



The Path to Holiness of Fatima's Saints

In her apparition to the children of Fatima on 13 June 1917, Our Lady told them she would come to take Francisco and Jacinta to heaven soon. Francisco was first; he died on 4 April 1919, one of twenty million victims of the worldwide influenza epidemic at the close of World War I. Jacinta was another; the same sickness took her life on 20 February 1920.

Francisco viewed his illness as a God-given opportunity to offer continual sacrifice for sinners, as the Lady dressed in white had encouraged them to do. In his ninth year, her apparitions had awakened in him a strong desire for solitude and prayer. Tending the sheep with Jacinta and Lucia before he got ill, he would often go apart from them to think over what the Lady had told them and to pray as she had asked. He soon became quite devoted to the rosary and ran its beads through his fingers continuously. As the influenza took its toll on his strength, he was seen to walk very slowly on the way to school for fear that headache pain might cause him to fall. But he refused to stay home. Instead, while the others went on to school, Francisco stopped at the church and stayed to pray before the tabernacle for the intentions people



Lúcia Santos (*left*) with
her cousins Jacinta and
Francisco Marto, 1917

entrusted to him. He lived his final months with a view to his upcoming death. When it came, his last words were these: "Mother, look at that lovely light by the door!"

Like her brother, seven-year-old Jacinta willingly accepted the Lady's invitation to suffer for sinners. And people gave her occasions aplenty to do so: skeptics mocked her; neighbors insulted her as a liar and a fraud. As her fame spread beyond Fatima, an exhaustingly long line of visitors came to interrogate her, including priests who disbelieved her account of the apparitions. With patience beyond her years, the little girl uncomplainingly paid the price of unsought notoriety.

Jacinta contracted influenza in October 1918, before Francisco did, but she outlived

him by nearly a year. During that time Our Lady appeared to her repeatedly to prepare her for the ordeal she willingly accepted to undergo for the conversion of sinners. Thus did Jacinta learn in advance of her forthcoming hospitalizations—the first for two months in nearby Ourem to treat bronchial pneumonia and an abscess; the second for tuberculosis in a hospital too far away to visit the little visionary whose greatest fear was being left by herself. As she told Lucia, Our Lady revealed “that I am going to Lisbon, . . . that I will not see you again, nor my parents either, and after suffering a great deal, I shall die alone.” And so it happened.

In the short lives of St. Francisco and St. Jacinta we who have lived longer can find much to take to heart in imitation. The Lady clothed in white showed them how to make a gift of their dying so that those dead in sin might come to life in her Son. If we follow the path of their child-like confidence in the Mother of God, perhaps she will lead us to do the same.