrated with Christ on the altar of Sacrifice, will have been offered to the Father as an offering of eternal praise.

Divine Host, Bread descended from Heaven,
Which the Father has given us, and in me has set alight
a flickering flame, which Your love sets
blazing within me, Divine Host,

on the altar of sacrifice, I adore You and love You,
I long to be consecrated with You, offered to the Father
a burning flame, so that I am lost
in the eternity of your immense Being.
Tiny Host, I long to be with you.
Make me, for You, your living tabernacle
There You can dwell, like this burning furnace,
which your Love, there present, does not allow to go out.
There you must dwell, truly hot flame,
that your Love keeps burning with the light of your gaze.

The little shepherds said nothing about the apparitions of the Angel because my mother had already scolded me a lot when there was a first apparition of a vague white figure, and my companions at the time talked about it in their families.

Then, when these apparitions occurred in the presence of Jacinta and Francisco, I warned them both not to say anything to anyone because my mother had already scolded me the first time, and the others had not believed and had made fun. And thanks be to God, Jacinta and Francisco kept this secret well.

When, after those earlier apparitions, the apparitions of the Angel occurred, I did not again urge the need for secrecy as the apparitions, of themselves, imposed silence, recollection and a life of prayer. It is God at work in souls, leading them by the ways along which He wishes to take them, provided they will allow themselves to be led, following the action of the Holy Spirit, and He will take them along straight paths and smooth ways. It is what Christ tells us in his Gospel: *“But the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.”* (Jn 14, 26).

St Paul says: *“Now there are varieties of gifts but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.”* (I Cor 12, 4-7).

“God chose what is weak in the world . He chose what is low and despised in the world... so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.” (I Cor 1, 27).

When I read these passages in Holy Scripture, the Gospel and St Paul, I understood the reason why God had chosen me. It is because it is his way to choose what is useless in order to make use of it, and so to show the world that the work is his and not that of the instrument that He has chosen.

The Message is the revelation of God present in the world in the midst of men and women, and in particular in each one of us.

It is not something new. Since the beginning of time, God, in various ways, has revealed Himself to humankind and at all times there have been faithful souls who, by following the light of faith, have met Him, adored Him, served and loved Him, trusted in Him, abandoning themselves into his Fatherly arms, in Him they have found life, grace, strength and salvation in Christ his Son, the one Saviour of all humanity.

The Message is more a new light to shine in the midst of the darkness of the errors of atheism, so that this will not succeed in extinguishing the light of faith which still shines in the hearts and souls of the elect, so that they, by following this light, can encounter Christ Jesus, the way of truth, justice, peace and love, the only things that lead to Life of which the Father is the source which fills and inebriates for ever. Thus God sent his light into the world so that the world would have light and

have it in abundance, drinking from the fountains of salvation: *"I am the Way, the Truth and the Life."* (Jn 14, 6).

This Life is the life of God, in which we all share, and it is from this Life that we receive immortality, by sharing in the immortality of God.

God always existed, and will continue to exist for ever with his chosen ones in the Kingdom of Heaven. Great is the Lord, immense his Mercy, eternal his love! I believe in Thee, I adore Thee. I trust and I love Thee! For Thee I live!

Thus, when the time, the year and the hour predestined by God came, He sent us his Heavenly Messenger, to this earth of which She was the Mistress, the Queen, the Mother and the Patron, in order to establish his altar in that place, and from there set out to evangelise the whole world, flying as it were on wings of light, to prevent atheism from extinguishing the light of faith, hope and love. She, in haste, descended from Heaven to earth, following in the footsteps of her adored Son so that the smouldering wick should not be extinguished. And it was in this abandoned spot, where everything summons one to prayer and silence, that reminds me of that other spot to which Christ withdrew for forty days and forty nights in order to fast, to pray and do penance for the salvation of humanity lost and neglectful in the abyss of sin, as if from there He had said to us: *Repent and do penance, lest you all likewise perish.*"

It was in a land of peace, chosen by God, when three little children were minding their sheep, after they had eaten their lunch, and said their beads, calling on the holy Name of God: *"Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit..."* *"Our Father who art in Heaven Thy kingdom come... Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us"* And also greeting the Mother of God and imploring her maternal

protection: *“Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with Thee, blessed art Thou amongst women, and blessed is the fruit of Thy womb... Pray for us, O Holy Mother of God, now and at the hour of our death.”*

Having finished their prayer, the three children entertained themselves by playing, trying to build a little wall around a clump of furze in an effort to protect it so that the animals would not nibble at its points which were pointing luxuriously upwards, as if pointing us towards Heaven, where God is, and the Mother of Heaven who watches over us. I did not think it then; today, however, I like to look at this little plant as if it were the tree of life, planted by God in the Garden of Eden, the fruit of which one was not allowed to eat or one would die. But, being the fruit of the tree of life, would one really die by eating this fruit? Yes, because the fruit of the tree of life, which represents God, in whose life we share, is not to be destroyed, but to be preserved so as to give other fruits of equal value, and to destroy a life is to incur the death penalty: *“Thou shalt not kill”*.

I remember the wall that we were building as if it were the symbol of the Basilica that would eventually be built on that very spot, for the glory of God and of Our Lady, and a place of rest for the mortal remains of the little shepherds. How great God is, making everything from nothing.

It was on May 13th, 1917, just after midday, when the Heavenly Messenger, wrapped in the light of God which transformed Her, as if she were a new creature, came down from Heaven to earth, in order to bring us the Message which God had entrusted to Her, to come down to the children of men whom Jesus had entrusted to her care when in agony on the Cross.

She came to poor ignorant children because, as Jesus said, of such is the Kingdom of Heaven.

She began by calming their fear of what they thought was an approaching thunderstorm which they were hurrying to escape from, believing that the flashes of light reflecting from Her were in fact flashes of lightning. Thus, She surprised them by saying, as She descended: *“Do not be afraid. I will do you no harm.”* It was as if She were saying to us that She was not the imagined thunderstorm which one fears and wants to run away from. Or else She wished to calm our fear in the same way as the Angel greeted the Lady herself when he came to announce the Incarnation of the Son of God: *“Fear not, Mary, for you have found favour with God”*. (Lk 1, 30).

Why should God have chosen the 13th of the month for this event? I do not know, but from then onwards in my meditations, I have thought a lot about this detail and asked myself: what could it mean to have chosen the 13th of the month? Without knowing the answer, one day I found myself thinking: Might it not mean the mystery of the Most Blessed Trinity? “One God in three distinct persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit”? And I meditated frequently on this idea: One God, three distinct Persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Is this the meaning that God intended to convey? I don’t know, but for me it was like the reflection of a new light.

