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On the Way to Salvation

Those who believe in Garabandal, accepting the series of events that occurred there as coming from God through the Blessed Mother, will consider Garabandal as a new Mystery of Salvation.

Or rather a new and exceptional manifestation of the great Mystery of Salvation.

That this is *new* and *exceptional* seems obvious; but not everyone fully understands the meaning of *The History of Salvation*. What does this expression mean?

The long process of divine intervention on behalf of a creature so honored by Him as the human being—to pull him away from the harmful situation in which he has fallen and to place him on the right road toward his final goal—constitutes the *History of Salvation*.

It is not a history easy to understand. To comprehend it in its true dimension and meaning it is not enough to have high intelligence and a capability for good judgment, since the information that comes forth can be just as confusing as it is clear. And so our way through it is always between the light and the darkness: light that is sometimes marvelously bright, and darkness sometimes the blackest. Likewise in going through the History of Salvation we continually encounter the Mystery of God. And once more we find here the certain and enlightening truth of Scripture, **My ways are not your ways, nor My thoughts your thoughts, as the sky is above the earth, so . . .**

The History or Mystery of Salvation has its *official* chapters that give the theme or the key to understanding the material, and which make up the Bible, the only writing known and approved with complete authority. But there also have come out, and continue to come out, complementary chapters. Without these, the official writings of the Sacred Scripture would be very difficult for most people to understand, and consequently the march of history would fail to make place or come alive for them.

We can consider what has been written — in lines not always clear or straight — by the *events* of Garabandal as one of these complementary chapters of the last times.

Did not official revelation close with the death of the last apostle, John? While this is true, the history of salvation did not conclude with it, and the march of this mystery continues involving all people **for the rise or for the fall** (Luke 2: 34) **even until the consummation comes.** (Matt. 13: 39-49; 24: 29-31) Just as God has intervened by actions and words of salvation from the beginning, so He will intervene until the end; through Himself, or through others; through

His *prophets*, through His own Son,⁽¹⁾ through the Blessed Mother . . . **I will be with you all days even until the end of time.** (Matt 28: 20)

It is the Blessed Mother whom He has sent to act at Garabandal, especially in the early times that we are now describing. But it appears immediately clear that her action — it could not be otherwise — is immersed in the general dynamics of **salvation which comes to us from God.** (Luke 1: 77-79) We are facing a new manifestation of the great mystery of salvation that He has shown from the beginning to aid His human creatures.

The Mother of God and all mankind has appeared again among us to repeat one more time in her own name and on behalf of Him Who sent her, *Salus populi, ego sum; de quacumque tribulatione clamaverint ad me, ego exaudiam* — *I am the salvation of the people, in whatever tribulation they call out to me I will hear them.* (Introit of the votive mass "Pro quacumque necessitate")

* * *

News of the events soon began to spread out into the surrounding areas, and many who were undergoing trials went with them to Garabandal . . . I have no evidence that the Virgin performed any obvious *miracle* at the time to free those coming for aid from physical or material tribulation. But there are innumerable persons who give revealing testimony that they have not come to her in vain, and that she certainly *heard*.

There were many mysterious answers given by the Virgin to questions arising from those tortured in the most hidden areas of their conscience.⁽²⁾ And

1. Beginning of the epistle to the Hebrews.

2. One example among a thousand:

The Talavera brothers, who own a hairdressing salon in Astillero (Santander), tell with full knowledge of the matter about what happened to a man from Aguilar de Campoo.

He had gone up to Garabandal during the summer of 1961. While seeing Conchita in ecstasy, he had mentally petitioned the Virgin for an answer to something that was really bothering him . . . The ecstasy ended, and none of the girls came to give him any message. Somewhat hurt, he returned home.

A month passed and he again felt the desire of visiting Garabandal. There he was able to witness an ecstasy of Mari Loli that affected him. After the trance, the man had lost himself among the anonymous spectators (he did not know any of the visionaries personally) when the girl went up to him, and told him *on behalf of the Virgin* words which were the exact response to what he had requested a month earlier, only mentally, and in front of another girl! This man was ready to swear that he absolutely had not spoken with anyone about his most secret petition.

The Virgin was coming to assist, not to entertain. On the 31st of August, among the many things that the girls were told to ask the Virgin, one was whether it was good for the people to ask questions . . . She answered yes, but that she was not going to answer pointless questions. On more than one occasion, questions of this type were made by people without understanding and without good intentions.

what peace, consolation of soul,⁽³⁾ and security went out toward the countless participants of those almost daily ecstasies that some considered an excess that could not be justified, or ridiculed as a *game* that could not be accepted as coming from God. Those who desired to approach God with simplicity of heart (Wisdom 1: 1) found at Garabandal what they sought.

I now wish to insert a very unusual case. It occurred in the early days of September, 1961. Fr. Andreu was in Ceferino's tavern and store when a priest in a foul mood entered brusquely and made his way toward him aggressively.

— *Tell me, Are you Fr. Andreu?*

— *At your service.*

— *Well, I am coming to tell you that I don't like this.*

— *No one can know better than you what you don't like . . . Nevertheless, I appreciate the information . . . Have you been here long?*

— *Ten minutes.*

— *Man. I have been here four weeks, and still haven't come to see everything clearly . . . And you . . . in ten minutes . . .*

This was a priest from Asturias, strong, built like a truck driver. To get out from under this, since he saw right away that *he was getting very irritated*, Fr. Andreu called Dr. Ortiz of Santander who was passing by and said to him,

3. Fr. José Ramón García de la Riva, who personally experienced many of the little wonders of Garabandal, mentions in his *Memorias*:

«One day I placed a white metal crucifix on the little table where Loli had arranged the articles to present to the Virgin. Since she couldn't see this, she sought all day to know the owner. She questioned one of my friends about this . . .

During the night I was seated in Conchita's kitchen when Loli came in ecstasy, accompanied by her father and other people. She knelt down, presented the crucifix she held in her hand to be kissed, and stayed quietly in front of me. She wanted to give me something, but because of my near-sightedness and being more intent on her face than her hands, I didn't notice it until Ceferino said to me, *Look, she's giving you a crucifix*. It was one of the most thrilling moments of my life! It was the metal crucifix that I had left in her house in the morning, without her seeing it, and which had so intrigued her throughout the day.»

Listen, Dr. Ortiz, this priest here is very interested in this. And since you are an intellectual, you can explain it to him.

Dr. Ortiz took the priest with him.

Ten minutes later the priest returned. But this time his attitude was completely different. He was pallid, trembling; not the same man.

— *Fr. Andreu, Fr. Andreu. It's for real! I'm convinced.*

— *Listen, Let's slow down. Ten minutes ago you didn't like it at all. And now you are already convinced? Doesn't it seem that you're going too fast?*

— *See for yourself what has happened to me. I was walking over there with Dr. Ortiz when we came upon one of the girls named Jacinta in ecstasy. She came up to me and made the sign of the cross over me; and there was a short man at my side, and she made the sign of the cross over him too. And then she gave me a cross to kiss, and she also gave it to the short man. Then she made the sign of the cross over me again, and did the same to the little man. During this I thought, "If it is true that it is the Virgin who is appearing, then let the ecstasy end." At that very instant the girl lowered her head and looked at me entirely normal!*

This left me breathless, and I said to her:

— *Aren't you seeing the Virgin?*

— *No, señor.*

— *Why is that?*

— *Because she has gone away!*

Then the girl turned around and walked away. She couldn't have taken four steps when she fell into ecstasy again, and came toward us another time. She made the sign of the cross over me, and then the sign of the cross over the short man; and she gave me the cross to kiss, and she gave it to the little man to kiss . . .



Peace came to tormented consciences as the seer presented the cross to be kissed.

— *Listen, Listen.* Fr. Andreu interrupted him. *Let me know who that short man is, for it seems to me that the really important one in this case is the little man and not you.*

And so it actually was, as was soon revealed.

That *short man* was a parish priest from one of the villages.

For some time he had been terribly tormented by great doubts about his priestly ordination: whether or not he had a clear and explicit will to be ordained; and whether as a consequence, his ordination was valid or not; and thus, whether he would be exercising improperly and without effect his priestly functions. Only God could know what the man had been suffering because of these scruples.

When he heard talk of Garabandal and of the *marvels* that were happening there, he thought that he might be able to find a way out of his dark tunnel.

