

The Apparitions at Garabandal

An Angel Appears

The story of Garabandal opens on June 18, 1961, on a Sunday, at eight-thirty in the evening. Four simple, unsophisticated girls were playing in a sunken lane, called the *calleja*, at the southern extremity of the village. The sound of thunder was suddenly heard and later a brilliant angel appeared, first to Conchita (Maria Concepcion) Gonzalez, and then almost immediately afterward to Loli (Maria Dolores) Mazon, Jacinta Gonzalez and Maria Cruz Gonzalez. Notwithstanding the identical family names, none of the girls were closely related. The first three girls were twelve years old and the fourth only eleven. However, because of the backward village environment, their mental and psychological age was considerably less. The angel came back eight more times in June.

A Mother and Her Children

The first time he spoke was on July 1st. He said: "Do you know why I have come? It is to announce to you that tomorrow, Sunday, the Virgin Mary will appear to you as Our Lady of Mount Carmel." The angel's mission was to prepare the children for Our Lady's coming and to be her messenger. He returned with her the next day but came back much less frequently after that. However, the Blessed Virgin began appearing almost every day and occasionally was accompanied by the Infant Jesus whom she carried in her arms.

The four girls talked with the Blessed Virgin with great simplicity. They talked about their everyday life, about going out to the fields to make hay and about getting bronzed by the sun. Our Lady delighted in their childish talk.

A charming and almost disarming spontaneity marked the apparitions. In her *Diary*, Conchita mentions that the angel and Our Lady smiled profusely and that they laughed at some of their childish remarks. She says several times that the Blessed Virgin kissed them. On a few occasions when she came with the Infant Jesus, she allowed them to take him

in their arms. They also did simple little things to amuse and please him, such as hiding pebbles in their sleeves and in the tresses of their hair. Once, Our Lady took the crown of small golden stars from her head and permitted them to hold it in their hands. Many have seen in all this an indication of the childlike attitude we should have in our relationship with Christ and his Blessed Mother.

The Scapular and Kissed Objects

In assuming the title of Our Lady of Mount Carmel at Garabandal, and by holding out the scapular to us, as it were, by carrying it frequently at her wrist, the Blessed Virgin was telling us that it still pleases her that we wear her mantle and that she will continue to bless and protect in a special way those who do this with faith and confidence.

The love that Mary manifests to those who live under the mantle of her scapular, she also shows to her children through the "kissed objects" so particular to Garabandal.

The kissing of objects started early in the apparitions but was considered so vital by the Blessed Virgin that she made it the principal object of her very last visit at Garabandal on November 13, 1965. Conchita has written a report of this apparition. Here are the significant parts of the report:

. . . I said to her: "How unworthy I am, dear Mother, of the numerous graces I have received through you. And yet, you come to me today to lighten the little cross that I now carry."

She replied: "Conchita, I have not come for your sake alone. I have come for all my children, so that I may draw them closer to our Hearts."

Then she said: "Give me everything you have brought so that I may kiss it."

I gave her everything. I had a crucifix with me. She kissed that also and said: "Place it in the hands of the Child Jesus." This I did. The Child did not say anything to me.

After having kissed everything, she said to me: "Through the kiss I have bestowed on these objects, my Son will perform prodigies. Distribute them to others."

"I will be glad to do this," I replied.

She asked me to tell her about the petitions that people had requested I transmit to her.

And I told her about them.

Then she said: "Talk to me, Conchita, talk to me about my children. I hold them all beneath my mantle."

“It is very small, we can’t all get under it,” I replied.

She smiled.

“This will be the last time you see me here—*Sera la ultima vez que me vea aqui*. But I shall always be with you and with all my children,” she said.

She also said to me: “Conchita, why do you not go more often to visit my Son in the tabernacle? He waits for you there day and night.”

It is all over now. The happy moments when I was with my heavenly mamma and my best friend [an expression frequently used by Conchita] and the Child Jesus, have passed. I have ceased seeing them, but I have not stopped feeling their presence.

Once again, they have left my soul filled with peace and joy and a great desire to overcome my faults and to love with all my strength the Hearts of Jesus and Mary that love us so much. . . .

P.S. (This is something that I am affirming on my own—*Esto lo digo yo*.) There is no use believing in the apparitions, if we do not comply with the message, or rather, if we do not comply with what Holy Mother Church asks of us.

The miracle is going to take place so that we will fulfill the message and also to confirm these apparitions. However, if we fulfill the message, it doesn’t matter if we don’t believe in the apparitions.

It would seem that the kissed objects of Garabandal, like the various medals and scapulars, and the Lourdes and Fatima water, are in the nature of sacramentals. They are all, at least in the broad sense of the word, “blessed” objects or material things through which it pleases God to grant favors or graces, temporal and spiritual. To be sure, God does not need these things, but he has chosen to use them.

Sacramentals, with their undeniable benefits, have, like so many other things, come under the fire of criticism and have tended to be discredited in our day. Through the kissed objects of Garabandal, God was telling us to maintain our faith in sacramentals and not to neglect their use. God will always distribute his grace in a way that confounds the proud in the conceit of their heart. And he will do great things for the lowly who do not question his ways.

Message That of the Church

Bishop Eugenio Beitia, one of the former bishops of Sant-

ander, issued a decree on July 8, 1965, in which he refused to recognize the supernatural character of the apparitions at Garabandal. However, in that same decree, he acknowledged the doctrinal integrity of the Garabandal message:

We point out, however, that we have not found anything deserving of ecclesiastical censorship or condemnation either in the doctrine or in the spiritual recommendations that have been publicized as having been addressed to the faithful, for these contain an exhortation to prayer and sacrifice, to eucharistic devotion, to veneration of Our Lady in traditional praiseworthy ways, and to holy fear of God offended by our sins. They simply repeat the common doctrine of the Church in these matters.

Great Miracle Yet To Come

The Garabandal event is not yet over. Its climax will be a great miracle that shall convince everyone of the authenticity of Our Lady's visits to this remote Spanish mountain town. Conchita tells us about this in her *Diary*:

The Blessed Virgin advised me of a great miracle, saying that God, Our Lord, would perform it through her intercession. Just as the chastisement will be very, very great, in keeping with our deserts, so too, the miracle will be extremely great, in keeping with the needs of the world.