God chose that wild place, with no natural attractions, no material comfort, on which to build his universal Temple to which, from all parts of the world, people were to come with faith, to love Him, to worship Him, honour Him in adoration, thanksgiving and, in all humility, ask his forgiveness, praising Him and blessing his Holy Name, singing his praises, begging

for his grace and blessing, trusting in the mercy of the Father of all humanity, in whose house there is a place for each son and daughter.

We don't want to wander off and stray along the wrong paths, leaving the food in our Father's house in order to eat the food of unclean animals, in search of sensual pleasure, burying ourselves in the swamp of the flesh which degrades and reduces us to the level of irrational and impure animals, taking us far away from our Father's house, from grace and the friendship of God. *"Blessed are the pure in heart, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven."*

The commandments of the Law of God tell us: *"You shall not commit adultery, you shall not covet your neighbour's wife; you shall be chaste."*

The prophet Jonah said to the Ninivites: 'Repent and do penance and you shall receive mercy'"

But what penance is it that God asks of us? To begin with, the sacrifice that each one has to impose on him- or herself in order to leave the way of sin and embark on a path of honesty, purity, justice, truth and love.

Sacred Scripture tells us that the Ninivites, when they heard the message of the Prophet Jonah, acknowledged their sins, repented, changed their lives, did penance, asking pardon of God, and Niniveh was not destroyed because in that way they received mercy.

This is what we have to do, acknowledge our sins, repent, ask God's pardon, change our life-style, do penance and observe the commandments of God so that we too may receive mercy.

At the end of her Message, Our Lady left us this lovely injunction: *"Do not offend the Lord our God any more, because He is already s much offended."* (13.10.1917).

There is a custom in our part of the world according to which, when you meet someone you do not know who speaks to you, you ask them where they are from, and what they want.

This is why I said: *“Where are you from?”* to which the Lady replied: *“I am from heaven.”*

Accustomed as I was to hearing that Heaven was far above us, above the firmament and the stars, the moon and the sun, and seeing such a lovely Lady there in front of us who said she was from Heaven, I felt a joy so deep that it filled me with confidence and love. It seemed to me that I could never again be separated from this Lady and I wanted somehow to seize hold of Her so that I could fly off with Her carried by her wings! But this was not what the Lord wanted.

So I continued the dialogue with the Lady:

“And what do you want of me?”

To this, the Lady replied: *“I have come to ask you to come here for six months in succession, on the 13th day, at this same hour. Later on, I will tell you who I am and what I want. Afterwards, I will return here yet a seventh time.”*

The phrase *“I have come to ask you”* has also often been the subject of many of my meditations. She, the Lady, the Mistress, the Queen of Heaven and earth, comes down humbly to ask, as if asking a favour. It is always the same. She who said, nearly two thousand years ago: *“Behold the handmaid of the Lord.”*

Unquestionably, She came at God’s request, to accomplish yet another mission which He chose to entrust to Her, to bring us a message of faith, hope and love. After all, was She not the Mother of fair Love, of hope, of confidence, the refuge of sinners, the gate of Heaven, the Mother of the People of God?

What a great example She gives us here, that humility which attracts the eyes of God, wins the love of his Fatherly Heart, and the mercy of his Infinite Goodness.

Thus, She is the first of the great chain of the elect, which rises from earth to Heaven, the Ark of the Covenant, Gate of Heaven.

The respectful form of the (Portuguese) word “you” that I used is the one we use when addressing people of a higher position than oneself.

Encouraged by the confidence which the Lady inspired in me, I asked: “*Shall I go to Heaven, too?*” To this the Lady replied: “*Yes, you will.*”

The interior joy I felt is indescribable, but even so I did not consider myself dispensed from the obligation laid on all of us to be faithful to God, loving Him, serving Him, and faithfully fulfilling his precepts and his laws.

When I was still a small child, seated on my mother’s lap or on my father’s knee, I learnt the Commandments of the Law of God, the formula ending as follows: These ten commandments are combined in two, namely to love God above all things and our neighbour as ourselves.

Later on, I read that Jesus Christ gave the following reply to a lawyer who asked him: “*Teacher, which is the greatest commandment of the law?*” What Jesus said was: “*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and the first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets.*” (Mt 22, 33-40).

On reading this, I thought: Here is my way, deny myself, embrace the Cross which the Lord has given me, for love of

Him and of my neighbour for his sake, so that, through his infinite mercy, I shall one day be granted the grace of being received into the heavenly dwellings of Heaven. Because it is love that purifies us, dignifies us and unites us with God.

St John tells us that God is love; hence only love can cause us to plunge into the immense being of God, in order to be one with God.

But this love is not content with being happy. It seeks to bring our neighbour, too, to share in that same happiness, which is why I asked: *“And Jacinta?” “She will go also”*. *“And Francisco?” He will go there too, but he must say many Rosaries.”*

I do not think this admonition was meant only for Francisco, but for all of us who were represented there in the person of Francisco. I also think that, here, Our Lady wished to tell us the great need we all have to pray, to place ourselves in touch with God by means of prayer, whether it be the prayer of the Rosary or some other prayer which places us in the presence of God with faith, hope and love.

I love to recall the phrase of the prophet Elijah: *“The Lord God lives, in whose presence I stand.”* It is a way of reminding ourselves that we are speaking to God, aware that He is present, that He sees us, listens to us and enfolds us in his Fatherly love. It is the prayer which Jesus Christ taught us: *“Our Father, who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy Name, thy Kingdom come.* This kingdom of light, peace and love which purifies all things, sanctifies and unites all things, in the immense Being of his Glory.

Remembering two young girls, my playmates, who had died, I asked: *“Is Maria das Neves already in Heaven?”* The Lady replied: *“Yes, she is.”* And Amelia? *“She will be in purgatory until the end of the world.”*

I have been asked many questions about this reply from Our Lady, and I do not really know the answers to them. I did not ask Our Lady herself for an explanation, it was too small a thing for me to remember to do so. But I have thought a great deal about this detail of the Message.

After all, I ask myself, what is purgatory? The dictionary tells us that it is a place of punishment in which the souls of the just are purified before being admitted to heavenly bliss: a place in which one suffers.

So we see that the word 'purgatory' means 'purification', and seeing that we are all more or less sinners, we all need to purify ourselves from our sins, faults and imperfections in order to be admitted to the joy of possessing the Kingdom of eternal glory.

