



## Life and spirituality



### The Seers of Fatima

«Without love, eyes cannot see»/ Miguel Torga

«He has scattered the proud and exalted those of low degree» (Lc 1,51-52)

The life of Lucia, Francisco and Jacinta, little shepherds of Fatima, is a history of grace and mercy. In these children we see in action the same paradoxical force which marks and acts in the whole history of salvation: the infinite disproportion between the history of the proud and powerful, with their schemes, strategies and conflicts, and the history of the humble who, in the truth of their existence, are invited by God to be a leaven of transformation of humanity. As seers of God's mercy, the little shepherds will make known the message by them welcomed through their simple lives. They are chosen to be witnesses of the presence of God's love, of the God who is love (1 Jn 4.8), irradiating and making transparent to the world his merciful face, that will turn their lives into a reflection of that Light which is God Himself; in the shade of an oak, the Lady made them see themselves in this Light. (M 174).



"Growing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man" (Luke 2.52)

Born in Aljustrel, a small place of Fatima parish, in the early twentieth century, the brothers Francisco and Jacinta and their cousin Lucia grow in a modest family environment, in a harsh, quiet and remote village. They did not know how to read or write, and little would actually know about geography, history and world wisdom, beyond the horizon and mountains. They received a very simple Christian upbringing and education, as it was expected in the secluded environment in which they lived. Lucia's mother introduced her daughter and nephews to catechesis, and Lucia herself, a little older than her cousins, will teach them the biblical stories and the prayers she had learned from her mother. However, despite the simplicity of their Christian initiation, their parents gave them a living example of committed faith: the Sunday participation in the Eucharist, prayer in family, truth and respect for all, charity towards the poor and the needy.

At seven Lucia began to tend and watch over the family flock. Sometime later, the cousins ask to accompany her, also keeping the flock of their parents. The three spent much of their time in the hills with the sheep, entertained in the joy of their childhood.

Lucia was a mindful child, attentive to God's love. Even six, when receiving for the first time the Body of Christ, she does not hesitate to make her prayer: "Lord, make me holy, preserve my heart always pure, for you alone" (M 72). The inner desire to be fully wrapped in the embrace of God will be the continuous line of the path she will follow.

Francisco, with his contemplative gaze feeding the inner silence, stared at nature as one who feels the creation and plunges into the beauty of the Creator. The peace he absorbed and savoured there was transmitted by him to his companions, and he was for them a sign of harmony, even in cases of offense and quarrel. He was fascinated by both the sunrise and sunset, which was his preferred "candle", the "candle of the Lord" (M 173).

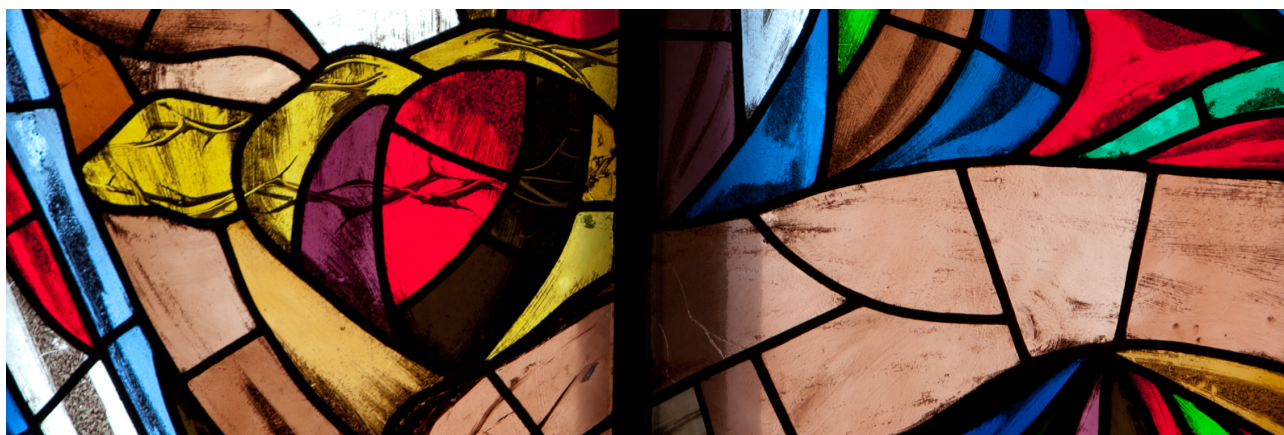
Jacinta had a special preference for the "candle of Our Lady", the moon, which did not hurt the eyes. The little girl accompanied very closely her cousin Lucia, for whom she had great affection. She took pleasure in the flowers found in the mountain, and picked in them all the joy of spring. She also liked listening to the deep valleys resounding with her voice echo, and they gave her back each 'Hail Mary' she invited them to pray. She

embraced the lambs, called them by name and walked among them carrying on in her bosom, "to do as our Lord" (M 44).

