

THE IMMACULATE HEART OF MARY AND FATIMA

By

R. M. D. WAINEWRIGHT



So early as the Second, or the June, Apparition, our Blessed Lady said to Lucia, 'Jesus wishes to make use of you to have me acknowledged and loved. He wishes to establish in the world the devotion to my Immaculate Heart'. She added, later in the interview, 'Don't be discouraged. I will never forsake you. My Immaculate Heart will be your refuge and the road that will lead you to God'. In Dr Marchi's account, he writes, 'With these last words she opened her hands, as she had on the previous occasion, and again communicated to them the light that streamed in two rays from her palms, enveloping the children in its heavenly radiance'.

In her Memoir (IV) Lucia records: 'Before the palm of the right hand of our Lady was a heart encircled by thorns which seemed to have pierced it like nails'. Francisco had seen this, although, as on the first occasion in May, he had heard nothing that the Lady had said—only the voice of his cousin Lucia. He asked many questions when the pestering strangers had gone, and the children were alone. 'But why was our Lady (Jacinta spoke of her at this time as the Lady, or that Lady; and Lucia says, after May, she was not sure who she was), with a heart in her hand, scattering on the world such a great light that is God?'

'You were with our Lady in the light I saw on the ground, Lucia. And Jacinta and I were going up towards the sky'.

'It's this way', said Lucia. 'You and Jacinta are soon going to heaven, and I stay with the Immaculate Heart of Mary for some time longer on earth.'

'How many years will you stay here?'

'I don't know. Plenty.'

'Was it our Lady who said so?'

'It was. And I saw it in the light that struck us in the breast.'

'That's right', put in Jacinta. 'I saw that too.'

Humanly speaking, this message and vision of the Immaculate Heart of Mary would be extremely strange and mystifying to these three children. By all accounts they were neither better nor worse than other youngsters of their village, where Catholicism was still a part of everyday life. Lucia, it is true, had made her First Com-

munion young, and was spiritually responsive at the time, while the other two had true religious impulses; and on the whole, as their father says, they were good children. But they had healthy animal spirits, and enjoyed life in the mountains, with its rough weather and hard work, as well as its flowers, sunsets, and songs. They never lost a certain impishness and sense of fun. Even today, as Mr Walsh records, Lucia's smile can be mischievous if a visitor asks a question that appeals to her sense of humour.

Lucia's mother 'Maria Rosa' brought up her children well, if strictly compared with the Marto parents. She sometimes read lives of the saints to them, but there is no indication that they were particularly impressed. Her first reaction to the story of the Apparitions, as is well known, was violently hostile. She prided herself that she had brought up her family to tell the truth, above all things, and she was bitterly mortified by a daughter with such pretensions as Lucia.

The priest of Fátima was also indifferent, sceptical, and inclined to be hostile. So, neither from their own characters and upbringing, nor from their religious surroundings, would the children have been likely to have imagined such a revelation as that of the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

It must, however, be remembered that by 13th June much had happened that would have prepared them to understand the meaning of this vision. The first time that the Angel of 1916 spoke to them, he taught them a prayer to the Blessed Trinity, and added 'the hearts of Jesus and Mary will be moved by your supplications'. The second time, when he interrupted their play by the well in Lucia's garden, he said, 'What are you doing? Pray, pray a great deal! The hearts of Jesus and Mary have merciful designs for you. Offer prayers and sacrifices constantly to the Most High'. And when Lucia asked how, he said, 'With all your power, (*De tudo que podeis*) offer sacrifices as an act of reparation for the sinners by whom he is offended, and of supplication for the conversion of sinners'. And the last time, when the Angel appeared with the chalice and the Host, he said at the end of his solemn prayer, 'And through the infinite merits of his most Sacred Heart and of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, I beg of you the conversion of all poor sinners'. By the time our Lady first appeared to them, (in 1917, May 13th) they had been repeating the Angel's prayer and trying to understand its meaning for a year, during which their families had suffered from the war considerably. She asked them, 'Do you wish to offer yourselves . . . as an act of reparation . . . and to ask for the conversion of sinners?' They answered, 'Yes, we do'. And before 13th June they had advanced a long way along the road of self-inflicted pain of many kinds. They

not only deprived themselves of extra good things, but gave away their lunches, and ate bitter herbs and berries. When parched with thirst in the great heat, they refused to drink. All this was completely hidden from their parents. 'We knew nothing, nothing', Ti Marto repeats today. 'To us they were just children like the others'. Moreover, since the first Apparition, they had all suffered from taunts and jeers, while Lucia had to endure her mother's threats and promises, scoldings and caresses, beatings and admonitions. All this they came to realise, and encouraged each other to understand, could be offered for sinners.

