

The Spirituality of Blesseds Jacinta and Francisco Marto

Archbishop Fulton Sheen wrote that in the past, when there was genuine humility among men, God sent the giants: Thomas Aquinas, Bonaventure, Albert the Great. Now, in our overconfident, self-reliant age, we have St. Therese, St. Bernadette, and more recently, within the last 100 years, three little shepherd children of Fatima. He wrote that the children had little minds with great understanding; they were little children who knew nothing about politics, yet could teach us the significance of two world wars within 21 years. We do well tonight to meditate on the words of Our Lord, “Unless you become as little children, you shall not enter the Kingdom of Heaven.”

The three children of Fatima had very different personalities. In fact, Lucia wrote that besides facial features and their basic practice of virtue, there was nothing about Jacinta and Francisco that would lead you to think they were siblings. We know that grace builds on nature, and the three shepherd children of Fatima show us that we are each called to a unique sanctity. We cannot use the excuse that “someone like me” couldn’t be holy. Someone like me might not be able to perfectly mimic a particular Saint, but someone like me is called to holiness, a holiness that will perfect my own personality if I am docile to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. A closer look at the spirituality of Blesseds Jacinta and Francisco Marto will give us wonderful examples of how to personally apply the message of Fatima to our daily lives.

Of the three children, Francisco seems to be the most simple, consistent and straightforward. Even before the visions, he was “quiet and submissive by nature.” Being a year older than Jacinta, was the one who worked it out with his mother that he and Jacinta would pasture their family’s flock with their cousin Lucia. He did this because Jacinta asked him to as she was too young to take the flock out by herself. This was how the three children found themselves together for the apparitions: Lucia had the fun personality that attracted Jacinta, Jacinta coerced Francisco into together joining Lucia, and Francisco did as he was told. So we see that even before the apparitions, the three made a good combination of personalities to get a job done.

Francisco never heard the Angel speak. He learned the prayers by hearing Jacinta and Lucia repeat them. He was not as limber as the girls and felt great pain in his back when praying for any

length as the angel taught them, on their knees with head bowed to the ground. He would pray thus as long as he could, and then he would sit or kneel for the rest of the time. After the apparitions of the angel, Francisco asked what the angel said. The other two were so affected by the apparition that they told Francisco they couldn't talk about it and to ask them about it tomorrow. Early the next morning, Francisco said, "Did you sleep last night? I kept thinking about the Angel, and what he could have said." Our Lord definitely knew what He was doing to choose Francisco not to hear the messages. I can't imagine what Lucia or Jacinta would have been like if they were told to "wait until tomorrow!"

Francisco was entrusted with a special mission from Our Lady, a mission he was grateful to receive. She personally asked him to pray many Rosaries before he would go to Heaven. Some have interpreted this as some form of reproach, that there was some reason he had to pray more than the other two in order to make it to Heaven. There is no hint of this in Lucia's memoirs. When he heard of this request of Our Lady, his response was one of joy, "Oh, my dear Our Lady! I'll say as many rosaries as you want!" Lucia recorded that from that moment onward, Francisco made a habit of separating himself from the other two. When they asked him what he was doing, he would hold up his rosary in explanation. When they asked him to come play and then pray the rosary afterwards, he replied, "I'll pray then as well. Don't you remember that Our Lady said I must pray many rosaries?" Another time, when he was on a tall rock for the entire morning, Lucia called him at midday: "Francisco, don't you want to come for your lunch?" "No, you eat." "And to pray the rosary?" "That, yes, later on. Call me again." Francisco's days held no less obligation than they had before the apparitions, yet he made time to pray many rosaries every day. He chose to give up many of the other activities that used to fill his days in order to make more time to pray. We could do the same. What we need to decide is how important prayer is to us. Francisco showed by his choices that prayer was the most important thing to him in the world.

It is important to remember that the children's motives were completely pure. They never made sacrifices or prayed just to save their own souls. Their intention was always "because Our Lady asked" or "to console Our Lord." The children had an intense desire to go to Heaven to be

with Our Lady and Our Lord. That was their only desire. Yet they loved Jesus and Mary so much that they were willing to live on earth as long as Jesus willed so they could do His will. Francisco would say from time to time, “Our Lady told us that we would have much to suffer, but I don’t mind. I’ll suffer all she wishes! What I want is to go to Heaven!” These sentiments were renewed in the midst of intense suffering of every kind.