They lived intensely, as only children can do.

They prayed, too. Their parents had advised them to recite the rosary after lunch, which they always did, with a very peculiar expedient, passing the beads of the mysteries with the simple evocation of 'Hail Marys' and, then, finishing with a deep and serious 'Our Father' (M 43-44). A simple and humble prayer of one who invokes a name. From this insistence in the invocation of God's name, even with the hurry of children who want to play, will sprout the gift of a life received and offered in sacrifice.

And so, Lucia, Francisco and Jacinta grew in wisdom, age and grace.



"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Mt 5: 8)

In a 1916 spring afternoon, after their simple prayer, the little shepherds saw, over the trees, "a light whiter than snow in the shape of a young man, transparent as crystal when the sun shines through it" (M 169); at this moment, nothing would make them assume that light in human form was the herald of God's peace, that would initiate them in their school of spirituality and prayer. It was something totally unexpected, and the little shepherds felt caught up in the contemplation of that immense light, plunged into an intense atmosphere in which the strength of the presence of God made them to be "absorbed, and struck dumb with amazement" (M 171).

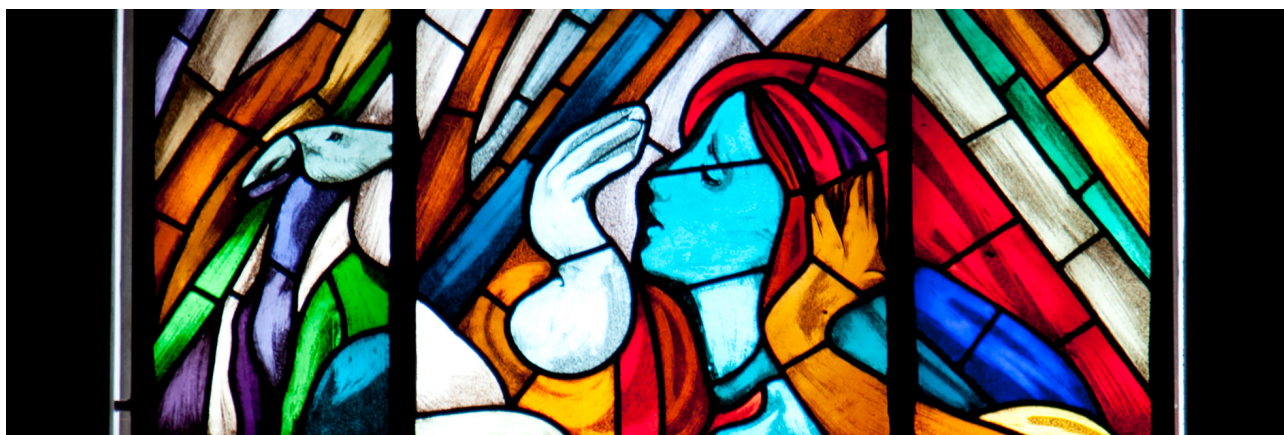
The Angel of Peace visited them three times in spring and summer of 1916. His words, deeply impressed upon the minds of the children as "a light which made them understand who God is, how He loves them and desires to be loved" (M 171), refer to God's heart, speak of a heart attentive to the voice of the humble, for which He has a "plan of mercy". When teaching the children to pray, the Angel invites, first of all, to the worship of this God's heart, from which will spring faith, hope and charity: "My God, I believe, I adore, I hope and I love you." Angel's invitation to cast down in adoration reveals to the children's eyes that the worship of God springs from this humble attitude of knowing himself welcomed by the previous Creator's love. From this worship is to sprout the entrusting surrender of faith, the hope of one who knows to be sustained,



and love in response to the inaugural and preceding love of God, which bears fruit in the compassion and concern for others.