As soon as he could, he went to the celebrated

village. But before arriving there, he disguised himself carefully. (At that time it was very unusual for a priest or religious to take off his cassock or his habit without serious reason.) He had so carefully disguised himself that Fr. Andreu said, *There was no way to suspect even remotely the presence of a priest there; his outfit was the strangest that could be imagined.*

It was an initial and consoling response to the priest's interior doubts that the girl was so definitely repeating on him everything that she had done previously to the priest who was at his side . . . But that was not enough. What can immediately settle a scrupulous conscience! After the first joy, spiritual confusion returned, and he thought, *I cannot leave like this; I need more proof.*

He found a place in a stable to pass the night and hoped to see if on the following day he would obtain the absolutely convincing proofs that he needed so much.

The new day came and the poor man did not



The visionary answered unspoken questions by making the sign of the cross with the crucifix.

have to wait for nightfall, as would ordinarily be the case. Already in the morning there was an important ecstasy; many persons were gathering for the celestial visit, and our little man naturally was in the front row.

When the girl in ecstasy began to hold out the crucifix to be kissed, the people rapidly formed a line along her path so that the girl could do it easier. The little man positioned himself like everyone else in the middle of the line, and from there observed with what celestial grace the visionary offered the crucifix, and with what feeling those lined up were coming to kiss it, one after the other . . . But he did not content himself with observing; his mind was working, and he formed this idea: *If I am truly a priest, instead of giving me the crucifix to kiss like the others, let the girl come and make the sign of the cross over me with it.*

Then the girl came up to the police chief who was so well disposed to the cause of Garabandal. She stopped in front of him, smiled, and without looking at him — actually she looked at no one, since during the ecstasy she held her face turned sharply

upwards — she slowly made the sign of the cross over him. Then she continued her way down the line, presenting the crucifix to be kissed . . . She came in front of the little man, and she made the sign of the cross over him! The answer seemed very clear; but . . .

The man was hard to satisfy. He did not hesitate to think, *This isn't enough since she made the sign of the cross over the police chief too, and the police chief isn't a priest. If instead of this she would have given the crucifix to everyone without exception to kiss, and on me — only on me — she would have made the sign of the cross three times, then there definitely would have been no doubt.*

He had not finished thinking this when the girl interrupted her path and made her way back to the beginning of the line, to once more begin holding up the crucifix to be kissed . . . She came again in front of the police chief, and she must have heard something from the Vision, since she was heard to ask, *What?* Following a brief pause, she smiled, and gave the holy image to him to kiss like the others . . . When she arrived in front of the little

man again, we can imagine his emotions. The girl was very carefully making the sign of the cross over him repeatedly — until it was done three times! And something more; she said to him very clearly, *Yes*.

That was too much; the poor man tried to hide his tears while the girl continued down the line, and he went to the church as soon as he could. There in the sacristy he opened up the sack that he had taken with him; he put on his priest's cassock with more feeling than ever before, and then fell on his knees in front of the Tabernacle, without being able to express to the Lord and His Mother all his feelings of love and gratitude.

When he left the church, he was truly *another* person, much more interiorly than exteriorly.

How many ineffable *mercies* of God came through the Virgin to the souls of those who ascended the high places of Garabandal, believing to have found there a **throne of grace: that we may obtain mercy and find grace in seasonable aid.** (Heb. 6: 16) As for those who came for other favors of lesser value —like an improvement in health, the settling of a difficult situation, the solution of some definite problem— and who to the eyes of others would have appeared to have wasted the trip, they ended feeling deep in their souls that they had not come, nor hoped, nor prayed in vain. In their contacts with the *MYSTERY OF SALVATION*, if their hearts were well disposed, they had not come away with empty hands.

REVEALING FACTS

This will exemplify some of the things that were happening during the summer days of 1961.

One day in September, Placido Ruiloba, the man from Santander previously mentioned as one of the best witnesses of the Garabandal events, came up to the village with his wife and her father. The father, who already had one of his legs amputated, was concerned that sooner or later the same fate would befall his other leg. «**My father-in-law**» — Mr. Ruiloba stated — «**went with great faith to the place.**»

Like so many other visitors they stopped first at the house of Ceferino, with whom Placido had

struck up a warm friendship. They told him all about the condition of the invalid and the desire he had for Mari Loli to petition the Virgin for him in ecstasy, requesting his salvation. *That she save at least the one leg that was left!*

Ceferino told them that during these days his daughter ordinarily had her ecstasies in the rooms upstairs; and that he, although sorry about it, could not allow many people to go upstairs, because of the danger that the rafters and the ceiling would fall down and cause a disaster; but that specially for this case, he would see to it that they could go upstairs. Minutes later Mari Loli arrived, and the visitors immediately entreated her to remember their request when she would be with the Virgin.



Loli in front of her home in 1961 —an instrument chosen by the Virgin to convey messages both for individuals and for the world.

From here they went to Conchita's house, to make the same request. (They transmitted it to Aniceta.) And when they were about to leave, Mr. Matutano,⁽⁴⁾ who was there, told them that it would be worth their trouble to remain, since Conchita already had two calls and it would not be long until the time when the Vision came.

And so it was. It happened in the little kitchen of the house, at the usual hour of nightfall. The small group standing around could follow from time to time the girl's conversation that dealt with many things. One of the things that they heard very clearly was the request for the salvation of the man who was there with his leg cut off. *That at least they don't have to cut off the other!*

The window was wide open so that many persons, who were not able to enter, could follow the trance from outside.⁽⁵⁾ After a while, the visionary who was still taken up in the trance—her head tilted sharply backwards, her glance fixed on high—held up her crucifix⁽⁶⁾ for everyone to kiss. And when all those in the kitchen had finished kissing it, she put her hand without difficulty through

4. See footnote 5 from Chapter IV.

5. The kitchens in Garabandal were on the street level.

6. Father José Ramón García de la Riva mentions in his *Memorias*:

«The girls began carrying the crucifix routinely in their ecstasies from August of 1961. When they had the first call, they went to find the crucifix and hid it in their clothes; when the time of the ecstasy came, they had it in their fingers. During the ecstasy they gave it to the Virgin to kiss; later they sometimes kissed it themselves; and finally they gave it to be kissed by the persons who surrounded them, although not to everyone; and also they made the Sign of the Cross on themselves and on others with it.»

The pious use of holy images, their purpose, and their value from salvation should be understood from this.

It can be seen that statues, crucifixes and holy pictures are useful. With their expressions and attitudes, they *tell* of hidden but certain realities. Is not visual teaching in the forefront today? And images *bring to mind* persons and facts which have great importance for us, making us aware of them by association of ideas and reflections, recalling to mind and maintaining certain physiological states.

Speaking to her sister Pauline, St. Therese of the Infant Jesus wrote down in her autobiography:

To the beautiful pictures that you have shown me, I owe some of the sweetest joys and strongest impressions which have inspired me to the practice of virtue. I pass my free time looking at them . . . The little flower of the Divine Prisoner, for example, has inspired me with such beautiful thoughts that I have remained all absorbed in them.

the bars of the window grate, so that those outside could also come up to kiss the sacred image. They were kissing it one after the other with a great deal of emotion. When it seemed that they had all done this—outside everything was totally dark; all that could be seen were the people on whom the light from the kitchen shown—it was observed with surprise that the girl continued to hold her arm outside, as if she were waiting for someone to come. And those inside heard her say, *Oh! They don't want to kiss it? Why?*

A short pause followed during which the girl's breathing could be heard very clearly. One of those present could not contain himself and went outside to see what was happening. He found a couple trying to hide in the darkness some distance away. He spoke to them and they admitted that they had withdrawn from the window when the girl began holding the cross to be kissed. He and she both considered themselves unworthy to place their lips on the holy article.

It took a little while for the man to convince them that their attitude was mistaken; that even though they felt themselves very sinful, they had no reason to turn away from the one who had come especially in search of sinners; that it was obvious that she was waiting for them, since there was the girl with her arm held out in the darkness, offering the crucifix . . . to them! And they were the only ones who were missing . . . And the girl was not doing this from her own initiative, since one had to do no more than look to see that she was completely removed from everything that was occurring around her . . . Faced with these thoughts, their resistance waned and from far back they came up trembling to place their lips on the image of the one who had invited them and waited for them in such an extraordinary way.