We can accomplish this purification in this life if God gives us time for this, by asking pardon of God with sincere repentance and a purpose of amendment, by doing penance, receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation — if our sins are serious or mortal — so that the priest, in the name of God, can absolve us, and also by offering to God sacrifices and good works in reparation for the evil we may have done including asking forgiveness of our neighbour if we have offended him or her in some way, for example: in his good name, in his honour and personal integrity; causing him in some way to commit an evil deed, deceiving him and causing him to embark on degrading or ignoble paths, or by bad example, trickery, deceitful words, bad advice, damaging him in his material, moral or intellectual possessions, depriving him of legitimate self-esteem by failing to respect his human rights, persecuting him with jealousy and envy, seeking to gain possession of his goods, his job, and so on.

All these things, and many others that I do not know how to say, are against the commandments of the Law of God and require great purification, even when they have been confessed and forgiven as to the penalty, heavy or light, but not satisfied for as regards purification, until this makes us worthy to be admitted to the immense Ocean of the Being of God.

This purification, which is called ‘purgatory’, can be more or less extensive according to the number of our sins, faults and imperfections and their seriousness, and for which we have not made full satisfaction by way of reparation, good works, penance and prayers.

And how are we purified in Purgatory, or what is it that purifies us? I do not quite know. It used to be said that we were purified by being placed in a burning fire, and that this fire was as fierce as that in hell. Nowadays, however, it seems that people no longer go along with this idea.

I myself think that what purifies us is love, the fire of divine Love, communicated by God to souls, to the degree to which each one corresponds [to this Love]. It is said that if a soul is granted the grace to die in an act of perfect love, this love purifies it completely so that it will go directly to Heaven. This shows us that what purifies is love combined with contrition, sorrow for having offended God and our neighbour, by our sins, faults and imperfections, because all this is against the first and last commandments of the Law of God. *“Thou shalt love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your strength.”* (Dt 6, 5). Thus, the tiny or the great flame of love — even if it be only the spark from the smouldering wick — will not go out but will go on flickering and increasing until it purifies the soul completely and makes it worthy to be admitted to dwell in the immense Ocean of the

Being of God, sharing with all the other blessed souls in the wisdom, the power, the knowledge and the longing for God, in the measure in which God chooses to communicate it to each one, while all sing together the hymn of eternal love, giving praise and glory to our God, Creator and Saviour. I do not know if what I say here is quite as it should be. If Holy Church says something else, believe in the Church and not in what I say, for I am poor and ignorant, and I may be wrong. This is what I think and not what I know, for I know nothing except to love and serve God and our neighbour for God's sake, and that to God belongs the knowledge, the wisdom, the power, and the grace which He communicates to whomever He chooses.

Here we see that our purgatory can be longer or shorter, depending on the state of grace and the degree of love of God we are in at the moment when we pass from this earthly life in order to enter into the sphere of eternal life, from time to eternity.

And the Lady continued her conversation with the little shepherds: *“Are you willing to offer yourselves to God and to 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?”*

In this question of Our Lady's, I see how God respects the gift of freedom which He has given us, and does not force us to accept a special Mission which He wishes to entrust to us. That was how He dealt with Our Lady, sending her the Angel to ask if she would agree to be the mother of the Messiah. This shows the immense delicacy with which God treats his humble creatures and respects the gifts which He has bestowed on them. He does not wish to be served by force, but out of

love, because God is love and only what is done out of love for Him and for one's neighbour out of love for Him is what pleases Him and is accepted by Him and has value in his presence.

The little shepherds, without concerning themselves about the sufferings that God was going to send them, entrusted themselves completely to the will of God, and without knowing it, for as yet they did not know the Scriptures, they replied following Christ's way when he said: "*Behold I have come to do your will, O God*" (Heb. 10, 7). Whatever You wish, and as You wish, dispose of me according to your good pleasure. And as Mary replied to the Angel when he announced to her the Incarnation of the Son of God: "*Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done unto me according to your word*" (Lk 1, 38), so the little shepherds, too, gave their reply, saying: "Yes, we are willing."

The Lady received this reply as the first fruits of her Message, and with a gesture of maternal protection enfolding us in the immense light of God, she replied: "*Then you are going to have much to suffer, but the grace of God will be your comfort.*" This grace placed us in the immense sea of the light of God, and brought us to adore Him there in the mystery of the Most Holy Trinity and to love Him present in the most Holy Eucharist, saying interiorly in the silence of our hearts: "O Most Holy Trinity, I adore You. My God, My God, I love you present in the Most Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist."

This message was, for me, the revelation of the mystery of God present in me, and myself always present in Him, where I must adore Him, love Him, and serve Him with faith, hope and love.

And the Lady ended the Message for that day by saying: "*Pray the Rosary every day, in order to obtain peace for the*

world, and the end of the war.” Then she began to rise serenely, going up to God; as the Angel Gabriel had earlier carried her reply, She now carried with her the reply of the poor little shepherds whom God had chosen in order to transmit his Message to the world.

“I have chosen you because I have loved you with an eternal love”. This is a love which requires sacrifice, renunciation, immolation: *“If anyone will come after me, let them take up their cross daily and follow me.”* This is what Christ asks of us in his Gospel, and it is also the meaning of the ‘yes’ that God accepted, and was a permanent and unreserved commitment to respond to his Love. It was this love which, in the course of nearly 88 years, has caused me to tread a difficult path, but what does that matter if in this way I prove my love for God? Whoever loves, says St Paul, *‘runs, is joyful, nothing holds him back’* Our Lady did not announce to us pleasures, earthly joys, honour, power, that we would be or become great, important in this world, where everything is illusion, blindness and vanity, and where all these things are sought with such eagerness, deceitfulness, injustice and God knows what else.

“Are you willing to offer yourselves to God and to 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?” *“Yes, we are willing”.* It was in the light of the prospect of much suffering that I uttered this *“Yes”*. And the Lord did not deceive us, nor did He fail to give us his grace, as Our Lady had promised. *“The grace of God will be your comfort.”* It is this grace of God that is at work in us, carrying us where God wishes to lead us, and we go willingly, like children relaxed in the arms of their father, whether He chooses to take us by smooth paths or to lead us along tortuous

ways, treading on thorns and thistles, placing our feet in the footsteps of Christ. Going ahead of us He left the mark of his steps in the ground for us to follow; it is to climb, with You, the steep rugged hillside of Mount Calvary, to drink with You to the last drop the chalice with the Father presented to You; it is to be one with You in the breaking of the bread and the drinking of the chalice; it is, through our intimate union with You, to be the beloved Son in whom the Father is well pleased, seeing in us the face of his Son, the Holy Spirit which kindles within us the fire of pure love which transforms us into a being of eternal praise to the Holy Trinity, whom I adore, whom I trust, whom I love and wish to praise for ever. From you I hope for this grace which will be my hymn of eternal love!