The Blessed Virgin has told me the date of the miracle and what it will consist of. I am supposed to announce it eight days in advance, so that people will come. The Pope will see it from wherever he is, and Padre Pio also. The sick who are present at the miracle will be cured and the sinners will be converted.

There will be no doubt in the mind of anyone who sees this great miracle which God, Our Lord, will perform through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin. And now as we await this great day of the miracle, let us see if the world changes and the chastisement is averted.

Padre Pio is reliably reported to have seen the miracle before he died. This should not astonish us, as we know that another person, Father Luis Andreu, S.J., also saw the miracle, as well as Our Lady, on August 8, 1961, six hours before he died. And Pope Pius XII saw the miracle of Fatima, the dancing sun, four times in the Vatican gardens thirty years after the original event took place in Portugal.

Conchita's manner of describing the greatness of the miracle is interesting. It "will be extremely great, in keeping with the needs of the world." Many feel that the world is in need of some great heavenly event to shake it up and bring it back to God. It should be noted that the chastisement is conditional. It can be averted "if the world changes."

Additional information concerning the miracle is given by Conchita in her report of a locution which she had with Our Lord on July 20, 1963. "Why is the miracle going to take place? To convert many people?", she asked Our Lord. "To convert the whole world," he answered. "Will Russia be converted?", she enquired. "Yes, she will be converted, and thus everyone—*todos*—will love our Hearts," he replied.

Conchita is the only one with whom the Blessed Virgin discussed the miracle. It will coincide with an event in the Church and with the feast of a saint who is a martyr of the Eucharist, and it will take place at eight-thirty on a Thursday evening. It will be visible not only to all those who are in the village but also to those in the surrounding mountains. It will be the greatest miracle that Jesus has performed for the world. There won't be the slightest doubt that it comes from God and that it is for the good of mankind. A sign of the miracle—*un señal del milagro*, which it will be possible to film or televise but not touch, will remain forever at the pines.

The Divine Warning

Conchita was advised by Our Lady at the pines on January 1, 1965 of a divine warning that would precede the great miracle. It will be seen and experienced by all men all over the world and will be a direct work of God. It will be very awesome. However, if men die from it, it will be only from the emotional shock of seeing it. It will take place before the miracle at a date unknown to Conchita and its purpose will be to give people a chance to amend their lives before that great heavenly sign.

Miracle of the Visible Host

A miracle to confirm the apparitions was requested by the girls early in the apparitions. One was given to them, one that Conchita called a "little miracle", *un milagruco*, using a diminutive proper to the Santander region. A visible Host

appeared suddenly and mysteriously on Conchita's tongue at one-forty in the morning on July 19, 1962. This precise miracle was announced fifteen days in advance by Conchita at the bidding of the archangel Saint Michael, who gave her the Communion. Many people were on hand for the event and one man, standing inches from Conchita, took pictures of it.

Sufficient Proof Already Given

Other unusual things, for which there is no human explanation, also took place along with the apparitions or visions. These, particularly taken all together, constitute a powerful argument in favor of the authenticity of the event.

The three calls or *llamadas* which preceded and announced Our Lady's coming, the ecstatic marches, oscillations and falls, the children's excessive weight to others and exceptional lightness to each other in ecstasy, their humanly unexplainable knowledge of what people totally unknown to them had done or were thinking, and the kissing of objects by Our Lady and the amazing way they were distributed to people during the apparitions, these are some of the humanly unexplainable phenomena encountered at Garabandal.

Conchita Like Lucia of Fatima

Of the four girls involved in the events at Garabandal, Conchita is by far the most important. Her leading role can be compared to that of Lucia at Fatima. Not only is she, like Lucia, God's main agent among the visionaries, but she, too, has given us an historical document that will have to stand as the basic core of any account of the Garabandal happenings. Lucia wrote her *Memoirs* and Conchita has written her *Diary*. Both documents are simple and unpretentious. *Conchita's Diary* was started in 1962 when she was 13 and concluded in the last part of 1963 when she was still only 14. This spiritual journal has a directness and lack of sophistication that give it a real ring of authenticity.

In the early days of the apparitions, Our Lady foretold that there would come a time of denials and contradictions on the part of the visionaries and their parents. These predictions have been fulfilled and have brought great moral suffering to all concerned and particularly to Conchita. Our Lady and Our Lord had told Conchita that she would have much to suffer for the world as part of her mission in life.

Garabandal Unique Event

Garabandal is unique in the history of Marian apparitions and this for a number of reasons. The number of apparitions, somewhere in the vicinity of two thousand, is amazing. The appearance and extensive use of a new means of heavenly communication not usually encountered along with apparitions having a public message, namely, the locution, sets it apart from Lourdes and Fatima. The span of time over which the apparitions (June 18, 1961 to November 13, 1965) and locutions (about April 1963 to February, 1966) occurred, is exceptional. The things announced for the future and yet to come—the warning, the great miracle and the permanent sign at the pines, and the conditional chastisement, are most unusual. The variety of the sites where the visions took place—in the church, at the door of the church, in homes, on various streets of the village, at the pines, is astonishing. The time at which they took place, literally at every hour of the day and night, is quite uncommon. The abundance of secondary or supporting mystical phenomena, such as the miracle of the visible Host, the *llamadas* or calls and the ecstatic marches and falls, is almost overwhelming. The trials of the visionaries, the difficulties and opposition that have accompanied the events almost continually are so unusual that there does not seem to be any natural explanation for them. The manner in which Garabandal has managed to overcome all obstacles and become more and more widely known and accepted, is another of the almost unbelievable happenings connected with it. Finally and most important of all, this spreading of the Garabandal message has been accompanied everywhere by an amazing explosion of grace manifested in cures, conversions and tremendous growth in love of God and of neighbor on the part of both those who disseminate the message and those who heed it.

The Church's Position on Garabandal

The diocesan authorities of Santander have repeatedly refused to acknowledge the divine origin of the apparitions of Garabandal. Rome, which can always overrule the local bishop where apparitions occur, has seen fit to leave the responsibility of the Garabandal event in the hands of the bishop of Santander. But, at the same time, Rome has made it clear that it

has always abstained from passing judgment on the heart of the matter, which is the supernatural character of the happenings at Garabandal. The door remains open then for Rome itself to eventually pass judgment, approving or condemning the apparitions.