The Angel's latest apparition renews the call to worship and unfolds it with an appeal to thanksgiving, to focus themselves on the Eucharist, and to become a gift offered for others. The Angel invites the children to the profound adoration of the Most Holy Trinity, to associate themselves with the sacrifice of Christ in the reconciliation of all in God (M 172). Afterwards, he offers them the Body and Blood of Christ, this first and foremost Gift, in whose light they will be asked to offer themselves in sacrifice for all "ungrateful men", for all those who do not know how to live in an attitude of thanksgiving.

Since then, the little shepherds will live plunged in this worship of God, with a discreet but confident and bold desire to turn their lives into a gift offered to the Creator in behalf of others. This will be their vocation.



"Feed my sheep" (Jn 21,17)

And behold, the unexpected invitation arises: "Are you willing to offer yourselves to God?" With this boldness a Lady, more brilliant than the sun, breaks out, on May 13, 1917, and enters into the lives of three children in the Cova da Iria. For six months, every 13th, the Virgin Mary will renew this invitation, on base of which the three shepherds will become humble witnesses of God's heart, in the complexity of a suffering world.

"Are you willing to offer yourselves to God and bear all the sufferings He wills to send you, as an act of reparation for the sins by which He is offended, and of supplication for the conversion of sinners?" (M 175)

The spontaneous fiat of the shepherds, 'the Lady welcomed [...] as the first fruits of her Message' (CVM 36), is confirmed by the Virgin with an intense light that penetrated the innermost depths of the children, making them see themselves" in God, who was that light"(M 175). This light, in which they will also be immersed in June, will prepare them to welcome the Secret revealed to them in July: in a succession of images unveiled by Our Lady, the little shepherds grasp the idea that God's heart is caring for the human history; that sin consists in being indifferent to God's heart; that God is merciful and is

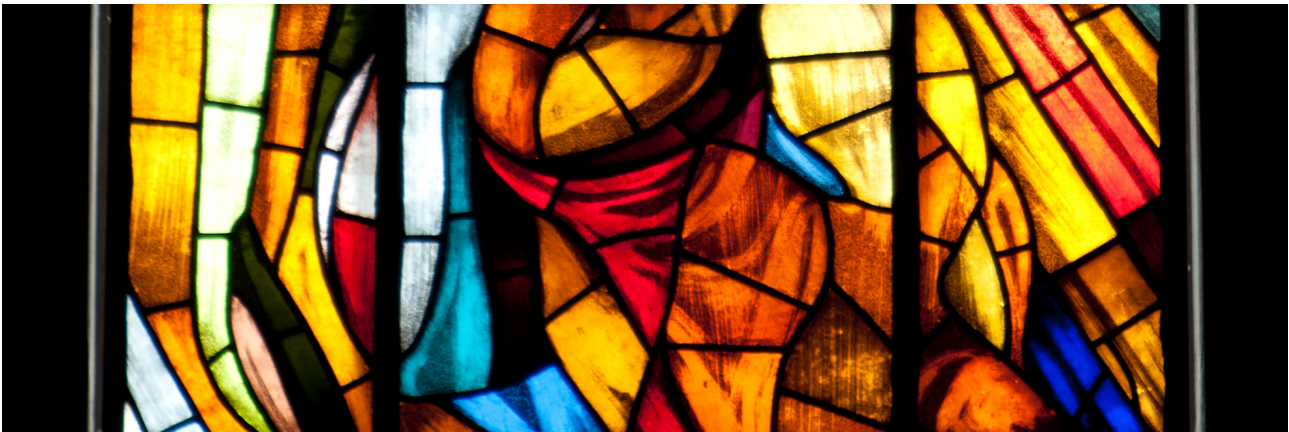
always in search of man entangled in his dramas and misfortunes; and that those who embrace the light of God's heart are invited to participate, by prayer and sacrifice, in His care for humanity.

On the first immersion in that light, Lucia, Francisco and Jacinta, still savoring the echoes of the depth they had experienced, decided not to tell anything of what happened. But Jacinta, strongly affected by the beauty of the Lady and full of an irrepressible joy, cannot refrain herself. She is the first herald and messenger of this newfound divine joy communicated by the Lady. And like the disciples of Emmaus (Lk 24,32) who, in front of the paschal mystery, had a burning feeling in the chest, she will confess to her friends: "I had inside me something that would not let me be silent" (M 45).