Thus, the heavenly Messenger rose to Heaven, bidding us to say the Rosary every day in order to obtain peace for the world and the end of the war.

But, I ask myself: why were we to pray the Rosary? Why did She not choose some other prayer? There are many formulae of different prayers, not that the little shepherds knew them, but that the People of God prayed and sang throughout the world and that God well knew. But She chose the five decades of the Rosary, a third part of the whole Rosary, possibly because it was more accessible to everyone, little and great, wise and ignorant, so that, with good will, we can all, every day, offer to God the humble prayer of the five mysteries of the Rosary, which will enable us, from the very beginning, to plunge into and to live the principal mysteries of God and his redeeming work accomplished by Jesus Christ our Saviour.

We begin this prayer by invoking the Most Holy Trinity: *In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*, after which we plunge into the first revelation which God gave

us of this mystery: *“The Holy Spirit will come upon Thee and the power of the Most High will overshadow Thee. Therefore, the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God.”* (Lk 1, 35).

And we continue our prayer gazing at Our Lady who is here transformed into a living temple of the Most Blessed Trinity: the Holy Spirit which came down upon her, the Father who extended his work over her and the Son whom the Most High generated in her virginal womb. This mystery of the most Blessed Trinity is the basis, the beginning and the end of all our prayer, of all our being and of the whole of our life; we came from God, we are going to God and in God we live.

The prayers which we pray unceasingly are all Biblical prayers taught and inspired by the same God. The *Gloria* was sung by the angels when Jesus Christ was born as man. The *Our Father* was taught to us by Jesus Christ himself. The *Hail Mary* is the greeting that the Angel Gabriel — by God’s decree — addressed to Mary when he announced to her the Incarnation of her Son: *“Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you”*. And then we go on to greet her with the words that Saint Elisabeth, her cousin, was inspired by the Holy Spirit to address to her: *“When Elisabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the babe in her womb leapt for joy and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. Lifting up her voice, she said: Blessed art thou amongst women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb.”* (Lk 1, 41-42).

It is because of this Fruit that you are blessed, Immaculate Virgin, Mother of God and of all humankind. It is for this reason that the Church beseeches you: *“Pray for us, o Holy Mother of God, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.”*

And we very much need Our Lady to intercede for us before God. The Holy Father, John Paul II, was right when he said

that the prayer of the Rosary is his 'favourite' prayer. It is indeed the most beautiful prayer taught to us by Heaven, and one which raises us to a deeper knowledge of God and of his redeeming work, in Christ, Saviour of the People of God, chosen portion, a People chosen to sing for ever the infinite mercies of the Lord our God: "*I will sing for ever thy mercies, O Lord.*"

May — June 1917

In spite of my insistence that we should say nothing about the apparition of Our Lady, Jacinta told her mother about it.

This was enough for the news to travel quickly among those simple, hard-working people, struggling to wrest their daily bread from their work in the fields, and in this way fulfilling God's Law: "*You shall eat bread by the sweat of your brow*" (Gen 3, 19).¹ It is the law of God which all of us are bound to obey in punishment for the sins which we have committed; since we are all sinners, we all have to work and to offer to God our work, the sacrifice which it costs us, in reparation and a spirit of penance for the evil we have committed, and the good that we should have done and did not do.

Among those humble people, unconcerned with political events, only occasionally did one hear any comments on the

¹ *At this point Sr Lucia added a note on a half sheet of paper stuck into the book:*

Even though in principle the law of work was not given as a penalty or punishment, it became such from the moment that our first parents disobeyed the Lord's command:

"The Lord said to Adam: Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it', cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Thorns and thistles it shall bring forth to you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return." (Gen. 3, 17-19)

news brought by people who had come from the cities. People regretted the assassination of the King and the Prince, and the establishment of the Republic which had expelled all the Friars and Sisters from the country, taking possession of everything that they had owned, houses, lands and churches, etc., maltreating the priests, not allowing bells to be rung, or processions to be held; they took possession of everything that belonged to the Church and they said that it belonged to them. And the worst of it was that, in addition to all this, they went to war forcing our sons to go to war and there die in front of the cannons, pierced by cannon balls. One does not know what kind of people these are! Might it not be that Our Lady appears on the scene now in order to save us? And they prayed and sang lustily: "Hail noble Patroness of our protected People, chosen from them all as the people of the Lord." And coming from the cities, towns and villages, with faith, hope and love, they run to know what it is: "what happened", poor and rich, wise and ignorant, but with faith, though others without it, curious scoffers trying to devise the best way to put an end to all this!

It was the beginning of what our Lady had told the little shepherds would happen: "*Then you are going to have much to suffer.*" Not only the little shepherds, but also their families.

That was how Christ accomplished his saving work. Almost as soon as he was born, he was persecuted, threatened with death, had to flee to a foreign country, and so on throughout his life, until he died nailed to the wood of the cross. The diabolical battle never comes to an end, even though it is certain that the devil will lose in the end because: *Who is equal to God?"*

And so the 13th June 1917 approached.

I was feeling exhausted from so many importunate interrogations, conflicts and contradictions. I did not yet know that this was the way the Lord intended to lead my steps, in order, through his Message, to take me to Heaven together with so many others who wish to follow him, following in his footsteps with faith, hope and love.

It was in this state of mind that I dared to ask the Heavenly Messenger to take us to Heaven: *"I would like to ask you to take us to heaven."* Earth no longer meant anything to me. What I wanted was for Her to take us with Her to heaven. But this was not God's design, which is why She replied: *"Yes. I will take Jacinta 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."*

This was the Mission which God had destined for me. But to remain on earth without the companionship of Jacinta and Francisco made it seem that I would be alone in this deserted and uncertain world, with no-one who could follow me, understand me, help and share things with me, treading with me the paths along which God wished to lead me, whether tripping over the stones in our way, treading on thorns and thistles, falling and picking myself up, God must always give me his hand and help me to keep my gaze fixed on Him.

Throughout my life, and still today, that is what I think, but then I was too ignorant and too much of a child to reason in that way, which is why the heavenly Messenger replied: *"No, my child. 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."*

With this promise I felt myself comforted, filled with confidence, convinced that the Lady would never leave me alone, and that it would be She who would lead me and guide my steps along the paths of life, wherever God wishes to take me, and so I entrusted myself to the Fatherly arms of our God and to her own motherly care.