There has been some concrete recent evidence to substantiate the position that Rome does not consider the apparitions of Garabandal a closed matter. Father José Ramón García de la Riva, pastor of Nuestra Señora de los Dolores, Barro (Llanes), Asturias, Spain, has stated that on May 21, 1971, he spoke with the Archbishop of Oviedo, who is his Ordinary, concerning the events of Garabandal. The reason for this interview was that the Holy See had asked the Archbishop for documents concerning Garabandal. Father de la Riva noted that "this was the first time he was ever officially called as a direct witness."

Father de la Riva offered his recent witnessing as proof of what he considered "false rumors to the effect that the Holy See had pronounced itself against Garabandal." He said that if the date of his May, 1971 interview were compared with other dates, "one would readily see that the Holy See has not yet closed the file on the Garabandal events."

In 1971, the Most Rev. José María Cirada (Lachiondo), bishop of Santander, was succeeded by the Most Rev. Juan Antonio del Val (Gallo), who comes from the area of Santander. As a priest of that diocese, he served on the Commission of investigation of the apparitions of Garabandal. He was personally present at one apparition at least.

As of October, 1975, Bishop del Val had not issued any official statement concerning the apparitions of Garabandal. A new climate now prevails in regard to them.

The Girls in 1975

Three girls have married: Mari Cruz, May, 1970 (Ignacio Caballero, Avilés, Spain—one boy, one girl), Conchita, May 26, 1973 (Patrick J. Keena, New York—two girls), and Mari Loli, February 2, 1974 (Francis Lafleur, Massachusetts—one girl). Jacinta, unmarried, lives at home.

Picture Story of the Apparitions



Eastern and central part of Garabandal as one enters from north by road from Cosio which ends in the village. 70 closely huddled homes and 300 people make up the pueblo. St. Michael's chapel, requested by Our Lady, in center between village and pines.



Girls at beginning of apparitions. L. to r. Loli, Jacinta, Maria Cruz and Conchita. Conchita's pigtails were cut at end of July, 1961, at Santander where she was called for questioning by diocesan authorities. House at upper left was Loli's home at time of apparitions and scene of a number of visions. House at right her present home.



Cross marks spot in *calleja* where all early apparitions, both of angel and of Our Lady, took place (June 18 through July, 1961). Some later ones occurred here, too. Blessed Virgin ordered girls to come here and say rosary, occasionally at 5 or 6 a.m. in winter. Penance was important part of Garabandal message.



The *cuadro* or corral erected in *calleja* at spot of early apparitions to protect the girls from spectators. Guardia Civil came from valley below. Note steep incline and loose stones. Girls in ecstasy came down here backward in dark at high speed and never slipped or fell.



Vision in the *quadro* (note fence pole) of the *calleja* in summer of 1961. All four girls were involved in early days of apparitions. Girls all hold a rosary which was recited during every apparition. Our Lady requested daily recitation of rosary. Pulse of two end girls is being taken. L. to r. Loli, Conchita, Jacinta and Maria Cruz.

Mood and expression of all four girls changed frequently and simultaneously, reflecting various degrees of seriousness, sadness and joy. This rules out possibility of hallucination, according to Dr. R. Puncernau, eminent neurologist from Barcelon, who examined girls several times in and out of ecstasy. He also holds that there is no natural explanation for all the phenomena taken together.

Dr. Celestino Ortiz, pediatrician from Santander, shown taking the pulse of Conchita in ecstasy. He spent some 50 days, at intervals, examining the girls. He, like Dr. Puncernau, maintain that the girls were healthy and normal in every way.





Successive phases of ecstatic march, Sept. 11, 1961, at 5 p.m. Loli, looking at vision, leaves Conchita's house followed by her father Ceferino. He accompanied her often. Seconds later, tempo of march increases.



Loli, only one in ecstasy, holds Conchita's left hand, Maria Cruz's right hand. Jacinta holds Maria Cruz's hand. Loli is in full ecstatic flight around corner of Conchita's house. Extended arms, inclined torso and sharply raised left leg indicate acceleration of her pace. Some marches were so fast spectators could hardly keep up with girls.



Loli, Conchita, Jacinta and Maria Cruz in ecstasy, holding rosaries and medals given to them by the people for kissing by Our Lady. She said her Son would perform "prodigies" through these objects she had kissed. Great bodily and spiritual graces have been received through them all over the world.



Reaching for Our Lady's kiss (same vision). A priest looks on. Some one thousand priests saw the girls in ecstasy. Many believed. Conchita's mother is at lower left. She attended most ecstasies.



Church of San Sebastian, focal point of apparitions. Visions sometimes began in church or under porch. Girls in ecstasy often entered church and prayed before Blessed Sacrament until this was banned by diocesan authorities. After ban, they walked in ecstasy around church, saying rosary and singing Hail Holy Queen, and they prayed at door. After each vision, girls generally went to church for "station" to Blessed Sacrament. Locutions (began, spring of 1963) often occurred in church. St. Michael brought girls Communion occasionally under church porch when it was not available otherwise.

Four girls, arm-in-arm in ecstasy, crossed narrow bridge in foreground: two end girls walked "on air."



At door of church, one visionary easily lifts other "to reach Our Lady." Girls in ecstasy were practically weightless to each other, but excessively heavy to others who tried to lift them.

Conchita receiving invisible but real Communion from St. Michael. Girls were prepared by angel for some time prior to first real Communion, and were taught to make adequate thanksgiving. Angel said he took Hosts from "tabernacles of the earth."



Photo of "the miracle of the visible Host." Picture taken by amateur with only pocket flashlight illumination. Conchita extended tongue and Host suddenly appeared, remaining visible for some two minutes. At Our Lady's request, miracle was announced 15 days in advance and large gathering was on hand. Close bystanders assured there was no fraud.

Are Apparitions Relevant Today?

In this age when everything is being examined with a critical eye, one has to ask the question: "Are apparitions a thing of the past or do they have a place in the Church today?" Are they relevant to our times? What is their meaning?

There is a vital bond between the divine manifestations of the Old Testament, the miracles of Christ, and the visitations of Mary that we call apparitions. To perceive this link of continuity is to see apparitions in their proper perspective.

In Marian apparitions, the past takes on new life and becomes present again. It is Cana all over again. Christ at the word of his Mother, healing the sick, giving the grace of repentance to sinners, leading the good to greater spiritual heights.