After those final two kisses, the girl withdrew her hand from the window, and minutes later the ecstasy ended.⁽⁷⁾

Almost at the same time Ceferino came asking for Mr. Ruiloba to come immediately, since his daughter Mari Loli had just gone into a trance. They went as fast as they could and came in time to hear how the girl was faithfully making the request

7. Fr. Valentín's journal shows that this episode took place on the night of September 17th.



Conchita's house with the grated window through which she offered the Virgin's kiss to repentant sinners outside

that they had given her. This filled them with consolation. But the consolation was followed by amazement when they heard the girl say *Oh, has Conchita already asked you this?*

Mr. Ruiloba is absolutely convinced that all this had a supernatural cause, since Mari Loli could not have known by any natural means what had just happened in Conchita's ecstasy.

Someone might ask, *What is the meaning of all this?*

Well certainly the man with the amputated leg remained, as far as his physical condition, in the same situation in which he had been before, without any substantial improvement (now he rests in peace), although with a certain betterment since he was not the same as before with regard to other more important matters. Since he had come *with great faith* he was not disappointed, and we know that he left Garabandal very satisfied, with a heart full of joyous thoughts. We know that he was thrilled by what he had seen and heard . . . and

sure that he had not lost the way. It could not be doubted that on those mountains something happened that affected him in a salutary way, something that, although it could not be explained, had brought him closer to a more important well-being. He could comprehend as never before those words of Christ, **It is better for you to go into life maimed or lame, than having two hands or two feet, to be cast into everlasting fire.** (Matt. 18: 8)

And what can be said of the recalcitrant couple? Throughout their life they will never forget those minutes of *suspense*.

They must have suffered intensely with the shame of knowing their unworthiness: the incompatibility on the same lips of sensual kisses and the kisses of the image of the Absolutely Pure. But then also, as never before, they must have been enlightened as to what lengths God will go to bring back sinners, to pardon them and purify them.

That kiss on a night in Garabandal, so unexpected and so urgent, must have marked the life of

that couple with salvation. Before God there is nothing without importance.

*What the storm wind cannot do,
Sometimes is done by a breeze;
And there are lives that are ruined,
By merely a smile.*

If a smile, as the poet Peman⁽⁸⁾ writes, could be the ruin of a life, how much more a kiss properly given could be the start of salvation.

About this time took place, although the exact date is not known, another of the innumerable *minor* events that constitute the Hour of Garabandal in the tremendous History of Salvation.

I received this directly from the lips of the stone mason Pepe Diez,⁽⁹⁾ to whom it happened; he remembers it as if it were still taking place.

As on almost all evenings in those days, *phenomena* occurred in the village, together with remarkable processions of prayer and penance that formed behind the girls walking in ecstasy through the streets and trails. But on this day Pepe Diez did not bother to take part in them. Besides this being nothing new for him, he was also tired, and he had no desire of being in the procession.

From his house he was able to hear clearly the sound of footsteps and prayers approaching, then receding, to be lost in the distance . . . When all became quiet, he went outside and made his way down a dark alley to better avoid any meeting that might detain him. As he was walking close to a wall, he smacked his forehead against a stone jutting out from it. The reaction was instantaneous, *motus primo primi*, as the moralists say: the typical reaction of so many men who have grown up surrounded by bad language and have made it their own. He let out a blasphemy.

Immediately he felt ashamed. But he did not have time to think about it. Something held him captive in that corner of the alley, as the sound of the *procession* that had faded away was now

8. Peman, poet, dramatist and Spanish orator, born in 1898. His most well-known dramatic works are *El divino impaciente* about St. Francis Xavier, and *Cuando las cortes de Cadiz* which tells about the resistance to Napoleon's French troops at Cadiz.

9. See Chapter II, footnote 9.

returning. It did not take long for the procession to come upon him, and he tried without success to hide where the shadows were darkest, so that everyone would pass without noticing his presence. The girl who was coming in ecstasy at the head of the parade, without lowering her gaze from on high, went toward him, crucifix in hand. Poor Pepe would have preferred the earth to swallow him. He fell trembling on his knees, and felt the girl place the crucifix on his lips with a soft force, as if requiring a kiss of reparation for the blasphemy that could only have been heard by the ears of God.

The stone mason was well admonished, more effectively than if he had heard many sermons on the faithful observance of the second commandment of the divine law. He will never forget the lesson.

And so at Garabandal Our Lady appeared in an ineffable way to repeat to everyone, **My little children, these things I address to you, that you may not sin. But if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father: Jesus Christ the Just. And He is the propitiation for our sins.** (1 John 2: 1)

There were other episodes of instruction during the final weeks of that unforgettable summer. We are going to mention one that deals with a subject that is today neglected to the extreme.

We know that the girls had a most proper comportment. The testimonies of this are numerous and explicit. Here is one of great value because of the competency of the witness — a person who shared the life of the girls as few others:

«Since my first visit, on August 22nd, 1961, I took advantage of all opportunities to go up to Garabandal where I have passed and still pass my happiest days.

I determined to study the girls closely, not only in their trances, but also in their normal state. I took pictures that show clearly that the girls are not sick or peculiar, and have no abnormal symptoms. I can report with a thorough knowledge of the matter on their manner of comporting themselves in their homes, in the fields, in the stables, in the church, etc. They cannot be distinguished from the other girls of the village. They play, run, jump up and down, pray . . .

Now there is something that can be noticed in their external manners that is not the same as the other girls. For example, in their way of sitting,



“Never have they been surprised in the least lack of purity.”

they always do it with great modesty. And never have they been surprised in the least lack of purity. Their comportment in this has been in the extreme. Furthermore everyone has been able to observe in the ecstasies how they concern themselves that their dresses are in place.»

(Fr. José Ramón García de la Riva,
Memorias de mis subidas a Garabandal)

Yes, their comportment was most proper; although we should bear in mind the customs and styles in mode in the daily dress then prevalent in their sheltered and secluded environment. The girls from Garabandal dressed like other girls of their time and area; and because of this, they sometimes wore short skirts, as was then the style.

The Virgin called their attention to this with a mother's delicateness.

In one of their ecstasies⁽¹⁰⁾ the three girls went to

10. This was an ecstasy during the middle of the night, between the 9th and 10th of September.

each one's home separately, by the Vision's request, to change the dresses they were wearing for longer dresses. Conchita was heard to say later during the trance, «*We should always wear long dresses like this, above all for coming to see you.*» (Sanchez-Ventura)

«On August 31st one of the girls,⁽¹¹⁾ while sitting, went several meters forwards toward the church and several meters backwards. The people who were watching became so filled with emotion that many cried . . . Not so much for the action itself or going over the ground sitting down like this, but because in all the distance traveled, the girl's dress, without being disarranged, covered her to her knees. And I observed afterward that, in spite of having slid like this on the dirty ground, the dress had not become soiled. It was on this same day in August that the Virgin advised Loli to lengthen her skirt a little. *She said this smiling.*»

(Fr Ramón Andreu's report)

11. This refers to Conchita, according to Fr. Valentín's notes.

The *spiritual giants* so numerous today even in the clergy, will put on a knowing smile here, discrediting Garabandal because of *infantile* ideas which to their way of thinking could only have importance for narrow-minded people still affected by the old fashioned morality of the Middle Ages.

Fortunately God has His own criteria, ordinarily close to the reasoning of simple and virtuous souls, ordinarily distant from those who follow their own ways, the *wise* and *prudent* who are not well versed in sacred literature.

Salvation in all its immensity is accomplished through things that are small.

Do not think that I have come to destroy the law or the prophets.

I have not come to destroy, but to fulfill . . .

Therefore, whoever does away with one of these least commandments, and so teaches men, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven.

But whoever carries them out and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. (Matt. 5: 17-19)

Modesty and decency can never be neglected in genuine morality because they are required by our condition as creatures made to the image and likeness of God, and furthermore raised up to be His sons and members of the Mystical Body of Christ. It is not that we are ashamed of our bodies, but that we are convinced that the most important part of us is not seen. And too much attention should not be given to our physical being while the other, our better part, remains forgotten and obscured. Proper dress is a distinctive trait of the human being who bridles and holds in check the animal nature, since there is in us a higher nature that deserves more attention and care.

Salus populi, ego sum — I am the salvation of the people. Each day it was seen more clearly that the Virgin had come to Garabandal to promote the salvation of her people.⁽¹²⁾ None of those who came

12. More about this?

From the ecstasy of September 4th:

«At 1 o'clock they took the hands of all those present, and made them make the Sign of the Cross . . . Then they sang rosaries through the village—the vision leading, the children singing only a part. They went from house to house, singing an Ave María at each house. Sometimes they went up the stairs if it was necessary.»

here with true devotion toward her and a well-disposed heart went away disappointed. And there are many who have stated that they have passed the best moments of their life in that little mountain village. *I do not yet know what heaven is, said one priest, but in Garabandal, it seems that I have been on the threshold.*

From the Water of Garabandal to the Water of Baptism

Toward the end of the summer in 1961 there was a unique episode that illustrated the work of *salvation* that the Virgin came to perform at Garabandal.