From the time of the apparitions on, Francisco became more and more contemplative. When asked what he was doing, he said he was “thinking”, which was how he described his contemplative prayer. Francisco teaches us how Mary always leads us to Jesus. The apparitions led him to a tremendous devotion to Our Lady, but an even deeper love of Our Lord. He said on one occasion, “I loved seeing the Angel, but I loved still more seeing Our Lady. What I loved most of all was to see Our Lord in that light from Our Lady which penetrated our hearts. I love God so much! But He is very sad because of so many sins! We must never commit any sins again!” When Francisco had been alone almost all day, Lucia asked what he had been doing. He said, “I am thinking about God, Who is so sad because of so many sins! If only I could give Him joy!”

Lucia remarked that the vision of hell in July seemed to make the least impression on Francisco, though he was considerably affected. What wholly absorbed him was rather the light of the Most Holy Trinity, which penetrated their souls. He said afterward: “We were on fire in that light which is God, and yet we were not burnt! What is God?... We could never put it into words. Yes, that is something indeed which we could never express! But what a pity it is that He is so sad! If only I could console Him!...” When Our Lady told the children that Our Lord would appear with her in October, Francisco said, “Oh, how wonderful! I’ve only seen Him twice, and I love Him so much!” The twice that he had “seen” Our Lord were the times Our Lady had shed Light on the children, which penetrated them, and Francisco knew that light was Jesus.

After Francisco was confined to bed, heaven consumed all his thoughts. He knew he was going there in a short time, and he redoubled his prayer and sacrifices. Lucia asked if he was suffering a lot. “Quite a lot, but never mind! I am suffering to console Our Lord, and afterwards, within a short time, I am going to heaven!” Lucia asked Francisco to pray for her. Francisco

replied, “Yes, I’ll pray. But look, you’d better ask Jacinta to pray for these things instead, because I’m afraid I’ll forget when I see Our Lord. And then, more than anything I want to console Him.”

Lucia wrote of Francisco’s sacrifices, “He took everything his mother offered him, and she could never discover which things he disliked. He went on like this until the day came for him to go to heaven.” Wouldn’t we do well to imitate this! Francisco knew when the time was near. Lucia was called to Francisco’s house, being told that he was doing poorly and had asked for her. When she arrived, Francisco asked for some privacy and then asked Lucia if she could remember any sins he had committed. He wanted to go to Confession and then receive Holy Viaticum. She told him he disobeyed his mother a few times, sneaking off to see Lucia or to hide from inquisitive crowds when his mother asked him to stay home. He said that was true, and please go ask Jacinta now. After thinking for a while, Jacinta came up with two sins Francisco had committed before Mary had appeared to them. In his whole life, only four sins that he could think of, along with the help of his closest friends! He replied, “Maybe it’s because of these sins that Our Lord is so sad! Even if I don’t die, I’ll never commit them again. I’m heartily sorry for them now. O my Jesus, forgive us our sins...” Do we examine our consciences as well? Do we value the Sacrament of Reconciliation as Francisco did? Do we respond with gratitude when someone does us the favor of revealing our sins to us?

He then asked Lucia to pray to Our Lord, begging Him to forgive Francisco’s sins. He also asked Lucia to pray to Our Lord, asking Him to let the parish priest bring Holy Communion. As soon as Lucia returned from the Church, Francisco asked, “Did you ask the Hidden Jesus that the parish priest would give me Holy Communion?” “I did.” “Then, in heaven, I’ll pray for you.” Again, we see Francisco’s combination of prayer and action. Even when our actions seem to do the trick, prayer will bless and bring more abundant fruit from our actions. Francisco confessed his sins and received Holy Communion the next day.

Francisco was so ill that he couldn’t concentrate enough to pray, so he asked Jacinta and Lucia to pray for him. Lucia’s last words to Francisco, said in the midst of many tears, were, “Goodbye, Francisco. Goodbye till Heaven.” He died the next day. Would that our parting from

our friends would be as holy. Is the object of our friendships heaven? If not, we're wasting our time. Francisco died a holy death. He would never have regretted a single Ave of his many rosaries. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us now and *at the hour of our death*. Amen. We cannot pray this enough!