The news of the apparitions of the Lady of the Rosary soon will make its way. And the number of those who, as pilgrims, come to the Cova da Iria will certainly increase; and so the children will have much to suffer at the hands of those who doubted or opposed them. Already in the first encounter, almost as if to confirm the children fiat, the Lady had assured them that they would have much to suffer. As was the case with prophets (Jer 1:19), the vocation of the little shepherds accepts suffering as an integral part of their mission. They will be, for many, accused of fraud and greed. Even their own families, except perhaps the father of Francisco and Jacinta, fear they are spreading a lie and are afraid for their life. At home, and everywhere, they are subjected to visits and to incessant and strenuous interrogations.

But the greatest trial and affliction would occur on August 13. On the morning of that day, the children are surprised by the visit of the Municipality of Ourém Administrator, a well-known mason and freethinker. After having questioned them in their home and at the rectory, because he wanted at all costs to know the secret they insisted on keeping concealed, the Administrator, in a tricky and deceitful way, proposes to lead them to the the Cova da Iria, but in fact conveys them to Ourem. There he insists on pressing the kids to unveil their secret, and even reached the point of locking them, for a while, in a cell with other prisoners, and of uttering the threat of making them fry in olive oil. Francisco's innocent reply radiates peace and joy: "If they kill us, it's all the same! We'll go to Heaven!"(M 146).

Handed back to their parents on August 15, they will encounter the White Lady on the 19th, in Valinhos, and in September and October, in the Cova da Iria. A large crowd gather in this last apparition - thirsty for God or simply curious - and witness a sign, as the Lady had promised. But for the children, Lucia, Francisco and Jacinta, the last encounter becomes a permanent reminder that they are called to transform their lives into a blessing (Gen. 12.2).



"I will give you shepherds after my own heart" (Jer 3:15)

The life of the shepherd children no more ceased to be paced and measured by God's heart. The fiat uttered to the Lady more brilliant than the sun was constantly renewed by the innocent desire of Lucia, Francisco and Jacinta to intensify in their lives the passionate affection for God. The presence of God became, for them, sacred ground and, like Moses, barefoot in front of the burning bush (Ex 3.2-12), their intimacy is transmuted into an act of adoration in the presence of that inner light, which is God, which burns without consuming. That's the ineffable secret strengthening them. This Sacred Bush burning in their chest awakens them, as once did to Moses, for the mission of caring for those who live in the slavery of sin and ingratitude. And so, in sight of all others, they are the presence of God's light and also, before God, mediators in behalf of all others. Their lives become a constant offering of everything they are and do – however slight – for the love of God and in favour of sinners.

Francisco, Jacinta and Lucia's lives assume this vocation, that is inseparably contemplative, compassionate and announcing. But each of them will take on, with a particular and greater accent, the specific nature of their calling.

Francisco, moved by his inner eye sensitive to the Spirit's light, listens to the call to worship and contemplation. Sometimes, he took refuge behind a rock or on top of the mountain to pray alone. Other times, he remained in the parish church, for long hours, in the intimacy of silence, to keep company with Jesus hidden in the tabernacle. There he persisted in prayer, thinking about God, absorbed in the contemplation of the unfathomable mystery of God who comes to meet man. Francisco, and only he, with the eyes of his heart, becomes aware of the sadness of God before the suffering of the world, suffers from it and wants to comfort Him (M 145). The little shepherd, who had not heard both the Angel and Mary, but had only seen them, is the most contemplative of the three children. In his life, it is almost as if contemplation springs from attentive listening to silence that speaks of God, to silence in which God speaks. Francisco's contemplative disposition consists in letting himself to be inhabited by the unspeakable presence of God – "I felt that God was within me, but I did not know how!" (M 142) - and this presence was to be transfigured into prayerful reception of the others. In Francisco comes to the fore a life of contemplation.

Little Jacinta translates the joy, purity and generosity of faith, welcomed as an offering of God's heart, and difused through the chores and trifles of her life as a simple girl, into a sacrifice acceptable to God (Romans 12, 1) in behalf of humanity. The force with which the divine light broke in and invaded her child's life seizes her definitely with a new dynamic and ardent desire of sharing her joy. The purity of her mirthful heart longs and wants that everyone may enjoy, grateful and pure, the presence and the gladness of God's heart. This eagerness to share the ardent love she felt for the hearts of Jesus and Mary made her grow and become solicitous for sinners. All the small details of her grazing day, all the discomforts of the unending questionings and interrogations to which she was subject, all the distresses of her illness were an occasion and motive of an offering to God for the conversion of sinners. Other times, she shared her food with the poor, offering this abstinence in sacrifice, as a sign of giving her life for the love of God and humanity. This pray and suffering for love "was her ideal, and she could speak of nothing else» (M 61). Her joy was to live immersed in the love of the suffering Christ, in the manner of St. Paul: "I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the Church "(Col 1:24). The fire she had in her chest radiated and would, certainly, expand inasmuch as it did not contagiare, through the theological dynamics of prayer and sacrifice, all men and women, particularly the ungrateful ones, that is, all those who do not welcome the grace. Jacinta's vocation is compassion.