Through a series of circumstances which many might attribute to chance or fate, but which we who have the faith attribute to Providence, a young woman from Paris arrived in the early summer of 1960 at the home of a young woman in Burgos. The young woman from Paris was 18 years old; her name was Muriel Catherine.⁽¹³⁾ The young woman from Burgos was slightly older, and was called Ascensión de Luis. The latter informed us of very interesting details about the way Muriel Catherine *providentially* chose her home and why she stayed with her.

The young Parisienne came desiring to learn the

From September 5th:

«At 5 in the afternoon, Jacinta and Loli went into ecstasy; they made the Sign of the Cross on the forehead of all those that were there; later they went out with a little crucifix and went from house to house, holding it up for everyone to kiss.»

From September 6th:

«They went from door to door singing the rosary. They gave the crucifix to everyone to kiss, and went in where there were sick or old people.»

(The quotes above are from Fr. Valentín's notes.)

It seems clear to me that in this there is a beautiful way of recognizing and showing that in every home or Christian household — and in Garabandal all of them were — there is truly a *domestic church*, with all that this means. And that every place where sons of God live, is also a *home of God*.

13. For special reasons, Muriel Catherine's last name will not be mentioned.

Spanish customs, and at the same time to have some new experiences and explore new horizons. Her parents allowed her exceptional freedom, and so she traveled alone without restriction throughout other countries in Europe.

Ascensión de Luis was employed in a state agency and was living almost alone in her family's apartment, since she had lost her parents at an early age, and her brothers and sisters had gone to live by themselves. Because of this she had agreed to have the unknown French student stay with her temporarily. Ascensión was deeply religious, marked by an extraordinary devotion to the Virgin, whose maternal help — she was the only mother that she still had — she had sought efficaciously in the important times of her life. Living the faith was for her the most natural thing in the world; and so on the first Sunday in which the French girl stayed in her home, she spontaneously said to Muriel, *What time shall we go to Mass?*

Muriel accepted the invitation readily and arm in arm the two went to church. However, it did not take Ascensión de Luis long to notice that her companion was out of place there; her unfamiliarity was evident, though she tried to do as well as possible what she saw the others do.

The reason for this was soon explained, as between the two had grown an excellent mutual understanding and affection; The French girl was not Catholic. Worse still, she did not have any religion. And it was not really her fault. Her father was a Jew, her mother a Protestant; but neither of them *practiced religion*. And as a result their three children, who had grown up without instruction, did not concern themselves about religion.

This discovery brought Ascensión to a greater interest and an almost maternal solicitude for Catherine. It seemed to her that God and the Virgin had confined the French girl with her so that she could open up to her the horizons of faith and hope, to introduce her to the way of salvation. Ascensión entrusted this matter to Our Lady in heaven, and set to work.

«I was quite moved when she told me that she didn't have any religion. I told her it wasn't possible to live like this, that she ought to accept her mother's religion or her father's . . . Or, since she knew me, a Catholic, she might even interest herself also in our religion, which

is the most demanding, but also the most pure — the true religion! And so, comparing one with the others, she could see which would bring her the closest to God.

We began instructions right away, and we held them constantly during July and August of that year.»

Catherine responded well, since she was a good person; and even had a little sentiment in her first experiences, in her first prayers. Ascensión remembers them kneeling together in front of a picture of Our Lady of Fatima, with some details that are quite remarkable, and her *disciple's* first Hail Marys on a silver rosary that Ascensión possessed and used as a precious treasure.

As Catherine liked Spain very much and its customs pleased her, she decided to write her parents to allow her to stay there longer. They answered that she should come to get her winter clothes, and so she went. Arriving in Paris and well versed in religion, she began to tell her parents that she would turn Catholic. She thought that — since they had not given her any religion — it would not matter to them that she embraced the one that seemed the best . . . But that was not the way it was. When she told her parents what she was thinking of doing, their reaction was violent; her father shouted out, *Of all things, to become a Catholic!* This was considered a real dishonor to the family. Coupled with the little liking that he had for Spanish people, the result of all this was that her father did not let Catherine return.

«But I continued writing to her; and in July of the following year, 1961, many difficulties and the firm opposition of her father having been providentially overcome, Catherine arrived here again. A few days later, for the first time there came to me the news or the rumor that there were *apparitions* happening in a village of Santander called San Sebastián de Garabandal . . . And then it occurred to me: *If the Virgin appeared at Fatima, why couldn't she appear here?*

Then I thought that — if this were true, something from God — here could well be the best means for the conversion of my friend . . .

I obtained information on what was happening in the little village of the Montaña province;

and we set out on the way; she had more faith than I myself.

On arriving on August 27th, a Sunday, we met a disagreeable situation: a tour group was giving all this a picnic atmosphere, as if it were more like a bazaar than a serious religious matter. We met a Salesian priest who was also upset. On observing the attitude of the crowd he had become angry, saying among other things that all this had the best indications of being diabolical.

At this point the pastor of the village passed by and approached him to calm him. *You can't judge this by what is happening here, by what is seen in this crowd. Wait and see the ecstasies of the girls, which you haven't seen yet.*

Nevertheless the priest was not calmed down, and I remember him being very concerned about whether they had done exorcisms on the girls . . . And if they hadn't done this, then whether they shouldn't be done as soon as possible. This priest lived in America and had planned to stay there in Garabandal two or three days to study all this better; I know that later he departed very enthusiastic.»

The priest's reaction and words had an effect on the simple people of San Sebastián. Ascensión de Luis tells us:

«On the following day, Monday, August 28th, the girls and their families were affected, and the village also, by what the Father repeated so often, that this could very well be a thing of the devil. Because of this they had prepared a small bottle of holy water to throw at the apparition the first time that it returned. *The apparition should not be trusted, said the priest, since the devil is very clever and can deceive, appearing in many ways; and to deceive he begins with good appearances.* The girls, very worried, would not let go of their bottle of holy water for anything.

In the evening Catherine and I, although we were rather unknown, succeeded in entering Jacinta's house. She was in the kitchen with her parents, and Mari Loli was with hers; the girls were unable to hide the worry that they had from what the Salesian priest was saying. What would happen when — on the Vision's arrival —



Jacinta in her home where the miraculous religious experience took place

she would receive an *asperges* of holy water? About eight or nine people were there, presided over by the pastor, Fr. Valentín. When I could, I explained very briefly to the girls the situation of my companion, requesting them to petition the Virgin very much for her. And I entrusted my cherished silver rosary to them to give her to kiss.

Not much later Jacinta and Loli went into ecstasy in the stunning way that has been described so many times. And immediately we heard them speak to the Vision in that voice like a whisper, so characteristic of the trances:

A priest has come who says that she is a devil, and that they were going to throw holy water at her so that she would leave.



“With this rosary she learned to pray . . .”

They said this with striking expressions of regret and fear. But soon their faces lit up with extraordinary joy and broke out in marvelous smiles, as they set down the bottle of water that they had brought to the side and behind them.»

This also brought joy and confidence to those present, since it could be supposed what had been the response of the apparition to the frightened expressions of the two little girls. A similar scene had occurred during the apparitions at Lourdes.

«The two girls,» — continued Ascensión de Luis — «were sitting in front of us on some small low benches like those still seen in the kitchens of the village. And on their laps they held the religious articles given to them to offer the Virgin to kiss. As soon as their apprehension had eased, they began to speak about Catherine, since they were heard clearly. *She isn't a Catholic . . . No, she isn't a Catholic . . . She*

isn't baptized . . . Come, help her . . . Oh! because of her parents! They remained for some time on this topic.»

And then they began to offer the vision the objects that they held on their knees. It was something worth seeing. Without lowering their heads, or moving their gaze from the spot on which it was fixed, they took the articles one by one. Raising up an arm with great grace as if to touch the lips of whoever had to be kissing them, they remained like this a few seconds with the arm on high and then lowered it in its place.