Now that we have relived the events of Fatima through Francisco's eyes, we must backtrack and do the same through Jacinta. Jacinta's spirituality could be summarized as an intimate devotion to Our Lord and Our Lady and the apostolate of saving sinners from hell, closely followed with praying and sacrificing for our Holy Father. Before the apparitions, Jacinta was sensitive, sulking when she didn't get her way with her playmates. At the same time, she was charming and good at talking others into what she wanted. She loved to sing, dance, catch butterflies, play games, and was full of life. She also practiced virtue and was very impressionable, especially in the area of the sacred. When she first heard the story of Our Lord's Passion, told to her by Lucia, she often asked Lucia to repeat the story, and she would cry each time and say, "Our poor dear Lord! I'll never sin again! I don't want Our Lord to suffer any more!" She was a delicate child, bothered by the brightness of the sun and affected greatly by the summer's heat. Let's keep these things in mind as we learn about Jacinta's transformation under Our Lady's guiding hand.

Jacinta followed the lead of the other two in applying what the angel asked of the children in preparation for the appearance of Our Lady. Lucia records that the angel first appeared after they had prayed the "short version" of the Rosary. This was Jacinta's idea. The children would simply say the first two words of each prayer for each bead, and thus would have more time to play. As it was her idea to say the shorter version, after the 13th of May, she had another suggestion: "I don't want to play today... That Lady told us to say the Rosary and to make sacrifices for the conversion of sinners. So from now on, when we say the Rosary we must say the whole Hail Mary and the whole Our Father! And the sacrifices, how are we going to make them?" It was Francisco who suggested the first sacrifice of the children, to give their lunches to the sheep. From that point forward they fasted regularly till their deaths. They never asked, "How much do we *have* to sacrifice?" Their question was always, "How much more can we do?"

All the children pondered Our Lady's words between the apparitions, and different aspects struck each of them. For Jacinta it was the conversion of sinners and the reality of hell that filled her mind and heart. Later, our Holy Father would join her ponderings. She asked Lucia, "That Lady also said that many souls go to hell! What is hell, then?" "...That's where people go who commit sins and don't confess them. They stay there and burn forever!" "And they never get out of there again?" "No!" "Not even after many, many years?" "No! Hell never ends!" "And Heaven never ends either?" "Whoever goes to Heaven, never leaves it again!" "And whoever goes to hell, never leaves it either?" "They're eternal, don't you see! They never end." Till the end of her life, Jacinta would ponder hell. Even in the middle of a game, she would stop and ask, "But listen! Doesn't hell end after many, many years, then?" Or: "Those people burning in hell, don't they every die? ...Poor sinners! We have to pray and make many sacrifices for them!" Or: "Hell! Hell! How sorry I am for the souls who go to hell!" Lucia wrote that "the vision of hell filled her with horror to such a degree, that every penance and mortification was as nothing in her eyes, if it could only prevent souls from going there."

She would pray the O My Jesus prayer over and over for long periods on her knees whenever she thought of hell. Sometimes, when she noticed Francisco or Lucia near her, she could call out to them, "Are you praying with me? We must pray very much, to save souls from hell! So many go there! So many!" One time she asked Lucia, "Why doesn't Our Lady show hell so sinners? If they saw it, they would not sin, so as to avoid going there!" She asked Lucia what sins could people commit to go to hell. Lucia replied that missing Mass on Sunday is that type of sin, and sometimes the things people say. Jacinta responded, "It wouldn't be hard for them to keep quiet, and to go to Mass! I'm so sorry for sinners! If only I could show them hell!" All of a sudden one day, Jacinta seized hold of Lucia and said, "I'm going to heaven, but you are staying here. If Our Lady lets you, tell everybody what hell is like, so they won't commit any more sins and not go to hell." When Lucia tried to calm Jacinta down by reminding her she was going to heaven, Jacinta said quietly, "Yes, I am, but I want all those people to go there, too!" Some have asked whether little children should learn about hell. Is it too harsh for them? Should we wait to tell them about it? Does it

make us fear God too much, or is it bad to think about hell? Well, apparently God didn't think so. He was the one who ordained that a 7, 8, and 10 year old should see the reality of hell and spread this message.