Lucia welcomes the mission to evangelize, to make known the good news of God's mercy, responding to the merciful God's desire to consecrate the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary (M 175). Early and in good time Lucia understands that in the core of the devotion to the Immaculate Heart is the transforming power of God's mercy. And there she discovers her vocation to be a living memorial of the "greatness of the Divine Mercy" (M 190). In a way similar to Israel, called to be a light to the nations (Isaiah 49.6), Lucy's life becomes a living testimony of the designs of mercy that God has for humanity. From her humble life as shepherdess until the closure of her religious consecration, Lucia is the witness who quenches herself in order that light of the Secret of God's mercy shine without interruption, as already definitively revealed by the Son and remembered at Fatima. In her we can catch a glimpse of the faithful witness of a gift, that is accepted and offered to the world.





"I thank thee, Father, that thou hast revealed these things to babes" (Mt 11:25)

Francisco and Jacinta's lives were brief and simple. They only lived from Love and for Love which was revealed to them in the light offered by the hands of such a beautiful Lady. And that was all. At the end of 1918, Francisco and Jacinta are taken by a bronco-pneumonia epidemic. The Lady had assured them they would go to heaven, and very soon, and so the children understood that their time was coming.

Francisco died on April 4, 1919, at his home in Aljustrel, and Jacinta on February 20, 1920, alone, in a hospital in Lisbon. The boy was ten years old. The sister was nine. The suffering of both, during the months of illness, was accepted as a self-offering for sinners, for the Church, for the suffering history of men and women, whom they loved to the end. When, one day, the Lady again appeared to Jacinta to announce her that, after suffering much, she would die alone in a hospital in Lisbon, and that the Lady herself would come again and bring her to Heaven, Jacinta exclaimed, full of innocence and maturity: "O Jesus! Now You can convert many sinners, because this is really a big sacrifice!" (M 62).

Who would suspect that so brief and simple lives were capable of such love?

Lucia will be yet witness of a century thirsty of God – of his Grace and Mercy – because too wrapped up in devices and stratagems of domination and violence. As a living memorial of God's graces, she will continue to announce the vocation of the Immaculate Heart as a way through which God rescues Mankind with his love. The dialogue opened in Cova da Iria will still be carried on with this consecrated woman, once shepherdess, who becomes seer of the presence of God-mystery-of-communion in the world dramas and messenger of the full life He grants. She will not cease to repeat and insist on the white Lady's requests: the conversion that is achieved through the worship of God; the prayer of the Rosary as meditation and contemplation of Christ's life; the consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, this singular woman who opens a way of being in the light of the Son; the reparation through the First Saturdays, these sabbaths consecrated to God and evoking the promised liberation.

Lucia will also see the Church's confirmation that the Secret of Fatima is an echo of the Gospel; and that the lives of her cousins, small children of the mountains, whom God visited, make known to the whole Church, on the threshold of a new millennium, a Christian style of openness to the designs of mercy and, therefore, they are blessed. At the end of this intense spiritual journey, Lucia is for ever welcomed by the light of God on February 13, 2005.

The little shepherds lived God's passion for humanity. And so they were chosen and constituted as prophets of God's love and offered and proposed by Him to the world as children shepherds after His own heart (Jer 3:15).

As referências textuais às fontes de Fátima citadas no texto seguem as seguintes edições: *Memórias da Irmã Lúcia I*. 14.<sup>a</sup> ed. Fátima: Secretariado dos Pastorinhos, 2010



[sob a abreviatura M seguida da(s) página(s)] e *Como vejo a mensagem através dos tempos e dos acontecimentos*. 2.<sup>a</sup> ed. Fátima: Secretariado dos Pastorinhos, 2007 [sob a abreviatura CVM seguida da página].

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