When the turn for my rosary came, they were heard to say, *Oh! With this rosary she learned to pray . . . With it she said her first Hail Marys . . . Her first Hail Marys . . .* It was Loli who presented my rosary, and she continued repeating this. She was putting it down among the other articles when Jacinta took it in her

hand and raised it again up towards the vision, repeating in her turn, as if it were something coming from inside of her, *Her first Hail Marys . . . Her first Hail Marys . . .* Finally she put it down on top of Loli's knees together with all the other articles.

My excitement was tremendous; and it was even greater when I learned that this certainly was the only article that had received the Virgin's kiss twice, since they had told me that when the girls presented something that had been once kissed, although it had been done a long time previously, they were accustomed to put it down immediately saying, *You say that this has already been kissed.* Because of this, from then on I kept the rosary as a real treasure.

When they had finished offering the Virgin all that they had there, they were heard to say, *Now? Good!* And Loli reached her hand behind the little bench on which they were sitting toward the bottle of holy water that had been set down there. She took it, opened it up, and threw it forcefully upwards in front of her . . .

And then we could notice a little wonder. The water didn't fall where it should have fallen naturally — upon me, the one who was the closest and the one in front of Mari Loli — but rather, making a mysterious curve in its path, it fell in the shape of a little shower on top of Catherine, who was facing Jacinta. Fr. Valentín, who was almost leaning against Catherine, behind her, assured me that not a single drop had fallen on him. I, who was holding her arm — we were leaning against each other because of the excitement — can also testify that nothing touched me. On the contrary, Catherine felt fully this mysterious *bath*. Not only on her head, but also on her dress and even on her feet. *"Yes, I was drenched!"* And I ought to say that this was a very small bottle, and it was not completely full since part of its contents had been splashed on the kitchen floor slightly before the coming of the apparition. »

The mysterious meaning of the episode is clear. The young 19 year old girl, through the mercy of the Lord in heaven, had already been brought to the faith, but there was something still lacking in order to enter fully into the City of God, to be counted among His sons:

Go into the whole world.
And preach the gospel to every creature.
He who believes and IS BAPTIZED shall be saved.
But he who does not believe shall be condemned.

(Mark 16: 15-16)

Thus heaven intervened miraculously to inspire Catherine to make the last step in the process of entering onto the way of salvation. And that unique intervention had a good ending, as we shall see later.

«A little later» — continues Ascensión de Luis — «we saw Loli anxiously searching among the kissed objects, and repeating in a worried manner, *Hers, hers . . . Where is hers? It's very small . . .* Finally, as if someone were mysteriously guiding her, she put her hand on the floor near her feet, and picked up a small medal of the Virgin of Lourdes, no more than two or three centimeters in size. It belonged to Catherine and we had given it to the girls when we entered, together with the rosary and some of my medals. And the girls had put them among the many articles that were awaiting the Virgin's kiss; in the course of the ecstasy it had fallen on the floor. The image was so tiny that I am sure it would not have been possible to find it there in the poorly lit kitchen if the hand of the girl had not been guided by someone.



Loli raised up her arm to offer the medal to be kissed; but in spite of stretching as much as

she could, it appeared that she was not able to reach. Then she picked up the things that she had on her lap and on top of her knees and stood up. She set the articles on the little bench, and stretched as much as she could on the tips of her toes . . . But it was seen that she still did not reach. Then Jacinta stood up in turn, picked Loli up by her knees — without the least effort — and raised her up as if she were a feather. I haven't seen a more beautiful picture: the two girls with their heads tilted backwards, their faces shining with the most ineffable happiness, smiling, making all their movements with an unsurpassable grace . . .

Loli, with her arm on high, tried to reach up with the little medal to the mysterious being that was there. She appeared to have succeeded, and after that Jacinta lowered her down, while addressing her voice upwards, *I? . . . I should give it to her? . . . I should put it in her pocket? . . .* She approached Catherine, who was breathless with excitement. (Catherine was seated on another one of those low benches, and it couldn't be observed whether her jacket had pockets or not. Without looking, Loli then said, *Here, here is the pocket!* And very carefully she put in it the little medal that seemed to have considerably more importance than its size represented.

Following this, the two girls (who were standing in front) began to lean toward us, while rigid and in a very difficult posture, seemingly one that they could not hold without falling. And a little later, with an astounding naturalness, they returned to their normal position. In speaking of this, it might not seem to be much, but I can tell you that observing it was a real marvel because of the expressions on their faces and the gracefulness of their movements.

Again Loli began inclining her body, this time only toward Catherine, to the point of resting almost on top of her, in a posture impossible to hold and without a single motion of loss of equilibrium or balance. Instinctively we stretched out our hands, since it seemed impossible that she wouldn't tumble down. But Fr. Valentín said to us, *Let her alone. She won't fall.* She was like this a few seconds and returned to her normal position. I had the impression that the girls were drawn where the

apparition (or the Virgin) moved, without ever taking their eyes from her, and that she held and supported them in their most difficult and remarkable positions.

Finally the two girls began to talk to the Virgin. *Here? We should pray here? . . .* And without going out on the street, as on so many other occasions, they began to pray right there — and how they did it! — a Station to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, while we joined with them as well as we could. Later we saw the farewells: they positioned their faces, first the one girl, then the other, in an attitude of receiving a kiss on each cheek, while they spoke out with most intense desire, *Don't go so quickly! . . . Stay a little longer! . . .* I don't know how long this lasted, but certainly more than a half hour.»

Ascensión de Luis kept a definite and unforgettable remembrance of that 28th of August, 1961 not only because of the number of things that happened there to her French friend, but also because it was her first visit to Garabandal. Many other trips followed as this young woman from Burgos is one of the persons most linked with the famous events. This first trip was a special day for her: the anniversary of the death of her own mother on August 28th. With regard to this, she received marvelous *information* from heaven at the time when the girls presented a memento of the departed for kissing. Hidden within it was a small leaf from a calendar, but a leaf with a *tale* . . .

Catherine had to endure the misunderstanding and opposition of her parents. But finally, providentially, she was able to return to Spain in 1963; and still more providentially, she was able to obtain the necessary permit for remaining temporarily to work in Burgos . . . And on the 20th of October, she solemnly received Baptism in the city's magnificent cathedral. The *girls* had not petitioned for her in vain. In several apparitions they were heard remembering her case, and repeating later in their requests: *At 21 years . . . when she will be an adult . . .* Yes, at 21 years, at an adult age, Muriel Catherine entered into the family of the sons of God with a very Christian and Spanish-French name: María del Carmen Catherine.

Could she ever arrive at measuring the depth and width of the mystery of salvation to which she had been brought by the decisive assistance of Our



Muriel Catherine receives her First Communion

Lady visiting us at Garabandal?

But when the goodness and kindness of God our Savior appeared, He saved us not by the works of justice which we have done, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renovation of the Holy Spirit, Whom He has poured forth upon us abundantly, through Jesus Christ our Savior: that being justified by His grace, we may be heirs according to the hope of everlasting life.

(Titus 3: 4-7)

Why at Nighttime?

On July 29th, 1968, I arrived in the late afternoon at the waiting room of the convent of Poor Clares in Aguilar de Campoo. There, leaning against the grill, since he was a little hard of hearing and did not see well, I found an old and venerable priest speaking with two monks on the other side of the grill. We exchanged greetings and this priest who liked to joke, for a reason I do not know, came out unexpectedly with a remark about

the events of Garabandal. *Yes, how are those strange affairs from Garabandal that always have to take place at night. As if the Virgin could not choose better hours to appear! Many things can take place in the darkness . . . At night all the cats are black.*

The good priest, lacking adequate information, had simply echoed the many rumors and prejudices that were circulating from mouth to mouth. How many times, even in the early days, had been promulgated the suspicious question concerning Garabandal, *Why at nighttime?* The objectors believed to have found here a good basis for distrust and rejection.

It is easy to go from *nighttime* to accept as likely the existence of other extenuating ideas like *rehearsal* and *deceit*; if not on the part of the girls, then on the part of other persons or parties putting pressure on the girls with their parents easily disguised agreement. I myself have heard rather weird, if not ridiculous, remarks on this matter. The surprising thing is that even Bishop Puchol came to accept



“Nothing extraordinary in them; they were similar to the other girls.”

such suppositions —*tremendous pressures*— in a document more or less *official*.⁽¹⁴⁾

As the question, *Why at nighttime?* repeatedly was brought up to the girls and those who were close to them, they consequently passed it on to the one they saw in their trances. And this happened specifically 10 days after the episode of the holy water on the 8th of September, a day which was distinguished at Garabandal since it had special Marian significance.