Shortly after the apparitions, Jacinta, who so loved to dance, promised never to dance again as a sacrifice for sinners. Sometimes, when Lucia was visiting Jacinta, Jacinta would tell Lucia to go away and visit Francisco so she could offer the sacrifice of not being with Lucia. She would sacrifice for the love of Jesus, for the Immaculate Heart of Mary, for sinners and for the Holy Father. Francisco would sacrifice to console our Lord, and then for sinners and the Holy Father. Lucia said that whenever a difficulty arose, Jacinta was the first to ask, "Have you already offered this for love of Jesus?" If the answer was no, Jacinta said, "Then I'll tell Him." Joining her hands, she would pray aloud, "Oh Jesus, it is for love of You, and for the conversion of sinners!" Later she would always add, "and for the Holy Father", and as Mary later asked, "and in reparation for the sins committed against the Immaculate Heart of Mary."

Many of us who were raised in a Catholic home can remember at one time or another being annoyed when our mothers would tell us to "offer it up!" Perhaps the example of the Fatima children will help us to see the real value in offering it up. Our sacrifices and inconveniences can bear great fruit, if only we would turn them into a prayer of sacrifice instead of letting them remain simply an annoyance. In this way, the children had perpetual peace, even in the midst of turmoil, because they saw their sufferings as bearing spiritual fruit. One of the biggest sacrifices Jacinta had to offer during the time of the apparitions was the fear of dying in prison in August. She wasn't afraid of dying; she was heartbroken to die without telling her mother goodbye. With tears running down her cheeks, she said, "I would like at least to see my mother." Lucia then asked, "Don't you want, then, to offer this sacrifice for the conversion of sinners?" "I do want to, I do!" With her face bathed in tears, she joined her hands, raised her eyes to heaven and prayed, "O my Jesus! This is for love of You, for the conversion of sinners, for the Holy Father, and in reparation for the sins committed against the Immaculate Heart of Mary!"

While she had a different prayer life than Francisco, Jacinta was a contemplative of her own right. She once told Lucia, “I do like to tell Jesus that I love Him! Many times, when I say it to Him, I seem to have a fire in my heart, but it doesn’t burn me.” Another time she said, “I love Our Lord and Our Lady so much, that I never get tired of telling them that I love them.” Jacinta would tell Lucia, “Our Lady said that her Immaculate Heart will be your refuge and the way that will lead you to God. Don’t you love that? Her Heart is so good! How I love it!” “I so love the Immaculate Heart of Mary! It is the heart of our dear Mother in heaven! Don’t you love saying many times over: ‘Sweet Heart of Mary, Immaculate Heart of Mary’? I love it so much, so very much.” When Lucia gave Jacinta a very lovely holy card of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Jacinta said it was ugly compared to how Jesus really looks, but she would take it anyway as it was Jesus all the same. She carried it with her always and put it under her pillow. She kissed it frequently, saying, “I kiss the Heart, because I love it most!”

When Jacinta and Francisco were very ill, Our Lady appeared to them in their home. Mary said that she would take Francisco to heaven soon. She asked Jacinta if she were willing to live a bit longer so as to suffer more and convert more sinners. Jacinta agreed. When Francisco was dying, Jacinta told him, “Give all my love to Our Lord and Our Lady, and tell them I’ll suffer as much as they want, for the conversion of sinners and in reparation to the Immaculate Heart of Mary.” This was not sadistic; this was love and a supernatural gift to see the value of sharing in the redemption of the world by uniting our suffering with Christ’s.

Our Lady appeared again to Jacinta, and told her she would go to another hospital, farther from Fatima, and would suffer greatly there and finally die alone. This terrified Jacinta, who loved her family and especially Lucia. When Lucia told her not to think about it, Jacinta said, “Let me think about it, for the more I think about it, the more I suffer, and I want to suffer for love of Our Lord and for sinners.” This knowledge that she would die alone plagued Jacinta constantly. One time Lucia walked into Jacinta’s bedroom and found Jacinta clutching an image of Our Lady, saying, “O my dearest heavenly Mother, do I have to die all alone?” We don’t know much about the final physical sufferings of Jacinta because she would not speak of what she was suffering. She was

operated on twice without general anesthesia, having two ribs cut out, leaving a hole the size of a man's fist. During the operation, she was silent, only whispering on two separate occasions, "Oh my good Mother!" and "Patience! We must all suffer to get to Heaven!"