It is also the more remote past coming to life again. It is a reliving of the days of God's first marvels for his Chosen People, the prodigies performed in Old Testament times. It is a manifestation of that same power and fidelity that God showed when he led his people through the Red Sea, into the promised land, when he gave them victory at Jericho, brought them back from exile and provided them with the means of rebuilding the Temple. To use the words of Mary, which she herself borrowed from the Old Testament, it is "He who is mighty doing great things for his People, showing might with his arm, giving help to his People, mindful of his mercy."

Modern Marian apparitions, like the marvels of old and those performed by Christ, involve a personal intervention of God and it is this that gives them their religious meaning. The great hidden God, the mysterious God who is so patient and slow to act that he seems deaf or indifferent, suddenly comes alive at a particular place and time in history. He appears, he talks, he performs wondrous deeds. The means he takes does not matter. It may be the wind, a cloud, a column of fire, bread from heaven, water from a stone, a prophet, an angel, or Mary, the mother of God. But it is

always he, who through these things and persons, shows himself to us and talks to us.

The Basic Purpose Always the Same

God's old and new manifestations all have the same ultimate purpose, a reform of heart. They all involve a call to conversion. The call God made through Isaiah: "Turn to me and be saved" (45:22), and that was echoed all through the Old Testament, was repeated by John the Baptist (Mt. 3:2), and finally by Christ Himself (Mk 1:15). It is also the fundamental theme that underlies the messages of Lourdes, Fatima and Garabandal, and that is why all these messages have such an authentic ring to them. They are all a pressing invitation to a change of heart, to a personal spiritual renewal. "People must not offend God any more, for he is already greatly offended," were Our Lady's parting words at Fatima and those which Lucia says impressed her most of all. "Above all, we must lead good lives," or to translate literally, "we must be good—*tenemos que ser buenos*," was the basic recommendation at Garabandal. All the other parts of these Marian messages, such as praying and doing penance, visiting the Blessed Sacrament, are means of obtaining the grace that will help us purify our hearts and live holy lives.

Visions Nothing New

The very vehicle of God's modern manifestations to us have an antecedent in sacred history. Visions and apparitions are indeed nothing new in the history of the People of God. In the Old Testament, God at various times sent angels to deliver his messages to men. He sent an angel to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre and to Moses in the burning bush, etc. At the time of the coming of Christ, he sent an angel to Zacharias in the temple, then the archangel Gabriel to Mary, the virgin of Nazareth, and finally, an angel in dreams to Joseph, Mary's spouse. After the birth of Christ, angels were sent by God to the Apostles Peter and Paul to help them in their work for the Church. And now in our own days, God continues to send angels with his messages. He sent them at Fatima and at Garabandal. But the principal bearer of his messages in recent times is Mary, the Mother of Jesus. God is free to speak to us through whom he wills. The important thing to consider is not so much who carries the message, but who sent it.

Divine Directives at Times of Spiritual Crisis

To appreciate fully the message God gives the world through apparitions such as those of Lourdes, Fatima and Garabandal, it is important to be well acquainted with the condition of the church at the precise moment of history in which the message is imparted. For much of the significance of apparitions derives from the fact that they are divine commands telling us what to do at a particular moment in the history of the Church, usually a moment of spiritual crisis. They are not doctrinal revelations and they add nothing to the deposit of faith which was completed with the death of the last apostle. They are clear and precise directives (instruction, warning, exhortation to penance, recommendation of a particular devotion, etc.), usually expressed in simple terms and given by a benign God to guide his People in some period of spiritual need.¹

Apparitions Part of Charismatic Element of Church

Karl Rahner points out that man is moved much more readily and effectively by the divine intervention that we call apparitions than by an abstract message or statement of principle from astute theologians or the hierarchy of the Church. And God who knows man's heart and mind takes him as he is and has recourse to the means that are most productive. He speaks to him in times of crisis, when there is urgent need that he listen and respond, through the impressive and effective charismatic instrumentality of an apparition. It would seem that God speaks to us through apparitions when other means have failed. Apparitions are part of the charismatic element of the Church and as such represent a vital stirring of the Spirit for the growth and welfare of the People of God.

Message of Garabandal—Preventive Antidote

The message of Garabandal appears as a preventive antidote prepared for the faithful by a loving God in view of an important spiritual tempest about to break upon the Church. The apparitions started in the summer of 1961 whereas the storm over the Church only began to gather with the opening of the Ecumenical Council Vatican II in the fall of 1962. The storm developed and broke during the Council and has been increasing in fury ever since.

¹ See St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa*, 2a 2ae, q. 174, art. 6, ad 3um; Karl Rahner, *Visions and Prophecies*, pp. 108-109.

At Garabandal, God anticipated the trouble and gave us the remedy for it before it occurred. Mary, the rosary, the scapular and sacramentals, penance, reflection on the passion of Christ and on heaven and hell, sorrow for sins and conversion of life, visiting the Blessed Sacrament in our churches, prayer for priests, bishops, and cardinals on the verge of eternal damnation, respect for the authority of the Church, the existence of angels, and modesty, these are all parts of the Garabandal message and things that have come under attack in our day. Through the apparitions at Garabandal, God prepared us ahead of time for the tempest that would rock the boat of the Church. He knew that it would break with such fury that it would strike fear in the hearts of many. So he threw out the anchor to us in advance of its coming.

The messages of such apparitions do not include new doctrinal revelations. Yet, they are not completely dissociated from dogma and the deposit of faith which they often illustrate or confirm.

At Lourdes in 1858, God confirmed the dogma of the Immaculate Conception proclaimed four years earlier by Pius IX. Garabandal, like all Marian apparitions, is a confirmation of the Church's traditional teaching about Mary's power of intercession and her active role in our salvation. There are also doctrinal overtones in the Garabandal message concerning the priesthood, the Eucharist and other topics.

The Messages of Garabandal

It is very deceptive to speak of the message of Garabandal in the singular. There were two formal messages. The first was given by Our Lady on July 4, 1961, and announced publicly on October 18 of that year. The second was delivered in Our Lady's name by Saint Michael on June 18, 1965.

Also, the entire Garabandal event comprised some two thousand apparitions and some forty locutions. Messages of varying kinds were imparted on all these occasions. These might be called informal messages, but they were often important and definitely form part of the total Garabandal message.