We have a short story from that day.

«**With the idea of delving into the extraordinary happenings that were taking place there, one day I climbed the mountain leading up to Garabandal. Significantly it was the 8th of September, the feast of the Nativity of the Most Holy Virgin, and I admit taking advantage of the occasion.**»

So Father Julío Porro Cardenoso, canon of Tarragona, described his first visit to the

14. «Nota» of March 17th, 1967 to the news media.

celebrated village.⁽¹⁵⁾

«We came to the place at a time when the visionaries were absent from it, since they had gone to a religious ceremony in a neighboring village that was celebrating the feastday of its patron saint.⁽¹⁶⁾ About 5 o'clock in the afternoon the girls returned to their homes, still not having eaten. Meanwhile, my good friend Father Valentín, the pastor of the place, had informed me in detail of all the most spectacular things. The rumble of thunder broke the almost

15. This distinguished priest soon became one of the most enthusiastic and competent promoters of the Garabandal cause.

He has published three books on the subject:

—*God in the Shadows* (A theological study on the events of Garabandal)

—*The Great Prodigy of Garabandal*

—*Garabandal, Without Meaning?*

(Editorial Circulo, Paseo Fernando et Catolico, 39, 7, Zaragoza)

The notes that I am using here were taken from his first book, *God in the Shadows*.

16. Sometimes they celebrated the feast of the Virgin of the Sick at Puente Nansa; sometimes the feastday was celebrated at the sanctuary of Our Lady of Light on a high hill in the Peña Sagra Mountains. In the village there was great veneration for this sanctuary, a continuing tradition from time immemorial. The pilgrimage toward it was long and difficult, five hours of walking on foot on the steep slopes of the mountains.

sepulchral silence that surrounded us while we were exchanging impressions and I was gathering the reports that had been put down in writing and accurately verified.»

Fr. Julio later took the occasion to examine each of the visionaries individually, asking them, «what I wanted to clarify the facts I had been told.» Then came the evening.

«The bells of the church brought us together for the rosary. Three of the girls were present there among the other children. (Jacinta was in bed with a sore throat.) I watched them and saw nothing extraordinary; they were similar to the other girls.

The rosary ended and the church was closed, as the bishop had ordered. At 10 o'clock at night the ecstasies began with Mari Loli in a trance.»

A series of observations then followed, certainly interesting, but which we already know, since they have been repeated many times. Two things in particular attracted Fr. Julio's attention.

(1) The strange movement of her clothes while the girl was falling to the ground.

(2) The girl's expressions and postures.

Concerning the first he says:

«Her clothes slid downwards in a movement that was not natural, as if an invisible hand were guarding the most complete modesty of the girl. All diabolical intervention has to be ruled out.»

Concerning the second:

«Loli fell slowly as though someone were lowering her to the ground: she was as if struck by a ray of light. I observed her closely; she had a truly angelical face; it didn't seem to be the same face.»

It was probably during this ecstasy⁽¹⁷⁾ that the girl, on the request of the pastor who had spoken with Father Julio about the feasibility of proposing certain questions «that would be unusual and difficult to answer,» asked the apparition among other things:

«What is it that the Virgin urges the Spanish people for amending their lives?»

Answer: That they confess and receive Communion.

17. I have seen later from the notes of Fr. Valentín that these questions that passed from Conchita to Loli, who had gone into ecstasy in Conchita's home, were not asked on the night of September 8th, but on September 9th.



“Loli fell slowly as though someone were lowering her to the ground.”



“Confess and receive Communion.”



“They fight among themselves.”

What sacrifice does she principally request from Spain?

Answer: That it would aid the other nations to be good.

What is the sin of parents that offends her the most?

Answer: That they fight among themselves: their quarrels and arguments.

Certainly it was at that time that *«at the request of the parish priest,»* once more the pointed question was also asked: *«Why do these things occur at nighttime?»*⁽¹⁸⁾

The answer did not come in words . . . the Virgin's expression *«filled with sadness.»* And not only sadness: *«The Virgin became serious,»* Loli said later.

It is easy to understand this response . . . I ask myself: Could there be any other reaction from a mother toward children who show distrust, who come to her with an attitude of suspicion and doubt? And so enclosed in this silent response is a hurt reproach: *For months I have come giving signs —the pure of heart understand—that it is I who am here among you, I who act, I who impart the intimate consolations of which many speak, I who give secret answers to many of your questions . . . And now you make this remark? Do you not have sufficient reasons to recognize me, and see that, though you don't understand them, there certainly are reasons for what I do and the way I act.*

Those who find a cause for suspicion and rejection in the nighttime idea, would not react better

better before the proofs of the daytime, of which there are a great number. Would their attitude have been any different if they had not found the *stumbling stone* of the nighttime? An episode from the gospels casts some light on this:

But to what can I compare this generation? said Jesus.
They are like children sitting in the marketplace,
who call to their companions and say:
We played wedding music for you and you have not danced;
we have sung funeral songs and you have not mourned.
For John came, neither eating or drinking,
and they say: He has a devil!
The Son of Man came eating and drinking and they say,
Behold a glutton and wine drinker,
a friend of tax collectors and sinners!
But the wisdom of God is justified by its works.

(Matthew 11: 16-19)

Then Jesus said to the royal official of Capharnum:
If you do not see continuous signs and prodigies,
you do not believe.

(John 4: 48)

A person can always find reasons for not believing if there is something in believing that does not correspond to his desires. From his place in hell the rich man of the parable requested the patriarch Abraham for Lazarus to come back to life in order to warn his brothers.

They have Moses and the Prophets . . .
No, Father Abraham,
But if someone from the dead goes to them . . .
If they do not heed Moses and the Prophets,
they will not believe even if someone rises from the dead.

(Luke 16: 27-31)

The Virgin responded to this question with a sadness on her face, since at the base of it — on the part of some at least — there had to be a disposition neither honest nor sincere.

Only she knows all the reasons for the ecstasies occurring at night. However some explanations have occurred to us.

«Never» —we read in Fr. Ramón's report— *«have the visions and phenomena of Garabandal encouraged a big crowd; rather they have strongly encouraged the opposite. In fact, the most interesting manifestations have taken place when*

18. The question took place in an ecstasy on September 8th.

the mass of spectators had left.»

Thus the fact that many of the phenomena occurred at night had a purpose of elimination. Since it was not pleasant to wait hour after hour to attain these things, after a disagreeable night, awake and almost sleepless,⁽¹⁹⁾ many abandoned the scene and left the village, especially those who had come as if on a tour to entertain themselves with a spectacle never seen . . . On the other hand, those who were seriously interested remained: persons who sincerely sought something and wanted to know what this was about. And so a gathering small in number, but continually renewed, could better observe and associate with the mystery that the girls experienced, a gathering that was physically much reduced in size.

The nighttime, the occasion so often propitious for sin, was marked in Garabandal with a sign of penance, prayer and expiation. Those who conscientiously united themselves with the *heavenly walks* of the visionaries, finished by experiencing the joy and the harshness of vigil hours that ordinarily left them physically exhausted and depleted. The testimonies that we can gather give an unending list of these things.⁽²⁰⁾

The nights at Garabandal, whatever the perverse and malicious may think of them, were not nights of sin, but rather of expiation for sin and prayer for sinners.⁽²¹⁾

19. In Garabandal one could not lodge in a rooming house, much less a hotel! Sometimes the village people offered or rented rooms to persons who merited special consideration; but ordinarily the people had to pass the time without sleep, or sleep as well as they could in their cars.

20. Fr. Julio Porro says of his first night in Garabandal:

«At 4 o'clock on the morning of September 9th, I left the village. A vigil like this wouldn't be worth the inconvenience, after traveling the very long trail to arrive at such an unknown mountain hideaway, if there hadn't been something very remarkable to be present at and witness.»

21. What we already know about the happenings during the nights at Garabandal is confirmed by what Fr. Julio says about the night of September 8th-9th that he experienced. Following what he says about Loli's trance, he relates:

«A series of ecstatic phenomena on the part of her and of Conchita followed . . . In the houses, through the streets . . . In the most diversified positions: standing, on their knees, completely prostrate facing the sky, seated with their arms in a cross and moving in this position through the streets, stuck in the mud and passing over the stones . . . I saw them come down the stairs in Mari Loli's home while sitting, with their arms in a cross

They were a practice of that which had been said by the angel to the shepherd children of Fatima:

You must pray much, speaking like this: "My God, I believe, I hope, I adore and I love . . . and I ask pardon for those that do not believe, do not hope, do not adore and do not love . . ."