During her time in the hospital, Jacinta continued to receive interior insights, both from appearances of Our Lady, and through her rich interior life of prayer. She told the Sister who took care of her that sins of the flesh and certain fashions are very offensive to Our Lord and Our Lady. She often repeated counsels not to sin, to pray the rosary often, and to love the hearts of Jesus and Mary a great deal. She also revealed that she saw the beauty of religious life. She said, "The Mother of God wants a large number of souls to bind themselves to her by the vow of chastity. I would enter a convent with great joy, but my joy is greater because I am going to heaven." This correlates well with the Church's teaching on religious life as a foretaste of Heaven. We strive to live a life that is an imitation of the life lived in Heaven, but Heaven is greater. This is as close as it gets here on earth.

The children can teach us much about intercessory prayer. They were little, and were unable to help others in a practical way. Yet, they could pray, and they never really felt helpless because of their trust in prayer. When Lucia went for her first interview with a priest, she was terrified. When she shared her terror with her cousin Jacinta, the immediate reply was, "I'm going to get up and call Francisco. We'll go and pray for you at the well. When you get back, come and find us there." Upon returning, Lucia ran to the well and found the two on their knees, praying. Jacinta ran to Lucia and cried, "You see! We must never be afraid of anything! The Lady will help us always. She's such a good friend of ours!" When Jacinta was being taken to the distant hospital where she was to die, she made her final good-bye to Lucia, saying, "Pray a lot for me until I go to Heaven. Then I will pray a lot for you."

When Lucia was going to an interrogation with the secular administrator, the children were all afraid, wondering if Lucia would ever return, or if she would be killed. Jacinta sobbed, but said with great faith, "If they kill you, tell them that Francisco and I are just the same as you, that we want to die too. I'm going right now to the well with Francisco, and we'll pray hard for you." That

was early in the morning. Lucia returned after nightfall, and she found her cousins on their knees, leaning over the side of the well, their heads buried in their hands, praying and weeping bitterly. They prayed for guidance in the midst of every difficult situation; they prayed for each other; they interceded for the many people's need whom they encountered; they prayed for sinners and for the Holy Father. Would that we would pray as they did, tirelessly, confident in the efficacy of prayer, begging, pleading, being very honest with Our Lord and Our Lady. Their prayers bore fruit – people were comforted, converted, and cured. These were special graces God gave through the intercession of the children and through the Immaculate Heart of Mary, sure. But all of us are promised that prayer is effective if we pray with the confidence and purity of a child. How often do we place ourselves before Our Lord and truly pour out our soul to Him, offer Him our lives, ask Him what He wants of us? The more we pray, the more our prayers will be conformed to God's will – we will grow in holiness, and others will benefit as well.

Both Francisco and Jacinta had a special love for the Blessed Sacrament, which they called the Hidden Jesus. After the apparitions, on their way to school, Francisco said, "Listen! You go to school, and I'll stay here in the church, close to the Hidden Jesus. It's not worth my while learning to read, as I'll be going to heaven very soon. On your way home, come here and call me." Lucia wrote, "Francisco went... between the baptismal font and the altar, and that was where I found him on my return." After a few weeks, Lucia noticed that Francisco was walking very slowly on their way to school. "What's the matter?" I asked him. "You seem unable to walk!" "I've such a bad headache, and I feel as though I'm going to fall." "Then don't come. Stay at home!" "I don't want to. I'd rather stay in the church with the Hidden Jesus, while you go to school." When Francisco fell too ill to leave his room, he said, "Look! Go to the church and give my love to the Hidden Jesus. What hurts me most is that I cannot go there myself and stay awhile with the Hidden Jesus."