It was then that the heavenly Messenger, opening her arms with a gesture of maternal protection, enfolded us in the reflection of the intense Light of the Being of God.

It was a grace that left a mark on us for ever in the sphere of the supernatural.

Oh! Had she not been the Refuge of sinners, the Mother of mercy, the Help of Christians, what would have brought Her down to us in order to introduce us, Lord, into the Ocean of your Love, of your Power, of your Immense Being, where this burning flame will cause us to live for ever, this mystery of love of the Three for me! It is with this love that I am to adore You, thank You, love You, be transformed into the canticle of your eternal praise.

It is thus I am to go, following after You, Lord, treading carefully this difficult path which You marked out for me.

Placing my feet in the footprints which You have left in the ground where You trod, to keep going, after You, with my eyes fixed on You; what more do I ask for myself than that I should be consumed with love for You, the life of God in me? Sparkling flame, which burned in me, and from day to day grew steadily stronger, stirred up by You, who never turned away from it! It grew and conquered the cold ground on which it trod!

Referring to this apparition of 13th June, 1917, of which I am now speaking, I say in my Memoirs: "*In front of the palm*

of Our Lady's right hand was a heart encircled by thorns which pierced it. We understood that this was the immaculate Heart of Mary, outraged by the sins of humanity, and seeking reparation."

Here, we are not to think in terms of the heart of flesh, as if Our Lady had torn it out of her breast in order to show it to us.

We all know that the heart is the symbol of love and of pain, the receptacle of mercy and of pardon.

It is this overflowing love which makes parents run after their erring children, who have left their parents' home, and gone off wandering, lost in ignoble ways. It is thus that Christ depicts Himself in the parables of the Good Shepherd, of the lost sheep, of the prodigal son, and the Gospel tells us how Our Lady and St Joseph returned in distress to Jerusalem in search of the Son whom they thought they had lost and, when they found him, Our Lady expressed the pain of her heart by saying: *"Did you not know that your father and I have been looking for you anxiously?"* And they felt they were well rewarded for all their toil and affliction when they found their Son and he humbly agreed to return home with his parents, and to live there, obeying them and working to help earn their daily bread.

This is the best and the first reparation that God and Our Lady ask of us and that we must offer to them, for our own sins and for those of our neighbours and of all human beings who are lost in their errors, wandering along tortuous paths, deceived and taken in by the search for pleasure that leads astray.

What, then, are we to do? Withdraw, turn back, knowing that in our parent's house there is a place for us, that we have a Father and a Mother who are waiting for us; we must change our way of life and go to meet them; there we will find the

pardon, the grace and the strength to offer them reparation for our past with the fidelity of our future, with prayers and sacrifices which we try to impose on ourselves in order to be faithful to God, to our neighbour and to ourselves.

Then, Our Lady also asked us to offer to God prayers and sacrifices for the conversion of sinners. This is our prayer and our sacrifices, united with the prayer and sacrifice of Christ, who offered Himself to the Father so that all of us could be saved; it is our charity united with the charity of Christ the Redeemer. It is the fruit of love, of which the heart is the symbol and the receptacle, from which this love overflows for our benefit, forgiveness, mercy and grace. But let us not forget that, in the first place, the sacrifices we must offer to God, and which He accepts and asks us to offer, are those which all of us must impose on ourselves, in order faithfully to fulfil the commandments of his Law — the commandments of the Law of God. This was the reply that Jesus gave to the young man who asked him: *“Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?”* Jesus replied: *“If you would enter life, keep the commandments.”* (Mt 19, 17). Love God above all things and your neighbour as yourself. Do not do to others what you would not like others to do to you.

Then, there are many other sacrifices which God asks of us and looks for from us, such as to help a neighbour in need to solve his problems, in so far as it is in our power to do so, to overcome the temptations and dangers which turn us from the right path; or to deprive ourselves of things we do not need in order to help those who have nothing; to offer to God our prayer and our sacrifices for those who most need faith, hope and love, which will bring them to follow a path of peace, serenity, truth and justice. To be just is to be holy.

13th June and 13th July

During this time, crowds of people coming from near and far, rich and poor, wise and ignorant, people with faith and unbelievers, atheists, curiosity-mongers, people who were violent and aggressive, came clustering round the three little shepherds as if they were baby lambs, with nothing to do, playing and jumping about among the gentle, peaceful sheep, grazing in the pastures where the shepherd leads them, looking after them, lest the wolves should come from the wood to snatch their prey and devour it. *“I am the Good Shepherd who gives his life for his sheep.” “I will never forsake you. My Immaculate Heart will be your refuge and the way that will lead you to God.” “Then, you are going to have much to suffer, but the grace of God will be your comfort.”* And it was with this grace and with the maternal protection of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, to whose care God entrusted them, that the poor little shepherds withstood the fierce waves of the stormy sea that tossed around them. And led, as it were, by an invisible hand, they moved in the midst of it in peace and tranquillity, treading the ground God had chosen for them, in order from there to carry the reflection of his immense Light to the farthest corners of the world. How great God is! He alone can work such wonders!

In this torrent which flooded the lowly Serra d’Aire, and which has still not stopped, rather it grows and increases more and more, I see as it were in a mirror a people thirsting for God, disillusioned and tired of the deceits and obstacles of the paganised, materialised, selfish and aggressive world, with no aim or guide that could bring it to the threshold of a saving doorway and lead it to the living waters which bubble forth

and fill for eternal life. *“Whoever drinks of this water will never thirst.”*

Today, as if it were in a painted panel, I look back and I see the past: God who wants to give us a hand in order to save us, and the abyss of sin in which wandering, deceived and tricked humanity is buried, seeking on earth what can only be found in Heaven.

In this apparition in July, Our Lady requested us to do something which has been the rule of my life: Sacrifice yourselves for sinners and say many times, especially whenever you make some sacrifice: *“O Jesus, it is for love of You, for the conversion of sinners, and in reparation for the sins committed against the Immaculate Heart of Mary.”*

Throughout the Message, beginning with the apparitions of the Angel, we find an appeal to prayer and sacrifice offered to God for love of Him and for the conversion of sinners.

