




Bl. Francisco and Bl. Jacinta Marto

BORN 1908; DIED 1919 (FRANCISCO),
BORN 1910; DIED 1920 (JACINTA)
CONFESSORS
FEAST DAY: FEBRUARY 20

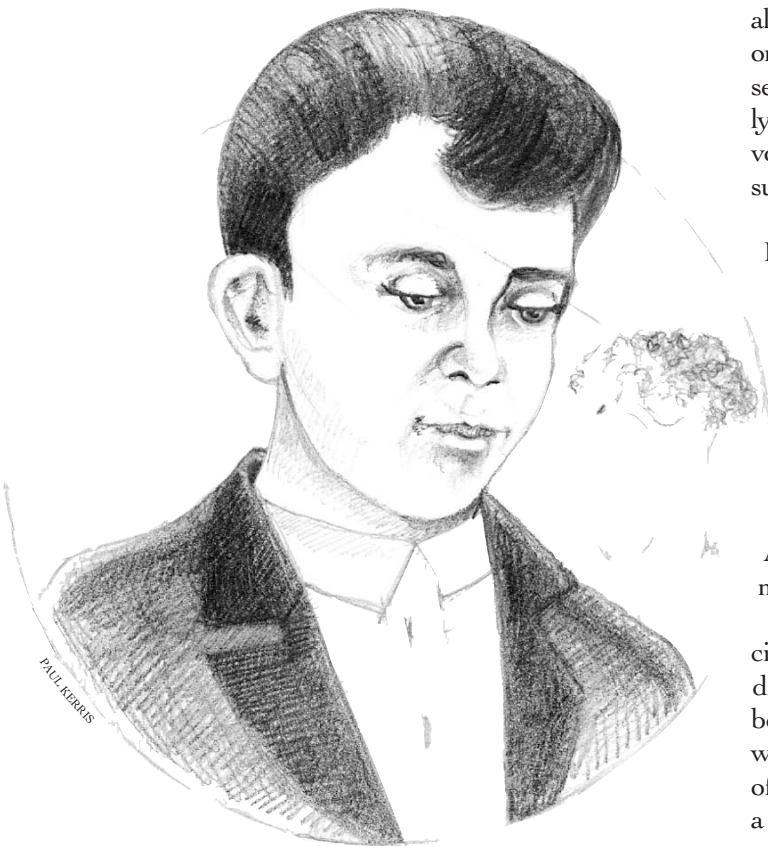
DURING THE YEARS of the dreadful cauldron of World War I, three children in a remote area of Portugal, far from warfare, were asked by Mary, the Mother of God, to be front-line soldiers in an even more awful war, against sin and evil. Two of them, Bl. Francisco and Bl. Jacinta Marto, died still children; the third, their slightly older cousin Lucia de Jesus dos Santos, lived into her nineties.



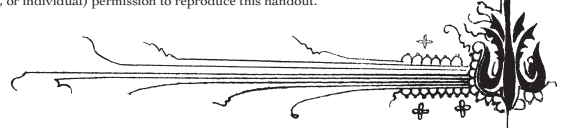
Francisco and Jacinta Marto, the youngest of eleven children of farmers Manuel Marto and Olimpia de Jesus dos Santos, were born twenty-one months apart in the village of Aljustrel, near the town of Fátima, Portugal. Francisco was good-natured and had a calm, sensitive, and contemplative temperament. He loved nature and music and could play a flute. He looked out for the welfare of wild animals, including snakes. He once gave up a handkerchief with an image of Mary that he had been given which another boy had taken and claimed was his own. Jacinta was obedient, sweet, affectionate, lively, outgoing, joyful, and playful but also tended to be bossy, hated to be contradicted or to lose at games, did not like to share her possessions, and tended to pout when crossed. Early in life, she realized what the crucifix meant, and vowed never to sin so that Jesus would not have to suffer further.