Jacinta's Eucharistic devotion was also intimate and sweet. When Lucia was on the way to school, she stopped by to see Jacinta. Jacinta would often say, "Listen! Tell the Hidden Jesus that I like Him very much, that I really love Him very much indeed." Or, "Tell Jesus I send Him my love, and I long to see Him." When Lucia would go to Mass, Jacinta would ask her to stop by as soon as

she could after Mass. Then she would ask Lucia to sit very close to her so Jacinta could be close to the Hidden Jesus within Lucia. Jacinta's biggest consolation near her death was the Blessed Sacrament Chapel in the orphanage she stayed for two weeks before going to the hospital to die. She would sit for long periods of time communing with the Hidden Jesus.

The children can teach us a lot about true spiritual friendship. Lucia wrote about her own annoyance with what she called Francisco's "never mind" attitude and Jacinta's sensitivity. Lucia wrote that the bond of kinship "increased with the graces Heaven deigned to grant us." It was a spiritual bond, and this bond was stronger than blood or interest. It was the bond of charity, which wills the other's true good. This is the bond we find in religious life, in which the members have no ties of kinship and oftentimes do not have natural interests in common. In this way, the children can be a model for all religious who strive for the same type of spiritual friendship the children had. They can also be a model for all families and lay faithful who wish to deepen their ties of blood and friendship with the deeper bond of a common faith. The true charity found in such friendship entails an honesty about the spiritual and a desire for the other's holiness.

The children exemplify this in a beautiful way. They helped each other examine their consciences. Knowing that they each sought to do as Our Lady asked, wanted to avoid sin, desired to offer sacrifices, they encouraged each other in these endeavors. Time and again, one or another of the children would remind the others to offer sacrifices. When Lucia walked to Francisco's house accompanied by some friends from school, he told her not to spend time with them, for they were worldly and she might pick up their bad habits. He told Lucia to stop by the church to pray after school, then to walk the rest of the way when the others were far ahead of her.

They were intent on helping each other to seek and do the will of God. Jacinta helped Lucia accept her plight of remaining on earth for a time, "You, Lucia, will remain on earth to spread the news that Our Lord wants the whole world to have devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. When you have to speak, don't hide yourself. Tell the whole world that God wants to grant His graces through the mediation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary; that we must not hesitate to ask them through her; that the Heart of Jesus wants to be venerated along with the Immaculate Heart of Mary;

that men must ask the Immaculate Heart for peace, because God has confided it to her.” These words acted as an encouragement for Lucia for the rest of her life. The message of Fatima, coming from Heaven, is very clear that unlike other devotions that are for a few or a certain age, devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary is for the entire world and is necessary. Devotion to her Immaculate Heart includes devotion to Jesus’ Passion, to the Eucharist, to the practice of virtue, to intercession for the world, for the conversion of sinners, for peace. On another occasion, Jacinta comforted Lucia by saying, “Poor thing. Don’t cry, Lucia, I shall pray a lot in Heaven for you. You are going to stay here, but it is Our Lady who wants it. If she wanted that for me, I’d gladly stay to convert more sinners.” When Francisco was dying, Lucia asked him when he got to heaven to ask Our Lady to take her also to heaven soon. He replied, “That, I won’t ask! You know very well that she doesn’t want you there yet.” The examples could go on and on.

Each of the children spread the message of Fatima in their own way. Francisco was a quiet model of holiness. When children were irreverent or worldly, instead of chastising them, Francisco would simply walk away. If he was asked the reason for his absence, he would calmly say he left because the children were being bad. Jacinta took another approach. She would tell people that they could go to hell for such things. It was very effective. Sometimes, she would simply kneel and pray for the person. She preferred the company of children to adults, and when they would play with her, she would also say the Rosary with them, teach them prayers, tell them about hell and how to avoid going there, and counsel them not to sin. The only thing the children desired for themselves and for each other was to go to Heaven and to obey Our Lady’s wishes. May we have the same focus and take the children as our model in applying the message of Fatima to our personal lives.

*Almost all information is from Volume 1 of Lucia’s Memoirs (“Fatima in Lucia’s Own Words.”) The information about the period Jacinta spent in the hospital is taken from the book “The Youngest Prophet.” The introductory remarks from Archbishop Sheen are from “The Littlest Flower.”