For me, this appeal is as it were the basic norm of the entire Message, which begins by introducing us into a plane of faith, hope and love: *“My God, I believe, I adore, I hope and I love You.”* Here we have the fundamental basis of our entire supernatural life: to live by faith; to live by hope, to live by love. It is the ideal of living our lives from day to day which brings us to a true meeting with God, our Saviour, for whom I work, whom I adore, in whom I hope and whom I love, certain of his love, his grace, his favour! The sacrifice offered to God with faith and confidence is the proof of our love.

Throughout the history of humanity as we know it, the ‘Bible’, we see that prayers and sacrifices were offered to God for each person’s own sins and for the sins of the people, beginning with Abel and Cain. Moses managed to escape from Egypt with his people by saying that he was going to the desert

in order to offer sacrifices to God; the ancient Patriarchs offered innocent victims of lambs, kids, calves, etc., in order to offer to God sacrifices of expiation for their own sins and for the sins of the people. Christ offered himself to the Father as an expiatory victim for the sins of humanity: and we, now, must unite our prayer and our sacrifices with the prayer and sacrifice of Christ immolated on the wood of the cross and present on the altar and in our tabernacles, renewing his offering to the Father in fulfilment of his redeeming work.

I do not know whether it was in order to make us understand more clearly and better the need we have to offer prayers and sacrifices to God for the conversion of sinners that Our Lady wished to show us hell, in the light of the immense Being of God; it could also have been because She already knew that, in time to come, this truth would come to be denied or questioned.

Jesus Christ speaks to us of hell in various passages in the Gospel: *“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left. Then the King will say to those at his right hand: ‘Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world...Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.’”* (Mt 25, 31-41).

In the vision of hell which Our Lady showed to the little shepherds, one saw the fire, but what I do not know is what kind of fire it was. It was certainly not a material fire, like the

fires we are accustomed to see here on earth. In the supernatural sphere, there is no material to feed a fire. For example, the sun, for so many thousands and thousands of years, so many that we do not know how many, which was created by God and placed by God in its orbit, always following the same path, with the same heat, light and life which it transmits to every living thing on earth; what material sustains it, such a burning furnace, burning always without ever dying out or being extinguished? And we do not know how many other fires God has created in the supernatural sphere, each one appropriate for the purpose for which God has created it. In the work of creation, we see that there are many secrets which human beings with all their wisdom still have not managed to discover. Faced with the omnipotence of God, we know nothing!

Speaking of hell, Jesus Christ said that there would be weeping and gnashing of teeth there. These words seem to mean the fire of anger, despair, hatred, the spirit of revenge, and so on.

Whatever the true state of affairs, what is certain is that hell exists, and it is something about which Our Lady is greatly concerned. This is clear from her Message, in which She asks several times for prayers and sacrifices for the conversion of sinners: *“You have seen hell where the souls of poor sinners go. To save them, God wishes to establish in the world devotion to my Immaculate Heart.”*

Why does Our Lady ask for devotion to her Immaculate Heart in order to save poor sinners? Her reply is: It is because God wishes it. *“To save them, God wishes to establish in the world devotion to my Immaculate Heart.”*

Yes, God wishes to use Her, as the Mother of the people of God, gate of salvation, gateway to Heaven, refuge of sinners

who appeal to her with faith, hope and love, Help of Christians, Mother of the Saviour, who by her intercession with God obtains for us the grace of pardon, for those who ask for it with sincere repentance, and the grace of conversion. Mother of divine Grace, Mother of divine Love, of which her Immaculate Heart is the symbol, She is the receptacle of the love of God and Protectress of the souls redeemed by the saving work of Jesus Christ her Son, who entrusted them to her motherly care as He was dying on the hill of Calvary, nailed to the Cross: *“Woman, behold your son.”* She is the Protectress, too, of all those who, with faith, hope and love, want to follow in Christ’s footsteps, giving for each one his own life, the life of grace. *Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with Thee. Blessed art Thou among women; and blessed is the fruit of Thy womb, Jesus. Pray for us sinners, and make us worthy of receiving the promises of Jesus Christ.*

“If you do what I say, many souls will be saved, and there will be peace.”

And what was it that Our Lady said to us: *“Sacrifice yourselves for sinners, and say many times, especially whenever you make some sacrifice: O Jesus, it is for love of You, for the conversion of sinners, and in reparation for the sins committed against the Immaculate Heart of Mary.”* Mary suffered in her motherly heart all the offences committed against God, Jesus Christ her Son. Thus, our prayers and our sacrifices, united with the prayer and sacrifice of Jesus Christ, complete what is lacking in his redeeming work, which is the part that concerns us, since we are members of his Mystical body. It is for us to carry, with faith and love, the weight of our cross, saying as Our Lady taught us to say: *“O Jesus, it is for love of you, for*

the conversion of sinners..., ”. yes, because it is love that gives value to our prayer and sacrifices, united to the prayer and sacrifice of Christ.

“*And there will be peace*”, that peace which is the fruit of our meeting with God, in the faithful and constant observance of his law, the commandments of the Law of God.

“*The war is going to end.*” The reference is to the 1914-1918 war — “*But if people do not cease offending God, a worse one will break out during the pontificate of Pius XI.*” In what sense would this war be worse? In the sense that it would be an atheist war, against faith, against God, against the people of God, a war that would endeavour to wipe out Judaism, which gave us Jesus Christ, our Saviour, and the Apostles, which transmitted to us the word of God and the gift of faith, hope and charity; the people chosen by God, chosen from the beginning: “*Salvation is from the Jews.*”

“*When you see a night illumined by an unknown light, know that this is the great sign given to 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.*”

It is not that God wants war. God is the Lord of Peace, of goodness and of love. “*Love one another as I have loved you.*” This is the Lord’s commandment, the first and last commandment of the Law of God.

However, God allows wars, as well as the multitude of other sins that are committed on the earth, in virtue of the gift of freedom that He gave to human beings, because He wishes to be served, obeyed and loved freely and not by force. If men make use of this gift in order to do wicked things, they are the ones responsible before God, their own conscience, and also before humanity which suffers the consequences of their evil

ways. For the people of God, these consequences are purifying, on account of their own sins and of those committed by the whole of humanity.

“To prevent this I shall come to ask for the consecration of Russia to my Immaculate Heart, and the Communion of Reparation on the First Saturdays.”

Yes, because consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary is a bond of union with the Mother of the Mystical Body of Christ and with Christ present in the Eucharist, become our daily Bread. Let a worthy reparation of petition be offered to the Father by his pilgrim people on earth.