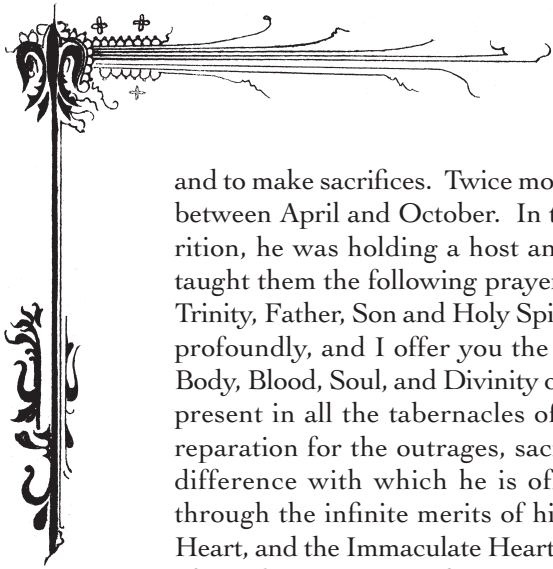
As was common then in that part of Portugal, Lucia, Francisco, and Jacinta were entrusted with watching the small flock of sheep owned by their parents, a task they loved since they could be outdoors, play, and pray. The children were taught their catechism, instructed in virtue, and trained in the habit of prayer, especially the rosary (although Jacinta thought it would save a lot of time to say just the first two words of each prayer). A year older than Francisco, Lucia alone had made her First Communion.

In April 1916, when Lucia was nine, Francisco not yet eight, and Jacinta seven, the children were confronted by something completely beyond their experience: an angel, who said he was the angel of peace and the guardian angel of Portugal, appeared to them. He taught them a special prayer, and urged them to pray often



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and to make sacrifices. Twice more he appeared between April and October. In the third apparition, he was holding a host and chalice, and taught them the following prayer: "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 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." He then gave Lucia the Host and Francisco and Jacinta the Precious Blood to drink. The children's behavior changed enormously in obedience to the angel's requests.

The following year, a series of six apparitions of Mary began on May 13 (now the Feast of Our Lady of Fátima). As usual, the children had recited the rosary together in the late morning. Afterward, they began building a little house with stones (the site of the present Basilica of Our Lady of Fátima). A wind arose and they saw great light, which they at first thought was lightning. But they saw a light approaching a small oak and, within it, a lady "brighter than the sun." A white rosary hung from her hands. She asked them to pray frequently, especially the rosary, to make sacrifices for the conversion of sinners, and to come back five more times to the same place on the thirteenth of each month. She also told the children that many people go to Hell because they have no one to pray for them and make sacrifices for them, and in the July apparition showed them a vision of Hell, which deeply affected them. Francisco alone was shown the sadness of Jesus and how sin offended him, and from that moment on he yearned only to console him. Jacinta directly experienced Mary's anguish, and took to heart Mary's request that they pray for sinners. In this series of apparitions, Mary also prophesied the end of World War I, an even more devastating war (World War II),

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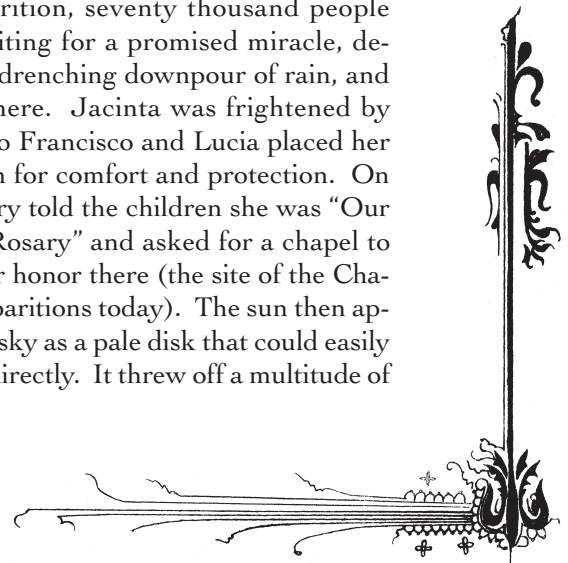
and in July asked for the consecration of Russia to her Immaculate Heart, only a few months before the convulsions of the Russian Revolution that created the terrible Communist regime which lasted until 1989.

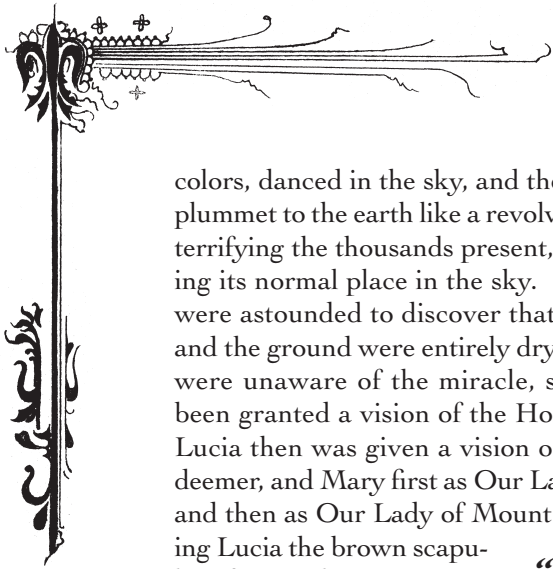
All the children tried hard to be good, and began making sacrifices. They gave up games and childhood pleasures, tried not to drink water on the hot days, gave their lunches to beggars and instead ate what they could find in the fields, and even wore small ropes tied tightly around their waists until Mary instructed them to stop doing this at night. They offered up all the little sufferings of each day and prayed together as well as alone, so that at an early age they were already