In addition to these spoken messages, formal and informal, there were the messages which were conveyed through the persons, places and events involved in the various happenings

that form part of the entire Garabandal story. The presence of an angel, the prominent place given to Holy Communion, these and other facts have a meaning and a message for us.

The Message of October 18, 1961

We must make many sacrifices, perform much penance, and visit the Blessed Sacrament frequently.

But first, we must lead good lives.

If we do not, a chastisement will befall us.

The cup is already filling up and if we do not change, a very great chastisement will come upon us.

The Message of June 18, 1965

As my message of October 18 [1961] has not been complied with and has not been made known to the world, I am advising you that this is the last one.

Before, the cup was filling up. Now it is flowing over.

Many cardinals, many bishops and many priests¹ are on the road to perdition and are taking many souls with them.

Less and less importance is being given to the Eucharist.

You should turn the wrath of God away from yourselves by your efforts.

If you ask his forgiveness with sincere hearts, he will pardon you.

I, your Mother, through the intercession of Saint Michael the archangel, ask you to amend your lives.

You are now receiving the last warnings.

I love you very much and do not want your condemnation.

Pray to us with sincerity and we will grant your requests.

You should make more sacrifices. Think about the passion of Jesus.

¹ Many books carry a different and shorter text: "Many priests are on the road. . . ." These are not the exact words transmitted to Conchita during the apparition. Father Marcelino Andreu, S.J., brother of the famous Father Luis Andreu, S.J., stood at Conchita's left side during the June 18, 1965 apparition. He is now a missionary in Taiwan. In his Mission Letter #3 for his friends in the United States and Canada dated October 18, 1969, he states: "The message that was released to the public by Conchita was the third copy she wrote, which differs a little from the first two copies of the original message she wrote, which, given by Saint Michael, read as follows: 'Many cardinals, many bishops and many priests are' When Conchita was asked why she dropped 'cardinals and bishops,' her explanation was that cardinals and bishops are priests."

The Renewal of Private Prayer and the Rosary

Rosary Messages of Lourdes, Fatima and Garabandal

One of the first things that strikes anyone who studies Lourdes, Fatima and Garabandal is the strong emphasis placed by Our Lady on the rosary at all three places. It is the only specific prayer recommended at each of the three places by the Blessed Virgin herself.

A formal message of Garabandal was given twice, but neither message makes mention of the rosary. If the rosary was not explicitly mentioned in the formal message of Garabandal, it was clearly and powerfully taught in other ways.

Renewal of All Private or Vocal Prayer

At Garabandal, Our Lady was concerned with the renewal of all private or vocal prayer and not just with the renewal of the rosary. According to *Conchita's Diary*, the Blessed Virgin gave Maria Cruz a practical lesson on how to recite the Creed, the Hail Holy Queen and the Sign of the Cross on August 8, 1961.

When she [Maria Cruz] arrived at the altar of Our Lady of the Rosary and of the archangel Saint Michael, she started to say the Creed *very slowly* with the Blessed Virgin. Maria Cruz said that the Blessed Virgin took the lead and recited the prayer first, in order to teach her to pray *slowly*. After the Creed, she said the Hail Holy Queen and then she made the Sign of the Cross *very slowly* and *very properly*—*muy despacio, muy bien* (Emphasis added).

In the same *Diary*, Conchita tells us that ten days later, on August 18, Our Lady gave the same kind of practical lesson in prayer to the four girls together. This time the rosary was the object of her simple motherly instruction.

. . . The Blessed Virgin appeared to us again. The first thing she told us was to say the rosary. As, naturally, we never

took the lead in reciting it, she said to us: "I am going to pray first and you will follow me." And she recited the prayers *very slowly*—*muy lento*. She said "Holy Mary" and we repeated "Holy Mary." We prayed in that manner. When it was our turn to say: "Hail Mary" and the other parts of the rosary prayers, we said them very slowly. When we came to the Hail Holy Queen, she told us to sing it and we did. At the end of the rosary, she gave us a kiss and departed . . . (Emphasis added).

In April of 1969, Conchita was sent a series of questions, several of which dealt with the rosary. One of them was the following: "Did Our Lady continue to say the rosary with the girls in ecstasy, even after they had learned to say it the way she wanted?" Conchita's reply: "After the first day, she no longer recited it. But when the time came for the Gloria, she indicated it to us by bowing her head."

Our Lady Commands Recitation of Rosary

Still other questions brought out the additional information that at each apparition Our Lady "commanded" the girls to recite the rosary, a thing they "always" did.

It was also learned through this same source that although the Blessed Virgin never preached or "talked about" the rosary to the girls, she "demanded that it be recited each day—*mando rezarle diariamente*."

From all these various remarks it is easy to understand how Conchita could say in reply to another question asked in April, 1969: "Yes, the rosary is a very important part of the Blessed Virgin's message."

Other Private Prayers Recommended

In speaking of the private prayer message of Garabandal, it should also be mentioned that Our Lady recommended visits to the Blessed Sacrament. This, like the general recommendation "to be good" and the need to pray for priests, is something that she came back on very often in her visits with the girls. She also requested that we "think of the passion," which is quite interesting for we border here on a higher form of prayer than simple vocal prayer, namely, meditation. It is significant that Our Lady used the word "think" and not meditate. She evidently wanted to reach as many souls as possible and did not want to frighten any one with the

word “meditate” which, for most people, has mysterious and sophisticated connotations. She was inviting us to reflect on or to think about the passion, something that everyone can do.

Deliberate Recitation

It is important to return now to Our Lady’s specific recommendations regarding the manner of saying vocal prayers. The Blessed Virgin was really trying to tell us some very important things in her simple instructions to the girls.

Not only do we know the precise pedagogical procedure used by Our Lady in teaching the children how to say the rosary and other vocal prayers—leading them herself, pronouncing a few words at a time, then having the children repeat these after her—but we know the end product. Tape recordings were made of these prayers at Garabandal during the apparitions. There is one recording of Jacinta reciting the rosary and the act of contrition in ecstasy and of Conchita saying the rosary in ecstasy. These are samples of the finished product, so to speak, of Our Lady’s instructions to the children regarding the recitation of vocal prayers.

It is very apparent from this tape that the Blessed Virgin taught the girls two things: pronounce each word of the vocal prayers very slowly and distinctly, and make a distinct and perceptible pause after each meaningful group of words.