But the Lady saw that her request would not be heeded, and so She went on: *“If my requests are heeded, Russia will be converted, and there will be peace; if not, she will spread her errors throughout the world, causing wars and persecutions of the Church. The good will be martyred, the Holy Father will have much to suffer, various nations will be annihilated.”*

It is not necessary to say how all this came about, as it is well known to everyone, so we will continue to reflect on what the Lady said to us:

“In the end” — that is, after all this has happened — *“my Immaculate Heart will triumph”* over all the wars provoked throughout the world on account of the errors spread abroad by Russia.

“The Holy Father will consecrate Russia to me, and she will be converted.” The word “converted” which comes from the word “conversion” means a change from bad to good, *“and a period of peace will be granted to the world”*. This promise of peace refers to the wars provoked throughout the world on

account of the errors emanating from Russia. This consecration was made, publicly, in Rome, by the Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, on 25th March, 1984, before the image of Our Lady of Fatima which is venerated in the Chapel of the Apparitions in the Cova da Iria, Fatima, and which the Holy Father — after having written to all the Bishops in the world asking them to unite themselves with His Holiness in this act of consecration which he was going to make — had ordered to be brought to Rome for the purpose in order to emphasise the fact that the Consecration that he was going to make before this Statue was the one asked for by Our Lady of Fatima.

Everyone knows very well that that was one of the most critical moments in the history of humanity, when the great powers, hostile to one another, were planning and preparing for a nuclear war, which would destroy the world, if not entirely, to a considerable extent, and what chances of survival would there be for the part that would be left? And who would be capable of removing those arrogant men, entrenched in their plans and schemes for war, in their violent ideas, atheistic, enslaving and domineering ideologies, believing themselves the lords of the whole world, to change all this into the exact opposite? To ask for a meeting in order to exchange a sign of peace? To change their plans for war into plans for peace? From aggressive and violent injustices to schemes for aid and assistance, recognising the rights of the human person, abolishing slavery, etc?

Who, other than God, was capable of working on these intelligences, on these wills, in these consciences, in such a way as to bring them to such a change, without fear, without dreading uprisings on the part of their own people and those of others? Only the power of God which was at work in all,

inducing them to give in in peace, without revolutions, without opposition, without conditions. *“Who but God?”*

And more than that! He even prompted one of the principal leaders of atheistic communism to set out for Rome and to meet the Holy Father. Perhaps without this man even realising it, the Pope had just made the Consecration of Russia to the Immaculate Heart of Mary asked for by Our Lady of Fatima. And there he was, recognising the Holy Father as the supreme representative of God, Jesus Christ on earth, Head of the one true Church founded by Jesus Christ, in order to give him the kiss of peace, and ask forgiveness for the errors of his party. In doing so, he gave to the world a witness of faith and confidence in the Church of the one true God.

There can be no doubt that only God can make out of stones children of Abraham! But that is the nature of the omnipotence of God, to make use of his opposites in order to accomplish his saving work: and that is what He did, as Our Lady said: In peace. Acting on those in responsible positions, inducing them to work together, to collaborate, to provide help and assistance in order to turn things in a better direction, that of peace, justice and truth, religious freedom, recognition of the rights of the human person and doing away with slavery. Who other than God would be able to demolish in this way a power which regarded itself as mistress of the world?

After all this, there are still blind people who cannot see, or do not wish to see, and who say: But there are still wars going on in the world, and Our Lady promised peace. Yes, Our Lady promised peace in reference to the wars provoked throughout the world by atheistic communism, without referring to civil wars, which there have always been and will always be, until it pleases God to change this world — as Jesus Christ

said — into a new earth and a new Heaven, like the little seed that dies when thrown into the earth and then, from this apparent death, there bursts forth new life in a more vigorous plant, filling the atmosphere with the scent of a more beautiful flower, and producing tastier and more delicate fruits. But this day has not yet come; it will come when God has predestined it in accordance with the plans of his immense mercy.

“I will sing for ever the mercies of the Lord.”

The word “conversion” means to undergo a transformation from bad to good; in other words a change for the better.

“And a period of peace will be granted to the world.”

This promise refers to the wars provoked throughout the world by atheistic communism, and it is over these wars that the Lady said that her Immaculate Heart would triumph; it is to this that she is referring.

“In Portugal the dogma of the Faith will always be preserved.”

This promise indicates that Portugal will always retain the faith; even when the atheists wanted to extinguish it.

“When you pray the Rosary, say after each mystery: O my Jesus, forgive us, save us from the fire of hell. Lead all souls to heaven, especially those who are most in need.”

This prayer has been interpreted in a number of ways. The words “*especially those who are most in need*” refer to those souls which are most in danger of being condemned; in other words those who are in a state of unrepented-of mortal sin, with no desire to repent or to ask God for pardon, who are hardened in evil.

Up to this point, I see in the Message as it were a preparation to release the people of God, in the words of Pius XII, from the greatest heresy to appear at any time in the world, and carrying its errors to the ends of the earth. And also from the danger of a nuclear war which would destroy a great part of his creative and redemptive work: the People of God chosen for eternal life.

So He begins by preparing the fragile instruments which He wishes to use, in order to show that the work is his, and that it is He who is at work, implementing the plans of his infinite mercy.

Whereas men, in order to overcome an adversary, prepare themselves by making weapons of war, God prepares instruments of peace, prayer and sacrifice in the footsteps of Christ, in denying themselves, in order to do the will of the Father: *“Father, not my will but thine be done”* Following the hard paths of life, treading on thorns and thistles, climbing the steep slope of Calvary, bearing the heavy wood of the cross, placing their feet in the footprints which the Lord has left along the way which He trod. But the grace of God did not fail them, and so that they should not lose heart, He bathed them in the Light of his immense Being, the glow from which floods me, attracts me and captivates me, it goes I know not where, but I want to follow it, to adore, to serve and to love, to be for this Light a host of eternal praise! I desire nothing else, long for nothing else; the mystery of the Blessed Trinity is, for me, the very best form of recreation: *“My God, I believe, I adore, I hope and I love You. I ask pardon for those who do not believe, do not adore, do not hope and do not love You.”*

“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, through the infinite merits of his most Sacred Heart, and the Immaculate Heart of Mary, I beg of You the conversion of poor sinners."

These prayers contain the entire meaning of our supernatural life, a life of faith, adoration, hope and love. It is love which purifies us, makes us worthy, sanctifies us and gives us life, communicating to us the Life of God, as Jesus Christ tells us in his Gospel: *"He who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me; and he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.... My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him."* (John 14, 21, 23).

Thus God is my dwelling place, my Temple, the Life of my life and the Being of my being, without Him I am not, from Him I received my being, in order to love Him, to serve Him and adore Him, with faith, hope and trust, with full yielding to his Love for me.