attaining great heights of prayer. Jacinta said she felt that there was a fire in her heart, and earnestly sought not to sin. A particular trial to them were the visitors who came while they were in the fields, for although they promised

Mary to keep the apparitions a secret, Jacinta told her mother, and Francisco and Lucia confirmed her story. Their parents, and Church and local authorities, were skeptical. When the apparitions became more publicly known, the children received rough treatment, including being called liars and frauds, being threatened and beaten, and imprisonment by the local mayor for several days in August, delaying that month's apparition until the nineteenth. The children remained steadfast, and the number of people at the site increased every month.

On the thirteenth of October, the date for the last apparition, seventy thousand people gathered, waiting for a promised miracle, despite wind, a drenching downpour of rain, and mud everywhere. Jacinta was frightened by the crowds, so Francisco and Lucia placed her between them for comfort and protection. On this date, Mary told the children she was "Our Lady of the Rosary" and asked for a chapel to be built in her honor there (the site of the Chapel of the Apparitions today). The sun then appeared in the sky as a pale disk that could easily be looked at directly. It threw off a multitude of





colors, danced in the sky, and then appeared to plummet to the earth like a revolving ball of fire, terrifying the thousands present, before resuming its normal place in the sky. The onlookers were astounded to discover that their clothing and the ground were entirely dry. The children were unaware of the miracle, since they had been granted a vision of the Holy Family, and Lucia then was given a vision of Jesus as Redeemer, and Mary first as Our Lady of Sorrows and then as Our Lady of Mount Carmel, offering Lucia the brown scapular of Carmel.

A year later, first Jacinta and then Francisco fell ill from what was called the "Spanish flu," a killer epidemic that swept the world in 1918-1919. Our Lady again appeared to them, and told them that she would soon take them both to Heaven, Francisco before his sister. Francisco was thrilled that he was to see Jesus and Mary, whom he so longed to console. Cared for at home, he continued his habit of making sacrifices, this time uncomplainingly taking whatever medicine or food was given, despite his aversion. Late in his illness, no longer strong enough to pray aloud, he continued praying in his heart. His last request was to receive his First Communion, which he was given the day before he died, a smile on his lips, two months before his eleventh birthday.

Jacinta's suffering was worsened by the loss of her brother but, during a vision of Mary, she said she still wanted to convert more sinners by her suffering. She endured everything for the conversion of sinners, peace in the world, and for the Pope, seeking mortifications even in the

midst of her illness. A complication of her illness, an abscess on her chest, led her parents to transfer her to a nearby hospital and then to one in Lisbon. There she underwent painful surgery under only local anesthesia to remove two of her ribs, which did not improve her condition. She was terrified to leave home, knowing that she would be entirely alone, and saw this as the greatest sacrifice of all. While she was in Lisbon, a woman to whom she had offered wise advice asked who had been her teacher. Jacinta

replied that it had been Our Lady. Jacinta died there a year and a half after first falling ill, not yet ten years old.

When grown, Lucia entered religious life, eventually becoming a Carmelite nun. Our Lady appeared to her three more times, asking her to promote the First Saturdays devotion, consisting of five consecutive first Saturdays of the month on which people were to pray the rosary and meditate on its mysteries, confess their sins, and receive Holy Communion in reparation for sins committed against her Immaculate Heart. She also repeated her request that Russia be consecrated to her Immaculate Heart.

During the apparitions, Mary had taught the children this prayer: "Oh my Jesus, forgive us our sins, save us from the fire of Hell; lead all souls to Heaven, especially those in most need of thy mercy." Now known as the Fátima Prayer, it is often added at the end of each decade of the rosary. These children, illiterate and unaware of the larger world, nevertheless saw it as it truly is, and expended their young lives in holy combat against its sin and evil.

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