Here is a detailed description of the first part of the Hail Mary as recited by Jacinta and Conchita in ecstasy according to the tape mentioned above. The second part of the prayer is answered by the spectators present at the apparition. It takes the girls from 20 to 24 seconds to say from the first words “Hail Mary” to the last ones “womb, Jesus,” and there are six clearly marked pauses between various short groupings of words. Translated into English, the Spanish tape comes through approximately as follows: “H-a-i-l M-a-r-y . . . f-u-l-l o-f g-r-a-c-e . . . t-h-e L-o-r-d i-s w-i-t-h t-h-e-e . . . b-l-e-s-s-e-d a-r-t t-h-o-u . . . a-m-o-n-g w-o-m-e-n . . . a-n-d b-l-e-s-s-e-d i-s t-h-e f-r-u-i-t . . . o-f t-h-y w-o-m-b J-e-s-u-s.

The purpose of this detailed description of the tape recording is not to give an example for slavish imitation. Our Lady is not concerned with any definite amount of time, any counting of seconds. She was not trying to set down an absolute and

unchangeable time pattern that everyone should necessarily follow. She was simply trying to tell us that we have to slow down the recitation of our vocal prayers, slow it down enough so that we can make it really meaningful. That is the whole reason behind the deliberateness.

Three Elements in Prayer—Role of the Will

For practical purposes we can distinguish three things in prayer; the will to pray, the use of our mind, and of our heart. The will to pray is the most important element. If it is there, our prayer will always have some value, no matter how far our mind may stray or how dry our heart may be. Willful, deliberately entertained distractions, are, of course, another thing. They do, in varying degrees, weaken or nullify our will to pray. But, if we want to pray, and actually try to pray, no matter how far our mind and heart may seem to be from God, no matter how poorly we may seem to succeed, we are truly praying and our prayer is acceptable to God. In a real sense, it is our desire and effort to pray that counts with God. It is not the fancy words that we use, or the glow and good feeling that may accompany our efforts that impress and please God. These impress and please us, not him.

Thinking—Role of the Mind

Our vocal prayers should also involve thinking. The thinking can be about God, Jesus, Mary, or the words of the prayers we are saying, or the mysteries of the rosary, if we are reciting that prayer. But there must be some thinking, some working of our mind as we pray, not just an empty motion of our lips. This is not to say that we must meditate as we pray. Thinking can and frequently will lead to meditation, but it is not quite the same thing. We can all think, but many of us experience difficulty in meditating in the full sense of that word. Meditation implies a certain development of a thought, a pursuing of a thought. Many people find it hard to stay with a thought for any length of time, long enough to really meditate, and yet they can put thought into their prayer. They can use their minds in a simple and spontaneous way. But not if they are pouring out words at a rapid pace. A considerable degree of slowness is required in saying the words if the mind is to have time to function, even in a simple way.

Thinking about What We Are Saying

To get us to put our minds to work or to “think” as we recite the rosary was definitely one of Our Lady’s concerns at Garabandal. This is clearly stated by Conchita in answers she gave during October, 1969, to questions sent to her concerning the rosary. The first question was: “Did The Blessed Virgin speak of the meditation of the mysteries of the rosary? Her answer: “The Blessed Virgin spoke of meditating on the rosary, that is, of thinking about what we were saying—*pensar en lo que rezabamos*. However, she did not say anything in particular about the mysteries.” The other follow-up question was: “What did she say of the mysteries of the rosary?” Her reply: “Nothing.”

What Our Lady sought specifically then was that we think about the prayers we are reciting, that we reflect upon the words we are pronouncing. This is an informal sort of meditation. It is not what is usually referred to as meditation on the mysteries. Conchita is quite clear on that point. The Blessed Virgin just did not bring up the matter of meditation on the mysteries. This, of course, does not mean that she does not favor it. Meditation on the mysteries is, indeed, a part of the Fatima First Saturday Devotions. She was attempting to reach the broadest possible number of souls and did not want to propose a form of prayer that would be beyond the reach of some and that could easily discourage many others.

We have the striking example of the visionary of Lourdes. Bernadette experienced difficulty in her prayer life in the convent. She was never able to become proficient in meditating. The prayer by which she sanctified herself as a nun was the simple rosary recited with recollection and love.

Acts of Love—Role of the Heart

What is said of the use of the mind applies to the heart. Our hearts, sentiments of love, must enter into our prayers. These normally flow from our thoughts. Thinking about God, Jesus, or Mary provokes sentiments of love for them. But the love will not come into speedily recited prayers, prayers that are only a rapid-fire rattling off of words.

Loving God is more important than thinking about God. So, too, in prayer, the part of the heart and of love is more important than that of the mind and of thinking. This is con-

soling and encouraging. There are many times, days of great fatigue, of illness, of emotional stress of all kinds, when it is impossible to think or even to keep one's mind for any time on a given topic. On these occasions, the heart can take over and fill the gap created by the practical temporary incapability or sluggishness of the mind. It will suffice to vaguely unite one's heart, to simply direct one's affections to Jesus or Mary. Here again, the slow, deliberate recitation of the vocal prayers will soothe the soul and dispose it to this fruitful prayer of affective union with Christ and his Blessed Mother.

Our frustrations in prayer, which lead to its partial or total abandonment, come in great part from the fact that we do not put our mind and heart in it. Prayer in which the mind and heart do not participate is a dehumanized prayer which cannot possibly satisfy us. Because of the struggle between the spirit and the flesh, prayer will never be very easy. But it should be a meaningful and rewarding experience. And it will be if we put our mind and our heart in it.

Vital Importance of the Pause

Let us take a closer look at the precise form of deliberate prayer revealed in the tapes mentioned above. Two things were noted: a very slow pronunciation of the words and a considerable pause between groups of words. Both factors are important and contribute together toward a total tempo of prayer that is conducive to thinking and to loving God.

The pause, the complete stop between the various short groups of words, is a key factor. It sets the rhythm and helps to maintain a steady slow pace. It works as a check or brake on the natural tendency that we have to speed up prayers that are repeated continually, day after day, even when they are properly pronounced.

It is especially the pause that fosters thinking and acts of love. It can be lengthened at will, as the Holy Spirit illumines our minds and invites us to dwell lovingly on certain words or thoughts. Following the impulse of his grace in our purely private recitation of the rosary is important. In group prayer, of course, a steady pace must be maintained and this cannot be too slow. But when we are alone, we shall never pray too slowly. It is much better to say one decade in a truly leisurely way, with our mind and heart really in it, than to say the

full five decades at a rate of speed that allows no time for their participation.