Because of this, those nights have left indelible impressions on many hearts. From the rugged and hard trail that led up to the village, to the difficult path up to the Pines, all was a symbol of the penitential and ascetic role that had to be followed by whoever wanted to *enter* in the march—frequently perturbing—of the phenomena.⁽²²⁾

Are the *dark nights* of Garabandal something new in the experience of Christians? Do we not well know that the nighttime hours appear in the History of Salvation as hours chosen for the *admirable commercium* between God and man? We can recall some well-known facts. It was at night that St. Joseph was made aware of Mary's great secret, on which our survival depended. In the middle of the night occurred the coming into the world of the Son of God and the Son of man; and the hours of the night were later those that He preferred to dedicate to prayer during His public life . . . In the secret of the night the mystery of the Incarnation, the summit of all history, and especially the History of Salvation, was realized. The Mass of Sunday in the octave of the Nativity starts solemnly with the words of the Book of Wisdom:

**For while all things were in quiet silence,
and the night was in the middle of her course,**

and their gaze fixed on the heavens, without lacking in modesty in spite of their difficult posture . . . They visited the sick, praying the rosary, and in that way entered into the house of Jacinta who was in her room with a throat infection.

It was exactly 2 o'clock in the morning; the Virgin told them to recite the rosary again . . . They said it perfectly.

Everything ended with the kissing of the Vision by the girls and of the girls by the Vision, and the Christian way of saying goodbye, *Until tomorrow, if God wills*. The girls finally embraced, and everyone started to retire. It was past 3 o'clock in the morning. We had been in a constant *dance* from about 10 o'clock. The visionaries were not tired; we were completely exhausted and drowsy.»

It seems to me that we have here a good *example* of what those nights were, the nights of Garabandal that some persons look upon as suspect.

22. *Narrow is the gate and straight the way that leads to life, and few there are that find it.* (Matt. 7:14)

Your mighty word leapt down from heaven,
from Your royal throne.

(18: 14-15)

And it is evident from the lives of the saints that their great communications with God took place with preference for the hours of the night . . . as if He were pleased to deal with His best friends right during the hours in which others usually offend Him the most.

The hours of darkness should not be so readily connected with the action of the *power of darkness*. It appears unfounded and unreasonable to try to find in this *nighttime* a sign of evil proceeding from the affairs of Garabandal. Besides anyone seeking darkness as a cloak for his wickedness does not have to search for it here; there are plenty of shadows and nights everywhere to cover the shame of an unworthy life.

Let us correspond with the exhortation of the apostle and **leave the work of darkness to put on the arms of light.** (Romans 13: 12) However, it is to be understood that this does not have any connection with the presence or absence of the sun on the horizon.

Meditation Under the Stars

With another useful report that seems extremely charming let us contemplate one more time how the nocturnal *vigils* of Garabandal were filled with *piety* and *penance*.

We owe this one to the previously mentioned María Herrero de Gallardo; it forms part of her letter to the Holy Office, dated February 2nd, 1968. She describes what she experienced a few days after the events that Fr. Julio Porro Cardenoso reported to us. She was there on September 12th, a Marian day also, because on it is celebrated the feast of the Holy Name of Mary.

«On that day the ecstasies started about five in the afternoon, and lasted well into the night, with slight intermissions, such as the one in which Conchita said to her mother, *Mama, let*



“The ecstasies started about five in the afternoon, and lasted well into the night.”



“hide and seek with the Vision.”

me have dinner now, for the Virgin is going to return, or like another one with Jacinta: The Virgin told me to rest a little, since she would not be long in coming back. Her ecstasy preceding this had lasted a long time and the position of her head, bent backward so acutely, must have affected her. But very soon after having said this, Jacinta went into ecstasy again; her rest didn't last more than three or four minutes.⁽²³⁾

23. As an interesting fact, I am inserting this from Fr. Valentín's notes for the afternoon of September 12th:

«Towards six, Loli, who went out of her house in ecstasy, came very specially near to "the man who had come many times; the people said he was Balduino."
(The King of Belgium)

Jacinta went from house to house, and made the Sign

I believe it was on this day that I saw the girls obviously play *hide and seek* with the Vision,

of the Cross on the beds of the sick . . . She turned toward me to meet me on the street, and made the Sign of the Cross on me . . . At 6:30 she passed by praying the rosary and made a Sign of the Cross on the cars that had come up to the village.»

Manuel Lantero, an industrial lumberer from Gijón, who can relate many things from his frequent visits to Garabandal, reports:

«One day I was in a car in front of Conchita's house in the enclosed garden whose entrance was sealed by a fence made of crossbeams. We saw the girls in ecstasy come twice up against the fence rails . . . Finally they jumped over them with extraordinary grace, went to the car, made the Sign of the Cross on top of the hood and the windshield. No mark remained.»



“shouts of joy”

although in the beginning I didn't understand well what they were doing. I saw them on the tips of their toes — attempting not to make noise and leaning their backs against the walls — glide furtively up to the corner of the street.

There they stuck out their heads a little at a time, appearing to want to surprise someone who was hiding from them . . . Suddenly, as if they had found what they were searching for at the end of the corner, they let out shouts of joy

and began to run in pursuit . . . It was really pleasurable watching the girls' game. Obviously they had a Mother who enjoyed playing with her little children.»

I know that there are people who dislike these games, regard them as trite, improper for a supernatural apparition, and look on them with disdainful disgust. These people are unaware of the gift of holy simplicity. The games, undervalued in spite of their marvelous charm, have been in their case **pearls thrown to the swine.** (Matt. 7: 6)

It is no surprise that many people are shocked by these games which do not seem to properly fit in with phenomena that are supposed to be supernatural. What can be the meaning of this? Can there be anything in this relative to the History of Salvation that we have been discussing in this chapter?

I admit being perplexed myself, but I am convinced that one cannot expect God to make all His ways of acting toward us completely understandable in every detail right from the beginning.

However, I have run into something that appears rather basic and that in some way may unveil the divine pedagogy that may be hidden in the unusual games at Garabandal.

In September, 1969, a group of French *Garabandalistas* gathered for a spiritual reunion at Cande. Among other interesting conferences, there was one by María Teresa Le Pelletier de Glatigny on *The Catechetics of Mary at Garabandal*, from which these statements are reproduced.

Among the important lessons of catechism by the Virgin at Garabandal, I wish finally to speak of a thing that appears to me to reach the depth of our spiritual life under a childish appearance. I wish to speak of that game of hide and seek in which the Virgin and her children took part during a long night.

The more that I think about this matter, the more I feel I understand it.

You understand that many mothers, teaching their little children to walk, use the nice deception of hiding behind a tree or a door to entice the baby to go after them. Stirred by the desire of finding its mother again, it makes its first steps without even being aware of it.

Previously I compared this attitude of a mother with the Virgin's game. For in the spiritual life, after giving us the joys of His presence, Jesus withdraws so that we might seek after Him more and without sensible consolation . . .

Mary, who knows the ineffable secrets of the divine life, to teach those profound things to her simple little girls, has played at hiding herself in order that the desire of seeing her again, the suffering that they then felt on losing sight of her, the wish that they would have to find her again, would bring them to one day overcome the vicissitudes of the spiritual life, something that isn't easy.

Between the 15th of July and the 8th of August, 1970, Mrs. Le Pelletier de Glatigny was in Garabandal. One day, speaking with Conchita, she asked her if she knew anything about her conference at Cande. Receiving a negative answer, she then explained to the young girl how they could understand those games, now so long past.

—Certainly the Virgin wanted to teach you to seek to adapt to a life of pure and simple faith when the apparitions ended. And now that you find yourself in the middle of spiritual darkness, you can understand better than I what this means . . .

—Yes, Conchita replied, that is what the Virgin wanted to teach us. I will read your conference.

* * *

Let us return to the report of María Herrero on September 12th, the feast of the Holy Name of Mary:

«Toward 8 in the evening, at twilight, the girls traveled through the village in ecstasy and headed



toward the road going down to Cossío. This was the first time that I saw them leaving in that direction. I didn't follow them since I was exhausted from a lot of running after them, from one spot to the next, on a rather hot afternoon.

The feast of the Holy Name of Mary was the feastday of my name, and of course, that of the one who bore that sweet name like no one else. Because of this, I had mentioned to Conchita that she should congratulate the Most Holy Virgin on my behalf . . . I had been thrilled to learn that on one occasion she had made Conchita give her congratulations on his feastday to a certain man who visited San Sebastián de Garabandal with devotion.