I believe in the one God in Three Persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit... *"The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the Child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God."* (Luke 1, 34-35)

The time from 13th July to 13th August passed with an ever increasing number of people who, tired and disillusioned with the materialism and deceptions of earth, came running in their thirst in search for the supernatural. Among these, there were many others with clever tricks, looking for something to latch onto in order to discredit what was happening and put an end

to mysticism, or so they said. I do not know whether these include some who were emissaries of the civil authorities who, a few days before August 13th, ordered the parents of the little shepherds to appear before them at the municipal headquarters in Vila Nova de Ourem and who, not having secured what they sought, captured the three children on that 13th August.

I won't spend time in describing here details of this event which are already well known. What I see here is the power of grace with which God was at work in those poor children, keeping them faithful to the plans which God had for them and for his Message. This is what God is like: in silence and peace He confounds those who deem themselves strong and powerful.

For this reason, the Apparition in August did not take place on the 13th but on the 19th (I think, for at the time the children did not yet know how to reckon the days of the month). What I am certain of, however, is that it was either a Sunday or a Holiday of Obligation because, when the children returned to Fatima, the parish church was full of people at Mass, which only happened on Sundays and Holy Days, and the apparition in the Valinhos happened on the same day, as I have already said elsewhere.

What it seemed to me they were most interested in was in making people forget the Holy Name of God, and in [securing] the revelation of the secret. Perhaps they were thinking that there lay behind it some strategy of the Monarchists against the recent establishment of a Republic. They also wanted the little Shepherds to promise that they would never again return to the Cova da Iria to speak to this Lady, suspecting, perhaps, that this Lady was the emissary of the Monarchy who was endeavouring by this means to cause the people to rise up against the Republic which was attacking their religious ideas,

their faith and trust in God and in the maternal protection of Our Lady who was the Queen and Patroness of Portugal.

But what can men do in the face of the power, the wisdom, the mercy and the omnipotence of God?

While men plan to erase the memory of the Holy Name of God from the people's minds, God makes use of three poor children to carry this very Name to the ends of the earth!

Christ said to the Pharisees, when he rode in triumph through the streets of Jerusalem: *"I tell you if these were silent, the very stones would cry out."* (Lk 19, 40). The same sort of thing happened in the humble Serra d' Aire to the poor little shepherds on whom they wanted to impose silence, whereas, instead, they, across mountains and valleys, hills and hillsides, ravines, quarries, rocky slopes, olive groves and pine groves, they, I say, awaiting the echo of his voice, sing and shout ever louder, proclaiming: *"We want God, ungrateful men ... Hail, Noble Patroness of the people You protect the people entrusted to your care. Do not withdraw your patronage which was entrusted to You by God... the whole world, Mary!"*

And the echo of these innocent voices, as if carried by a gentle breeze issuing from the lips of God, blew softly over the whole world, ever reverberating with the same refrain: *"We want God, ungrateful men ... Hail, Noble Patroness of the people You protect, chosen by God to be the People of God; do not withdraw your patronage which was entrusted to You by God. Ave Maria! Hail Holy Queen, Mother of mercy, O clement, O loving, O sweet virgin Mary! To whom God entrusted the whole earth. Hail noble Patroness!"* That is what God is like!

On August 19th — I think it must have been that day — I say: 'it must have been' because at the time I still did not know

how to reckon the days of the month, as there was still no school for girls in Fatima — the civil authorities brought the three little shepherds whom they had captured back to Fatima, leaving them on the veranda of the parish priest's house, opposite the Church, the intention presumably being for the people to see that they had been released when they came out from Mass, thereby calming those who had been angered by the fact that the three children had been captured. The children themselves eventually returned to their homes accompanied by their parents, other members of the family and friends who wanted to find out from them what had happened to them.

After they had eaten their mid-day meal with their families, while they were minding their sheep in the Valinhos, the fourth apparition took place, during which the Lady again asked the children to continue to come to the Cova da Iria on the 13th of every month, and to pray the Rosary every day.

Then, in reply to a question that I asked Her — at the suggestion of others — concerning what She wanted done with the money that people were leaving at the Cova da Iria, the Lady said: *“Have two litters made. One is to be carried by yourself and Jacinta and two other girls dressed in white; the other one is to be carried by Francisco and three other boys. The money from the litters is for the ‘festa’ of Our Lady of the Rosary, and what is left over will help towards the construction of a chapel that is to be built here.”*

This reply of Our Lady's was interpreted by different people in different ways, including my mother who said that it was vanity on the part of the children to want to be the centre of attention in the procession on Our Lady's feast, carrying the litters with the offerings that would be given to them for the benefit of the Church.

Others said that the Lady wanted in this way to show that She accepted and was grateful for the offerings which were being given to her, etc.

At the time, I said nothing further; all I knew was that that was what Our Lady had said.

My mother was right, though, because that is the kind of person I was right from the cradle. I love feast days, to sing and to dance, but then so did she; she was the best of all in popular dances, and when dancing in pairs, her companion had to be very light on her feet. Like David, she dances, and sings before the Holy Ark.

Today, looking back at the times that have passed and everything that has happened, I see those litters as a kind of foretaste of many others which came to be used to bear her image, carrying her to the ends of the earth, in the sense foretold by Jesus Christ to St Peter: "*I have prayed for you, so that your faith may not fail.*" She, as heavenly messenger and patroness of the entire world, can also say to us: I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail, but that it may grow and increase always. That is why I have come. God sent me as shepherd and guide, Mother and Protectress, in order to take care of the Lord's flock. It is for this reason that — represented in my Image — I travel all over the world, the sea and the air, in search of the lost sheep.

For Her there are no barriers or frontiers; all paths are smoothed out for Her and She travels over them as Lady, Queen and Mother. All the people acclaim and bless Her on their knees, asking for pardon, grace, strength and light, faith and

love, even those who do not believe, do not hope, do not trust and do not love. All this is borne out by the documents which have already been written and published by Maria Teresa Pereira da Cunha, an eye witness who was one of the principal members of the committee which accompanied the image of Our Lady on her first world-wide journey, plus the remaining documentation which has so far been retained in the archives..

And the Pilgrimage is still continuing today and, wherever it goes, it brings the light of faith, hope, trust and love, bringing to the motherly hand the children who have gone astray, so that She can lead them to their Father's house. Jesus Christ has told us that in Heaven there are many mansions, where there will be a place for each one of us — all that is needed is that we ourselves should not wish to distance ourselves from our Father's House.