The importance of a distinct pause or clear break in the recitation of vocal prayers cannot be stressed too much. The real success of Our Lady's formula for private prayer and the rosary depends upon it. A deliberate pronunciation of each word does not suffice, nor does a simple slowing down between groups of words. There must be an appreciable pause, a noticeable break after every few words, the exact grouping of these words not mattering that much and depending on personal preference.

Thanks to the Holy Spirit, a continual newness and freshness will be discovered in the rosary's rich, meaningful words which tired us so when we ran through them in the past. Thanks also to the promptings of the same Spirit, sentiments of love will easily well up in our hearts. Holy resolves will follow. At this point, the rosary has become a true prayer because it has led to meaningful communication with God.

Need of a New Attitude—Seeking Contact with God

It would seem that we need to reform our basic attitude on vocal prayer. This prayer should not be thought of in terms of acquitting an obligation, of saying a prescribed number of formulas. What we should have in mind when we engage in it is that we are attempting to enter into dialogue with God, to establish a truly personal relationship with him, to get through to him. Praying and saying prayers are not necessarily the same thing. We can say prayers without really praying. As we start our prayer, our attitude should not be: "I am going to recite so many prayers, so many Hail Marys and Our Fathers, and when I have said the number I set for myself, I shall have prayed." Rather, it should be: "I want to enter into contact with the most wonderful being that exists. I want to talk to him (or to Jesus or Mary), person to person. To help me, I shall use certain rich, meaningful prayers that will serve as a starting point, a launching pad for getting to them. My purpose is not to do a thing, but to reach God, to establish a living contact with him."

Quality rather than Quantity

In this regard it might be helpful to build our prayer life around the concept of time rather than of quantity. Determine

how much time we want to give to prayer each day—for there should be some prayer each day, though not necessarily in the morning or in the evening—and forget the matter of how many prayers we shall say. Put the accent on quality rather than quantity by leaving the number of prayers completely open, a thing that will vary each day according to the inspiration of the Spirit.

Most of us are driven principally by considerations of quantity. We feel that we should say certain prayers, a definite number of prayers, the entire rosary, for example. And we feel that if we have recited the prescribed quantity which we have determined for ourselves, all is well. We are so convinced of the prime importance of quantity, that we rush through these prayers with little concern for their quality. The thing that counts is to get them said. How we do this—in practice, if not in theory—is not that important.

It would be so much better to say that we shall pray for so many minutes each day and not worry about the number of prayers we fit into that period. So, too, for the rosary. It would be preferable to allot an amount of time for it and to say as many decades as a deliberate, thoughtful and loving recitation will allow.

There is a grave danger that menaces those who say the rosary frequently. They come easily to a point where they rush through it because they have unconsciously developed a “getting it in” attitude that is strongly tinged with formalism and legalism. They become more concerned with the resolution than with the prayer, with keeping their word than with communicating with God. They race through the prayer and almost sigh with relief when it is over. Hardly a real prayer!

Saint Theresa Used This Method

The saints have always sensed the need for deliberate, meaningful and loving prayer. Saint Theresa of Lisieux, the Little Flower, has a most interesting section in her autobiography, *The Story of a Soul*, that illustrates the principle that Our Lady was attempting to teach us at Garabandal.

I find the recitation of the rosary harder than putting on a hair shirt. I feel that I say it so badly! Try as I will to meditate on the mysteries of the rosary, I just can't keep my mind on them. . . . Sometimes, when I am in such a

state of spiritual dryness that I can't draw a thought from my mind which will unite me with God, I recite an Our Father and a Hail Mary *very slowly*. Then these prayers enchant me and nourish my soul much more than if I had recited them hurriedly a hundred times. (The emphasis is Saint Theresa's.)

We, too, would do better to say one or two decades of the rosary very slowly, "à la Garabandal," rather than race through the whole rosary!

Flexibility Desirable

Saint Theresa's remarks raise the question of some possible flexibility in the recitation of the rosary. Each person should attempt to find the precise formula of private prayer that best suits him, that is, the one best tailored to his particular needs, which is not the same, of course, as his whims and fancy. For example, a person who is very nervous, or sick or weak, or who for any reason finds it difficult to pray for a sustained period of time, will undoubtedly pray the rosary more fruitfully by dividing it up and reciting it a decade or two at a time, and he should not hesitate to do this.

Choosing a Time to Pray

Also, it is very important to determine and set aside the moments of the day or the evening that experience has shown to be most appealing and most conducive to devout prayer.

We must recognize the fact that there are moments in the day when we are so preoccupied or tired that we don't feel like praying and simply cannot pray well. For most of us, if we wait until the very end of the day, we find ourselves so tired and eager to get into bed that we are just not in a suitable frame of mind to pray, let alone pray slowly and deliberately. Lack of discernment and proper planning is one of the major reasons why so many people pray poorly, fail to devote sufficient time to private prayer, and eventually come to abandon it almost completely.

With good will and a little experimentation we shall come to discover a definite period of time each day when we find it relatively easy to pray and to pray well. This we should reserve for God and defend jealously. This is the precious pearl in comparison to which nothing else has value and for

which we should be willing to sell all else. This is the leaven that will raise and transform our lives, giving them direction and meaning and bringing us peace and joy.

The Need of Private Prayer in Our Daily Lives

There are still some other broad and important lessons to be drawn, not from Garabandal alone but from Lourdes and Fatima as well.

First, as the rosary is a form of private prayer and was recommended at all three places, it would seem legitimate to conclude that Our Lady was trying to tell us through the striking medium of heavenly visions that we should put private, personal prayer into our daily lives.

Somehow we continually need to be reminded—and occasionally in a dramatic way through apparitions—that we must “pray always.” For our truest posture in the face of God our Father, is that of children with outstretched hands.

The girls recited the rosary as they walked in ecstasy to the pines, to the cemetery, around the church, through the village streets, and when visiting the sick in their homes. This can be seen as an invitation to us to say the rosary as we walk about, wait for a bus, drive our car, etc. As so often happened at Garabandal, Our Lady taught us through the actions of the girls in ecstasy as much as through her verbal exhortations.