So that when they saw our Lady's Heart, circled with thorns, they interpreted it as a symbol of the suffering caused to her by sinners.

Devotion to the Heart of Mary is, of course, an extremely ancient one, founded on the Gospel words, '*Maria autem conservabat omnia verba haec conferens in corde suo*', and expounded by Saints such as Ambrose and Anselm. It was St John Eudes in the 17th century who preached the Devotion to the Hearts of Jesus and Mary and wrote '*Le Coeur Admirable De La Très Sacrée Mère De Dieu*'. And the form of the Devotion taught by our Lady of Fatima, i.e., 'The Immaculate Heart of Mary, Refuge of Sinners', had a remarkable history in 19th-century France.

In the year 1836 M. Des Genettes's church of Notre Dame des Victoires in Paris had fallen as low as could be during and after the Revolution and M. Des Genettes had worked and prayed for years, exhausting every means of spiritual revival, and had even begged to be relieved of his cure. On 3rd December, 1836, he was in church, celebrating Mass at the Altar of the Blessed Virgin, when he was so distracted by a sense of the hopelessness of his efforts that he could hardly continue, and prayed in despair, 'My God, deliver me from this terrible distraction'. He had hardly said it before he seemed to hear an inner voice, 'Consecrate your parish to the Immaculate Heart of Mary'. At once the distressing thoughts vanished. His distractions, however, returned later, and he heard the message again. He hesitated to accept it as a message from heaven, later admitting with great frankness that he knew nothing of the devotion to Mary's Heart, beyond remembering having heard one sermon on the subject which he had not liked, and which had left him prejudiced against it. 'It seemed to me', he said, 'but a vague mysticism alike unable to occupy the attention or satisfy the heart'.

Nevertheless he obeyed the inner voice, going so far as to draw up the rules of an Association in honour of the Immaculate Heart of Mary for the conversion of sinners. On the next Sunday after his plans were submitted to the Archbishop of Paris, he told the scanty

congregation about them, and asked as many as possible to meet in the church that evening. To his astonishment a huge crowd of people arrived, including numbers of men. At first listless, they gradually became more and more attentive, and during the singing of the Litany of Loretto, at the words '*Refugium peccatorum ora pro nobis*', they all fell on their knees and repeated the invocation three times.

That was the beginning of the great Archconfraternity at our Lady of Victories. By the year 1880 there were 17,833 associations in France, with stories of extraordinary cures and conversions.

At Fátima there have been, indeed, a great many authentic cures, but the conversions, not only at Fatima, but wherever the devotion is beginning to be understood and established.

The Pope's consecration of the world, in 1942, to the Immaculate Heart of Mary convinced many of the importance of a revelation to the Church which has taken so long to spread and to be accepted. With the consecration of England, in July, first at Walsingham, and then parish by parish, it may be hoped that many will believe that nothing less than the salvation of the world depends on its response to our Lady of Fatima.

St John Eude's book, mentioned above, is full of material for meditation on the sinless and loving heart of Mary, whose concern for the souls of all men is so great, and whose power is as great as her love; leading us to her Son, when all other means have failed to produce anything but tepidity and mediocrity, which are indeed treachery.

A LETTER TO RELIGIOUS

BY

ST CATHERINE OF SIENA¹

To Brother Filippo di Vannuccio and Brother Niccolo di Piero of Florence, religious, of the Order of Mount Olivet.



IN the name of Jesus Christ crucified and of sweet Mary. Dearest sons in sweet Jesus Christ. Catherine, servant and slave of the servants of Jesus Christ, writes to you in his precious blood, with a desire to see you established in true and perfect patience. For without patience you would not be pleasing to God, nor would you bear the yoke of holy obedience. Instead you would rise up against your superiors and against your order. Patience is only to be found in him who has

¹ Translated by D.E.K., O.P. These letters have not appeared before in English.