When we do not have time to say the rosary, or even a decade, we can still discover many moments each day when it is easy to recite one or more deliberate Our Fathers or Hail Marys, for example, while shaving or putting on makeup, while walking from one room or office to another, while doing any number of simple actions that do not absorb our mind and leave it free to “think about what we are saying.” By spacing prayer in this way throughout our day, we will create a mentality or habit of prayer and recollection that will be most helpful and rewarding.

The Power of the Rosary—Good Pope John

Also, since the private prayer most strongly recommended at Lourdes, Fatima and Garabandal was the rosary, it is quite evident that the Blessed Virgin was reminding us of her unique power of intercession among the saints. She was trying to tell us that we need the help that this power can provide and she was inviting us to have recourse to it.

Good Pope John, who called Vatican II, was a man who believed with his whole heart in the power of the rosary and who through that prayer was drawn to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. There is hardly a page in his spiritual diary, *Journal of a Soul*, that does not speak of Mary. The two great devotions of his life that stand out in this document are the rosary and the Eucharist, and the Eucharist in its full dimension of Mass or sacrificial banquet and Divine Presence in the tabernacle. He states explicitly in the *Journal* that one of the great consolations of his life is the fact that he has always been faithful to the daily rosary. As Bishop and later as Pope, he recited the rosary each evening with his entire household staff of laity, priests, and nuns. When he was named Cardinal Patriarch of Venice with pastoral responsibilities for souls he felt the need for more prayer and resolved "to recite all fifteen decades of the rosary every day, if possible in the chapel before the Blessed Sacrament" (p. 23).

"The rosary is a very important part of Our Lady's [Garabandal] message," Conchita has said. It is important because of the treasures of grace that it will unlock for us. It is important also as a means of keeping our devotion to Mary alive and effective. Without it, or some other adequate substitute, she will soon fade from our minds and from our hearts. Devotion to her cannot survive in a vacuum. It must be sustained and nurtured by prayer. That, too, is one of the things Mary was implying at Garabandal when she ordered the girls to say the rosary every day.

There was great insistence at Garabandal on the Eucharist and particular stress was placed on visiting Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. It is in the village church that the people of Garabandal gather each day to say the rosary. Isn't Our Lord also trying to tell us something through this fact? Aren't our churches the place where we should attempt to say the rosary as often as we can?

The Message in a Nutshell

God Speaks to Us — The message of Garabandal is the important thing. To capture our attention, God sent this message through the exciting medium of “apparitions.” He sent the Mother of Jesus, as he had sent the prophets of old, to speak in his name.

Leading Good Lives — The message is not new. It is the gospel message applied to our times. Its main theme, which re-echoes the Old and New Testament, is our need for a conversion of heart; we must ask forgiveness for our sins and lead good lives.

Penance and the Passion — The principal means proposed to help us become a holy people are the Old and New Testament means of prayer and penance. Great stress was placed on these. We were told to make many sacrifices, to perform much penance and to think about the passion of Jesus. Reflection on the passion will inspire us to do penance and make sacrifices.

Prayer and the Rosary — Prayer, a renewed and meaningful prayer, was urged. One prayer, the rosary, was unfailingly recommended every time Our Lady appeared and its recitation was made a part of each of her visits.

The Eucharist and the Priest — The Eucharist, the great New Testament means of holiness, figured prominently in the message. Holy Communion and visiting the Blessed Sacrament were the object of particular attention. The priest, the very special man appointed by God to lead his People to holiness, was constantly mentioned. Though Marian in its context, the main thrust of the Garabandal event is eucharistic and sacerdotal.

Mary Our Mother, the Scapular and “Kissed Objects” — Presiding over the entire event in God’s name and fulfilling the motherly function given to her by Jesus at the foot of the cross, was Mary. She invited us to wear the brown scapular of Mount Carmel as the symbolic mantle of her protection and she left us “kissed objects” as helpful sacramentals, that is, as perpetual reminders of her motherly love and of the power of her intercession with her divine Son.

And Other Things — Obedience to the Church, modesty, belief in the angels and their power to help us and recourse to Saint Michael against the devil, were other things that Our Lady recommended to us at this time of confusion and disbelief in the Church.

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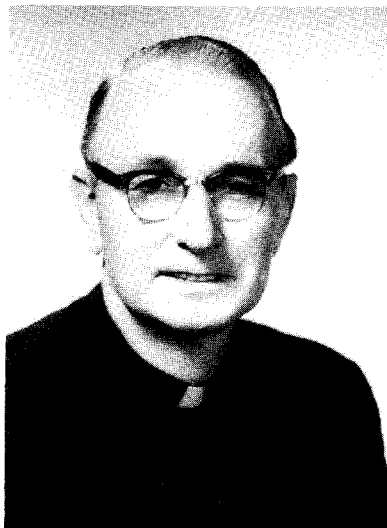
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Father Joseph A. Pelletier received a Baccalaureate and Licentiate in Sacred Theology from the Pontifical Institute Angelicum (Rome) in 1937. He then returned to his alma mater, Assumption College, Worcester, Massachusetts, where he taught social sciences and religion for ten years. A Master's degree in Sociology was obtained from Boston College in 1947. For the past twenty years he has served on the administrative staff of Assumption College.

His avocation as a writer began with his book *The Sun Danced at Fatima* published in 1951. An immediate success, the book went through five printings (35,000 copies) in a year-and-a-half and was translated into French. It was followed in 1954 by *Fatima Hope of the World*. These books gained for Father Pelletier a world-wide reputation as an authority on Fatima.

Father Pelletier continued his apostolate of the word through frequent lectures and religious articles in American and Canadian Catholic monthlies.

He is now dedicating his pen to the appearances of Our Lady and the other extraordinary phenomena that occurred over a four-and-a-half year span (June 1961 to February, 1966) at the Spanish mountain village of San Sebastian de Garabandal. His works on this subject are characterized by the same scholarly approach—painstaking research and scrupulous reliance on authentic documents—and by the same easy, limpid style that marked his books on Fatima and his other writings.

His introductory piece, an illustrated flyer entitled *The Apparitions of Our Lady at Garabandal*, has already been highly acclaimed. The present pamphlet *Garabandal Prayer and the Rosary* was quickly followed by a first book dealing principally with the message and entitled *God Speaks at Garabandal*. A second book *Our Lady Comes to Garabandal*, stressing the story of the apparitions, is expected to appear late in 1970.

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