Aniceta had forbidden Conchita to venture out on the nearby road that led out of sight of the village. On this occasion, Conchita, seeing herself prevented from following the Vision and her companions, began to cry out loud, imploring her mother to permit her to continue onward. Aniceta was so struck by Conchita's voice, full of suffering, that she felt convinced (according to what she herself told me) of not finding herself simply before the voice of her daughter, but before a strange force that came out of Conchita and her voice. She had no other solution but to let her leave.

And then the four girls began a swift march toward Cossío, so rapid that the people following them were not able to keep up. Then I decided to run after the crowd, too; but I felt exhausted, and from time to time I had to stop to catch my breath . . . Fortunately, the girls also slowed down to pray in a loud voice, accompanied by a crowd.

On coming to the little wooden bridge that crosses over the ravine, at the bottom of which a waterfall flows, they stopped completely. And returning to the Pines, they continued their prayers there . . .

Beneath a cloudless sky covered with stars, on a clear transparent night, the Hail Marys were being counted out slowly, as if imbued with an infinite fervor.

The fifteen mysteries of the rosary followed like this, one after the other—without hurry, as the girls were accustomed to pray in ecstasy. Everything encouraged MEDITATION.



“Aniceta . . . struck by Conchita’s voice . . . a strange force that came out of Conchita.”



Loli returns a wedding ring to its owner on instructions from the Vision.

Somehow I understood then more than ever Conchita's phrase calling the *Cuadro* her *little piece of heaven* . . . I myself had this little piece of heaven on the twelfth of September, 1961, in the prayer of the night, enveloped in silence and solitude.»⁽²⁴⁾

On that 12th of September, in a more private ecstasy following the one that María Herrero has just described, some interesting things occurred in Conchita's house, I say, *in Conchita's house*, since

24. Such a sweet impression remained in the mind of Mrs. Herrero de Gallardo from that prayer and meditation under the stars that years later, in September of 1967 . . . Let us listen to her:

«We made a procession on St. Michael's day. It was a procession composed almost completely of *Garabandalistas* from Cataluña who were coming to inaugurate the private chapel to St. Michael. We went up penitentially from Cossío with the banner of the Archangel and the picture of the Virgin painted by Isabel de Daganzo. I called Mercedes Salisachs' attention on coming to the place, and she made the procession stop there in memory of the apparition of September 12th, 1961. And all of us got on our knees on the hard ground; we prayed one of the 25 rosaries that we recited that day.»

the girl herself was not there . . . Father José Ramón García de la Riva describes it to us in his *Memorias*:⁽²⁵⁾

«Loli was in ecstasy and there came the time — so familiar to many and for all so moving — of returning to each one of the owners the multiple articles that had been kissed by the Virgin. As usual the girl, without looking and without erring, began her task, taking the articles one by one from the pile where they were all piled up and jumbled together.

She came in turn to a wedding ring. Loli took it and gave it to a woman, putting it on the customary finger of her right hand. (*European custom*) But almost immediately, and giving the impression that she was following hidden instructions, she took the ring from that finger and put it on the corresponding finger of the left hand. The woman could not contain her feelings and broke out in tears.

25. Fr. de la Riva stated that the ecstasies in Conchita's house on the night of September 12th lasted from ten at night until four in the morning.

The reason? She was from Valencia and had understood the Virgin's refinement, since in her area—as she told the people around her—wedding rings were not accustomed to be worn on the same hand and finger as in the rest of Spain, but instead exactly where Loli had put hers . . . The thing didn't end there. Loli also told the name of her husband, which the woman had absolutely not revealed to anyone.»

Another episode, following this one right at the foot of Conchita's bed, occurred during a very prolonged ecstasy of Loli and Jacinta.

«I had already given everything I had at hand so that it could be kissed by the Virgin, and I cannot explain now the reason why I also gave Conchita the camera in its case during the ecstasy of the other two girls. (It was known that only by means of one of the visionaries who wasn't in a trance could the rest of us communicate with the girls in ecstasy) . . . »

And so begins the remarkable tale that Father José Ramón describes in his *Memorias* under the title of *The Story of the Virgin's Photograph*, and which I am not going to reproduce here so as not to lengthen this chapter excessively.

Certainly memorable during the apparitions in Garabandal was the first feastday of the Holy Name of Mary!

It was now the pre-autumn season, peaceful and enchanting, and the vigils of prayers and meditations under the stars—like that which took place at the little bridge over the ravine—were wonderful. However, simpler vigils composed of amicable conversations in the kitchens of the homes had their own charm. María Herrero described one of the latter type like this:

«One evening after the apparition, I found myself alone with Conchita in her home. I took advantage of the occasion and said to her,

—*Tell me about the Virgin, Conchita.* (As a rule, none of the girls spoke spontaneously about their visions; they jealously kept *their secret*; but that day I was fortunate.)

—What do you want me to tell you? Today the Virgin came without the Child. And she didn't bring her crown. Her hair is long, dark

brown, parted in the middle . . . We have never seen her with a veil on her head and her hair waves lightly, as if blown by a breeze . . .

—*Anything more?*

—There's so much! But I don't know how to say it . . . One interesting detail: when the Virgin prays the 'Gloria', she bows her head with extraordinary reverence.⁽²⁶⁾

—*Have you ever seen her clothed in the Carmelite dress?*

—She always comes clothed in white and with a dark blue cloak. Only on the feastday of Mount Carmel, July 16, did I see her in the Carmelite habit.

—*And what can you tell me of St. Michael?*

—He started everything. He came the first time on June 18th, preceded by lightening and a roaring like thunder that made a great impression on us.

—*That isn't strange, Conchita, for don't you know that St. Michael is the leader of the Celestial Army, the standard-bearer of God, the vanquisher of Satan, etc., etc.?*

—Well, no. I don't know anything about that.

At another time in the conversation, speaking of the Child Jesus, Conchita tried to explain how he was dressed.

—It is very difficult to describe the color of His clothes! It is as if He were covered with a little of the sky . . . But not exactly blue; I don't know what His clothes could be made from . . .

Concerning St. Joseph:

—**HE IS THE GREATEST OF THE SAINTS IN HEAVEN.»**

26. The woman from Gallardo also heard Conchita say, although she does not remember if it was on this or another occasion:

«The Virgin gives the impression of looking more than at you. She is looking at the world. And in what a way! No one could look like that.»



"THE GREATEST OF THE SAINTS IN HEAVEN"

The Designs of God

The presence of St. Michael the Archangel has a definite significance in the mystery of Garabandal. At Burgos in November of 1967 Conchita told the painter Isabel de Daganzo:

«He seemed to be about 9 years old, with black eyes, smiling, with spread out pale pink wings, wearing a light blue garment. We didn't see his hands except when he gave us Communion. The bottom of his robe didn't touch the stone that the people call "the Angel's Stone"; he was on top of the stone, but up in the air.»

In spite of his *harmless* appearance, we should remember the true nature of the first archangel, as María Herrero tried to make Conchita, then *unlearned*, understand. He is God's instrument for the highest missions: God's arm in the great combats.

Why then did he show himself like this at Garabandal? What definite mission did he have? Preparing the way for the **woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, crowned with 12 stars** (Apoc. 12: 1) was no minor matter. However, there are reasons to think that he was coming for more than that . . .

Outside of the lightning and thunder, everything about him seemed to show peacefulness. But a mission of peace could be the preamble, if it fails, of a final all-out battle.

Who could say whether or not we have already entered one of those final hours prophesied in the last book of Scripture?

**And I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun,
having the sign of the living God;
and he cried with a loud voice to the four angels,
to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, saying:
"Hurt not the earth, nor the sea, nor the trees,
till we sign the servants of our God on their foreheads."
(Apocalypse 7: 2-3)**

A last attempt at peace before passing on to the final reckoning. An Angel with a peaceful appearance conducts a peace-making mission; though later he can become, in a different stance, the leader of the angels of justice.

On the shores of the Tigris River, during the most

spectacular *prophecy* of his life, Daniel once said:

**But at that time shall Michael rise up,
the great prince, who stands for the children of your people:
and a time shall come such as never was
from the time that nations began even until that time.
And at that time shall your people be saved,
everyone that shall be found written in the book.**

**And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth,
shall awake: some unto life everlasting,
and others unto reproach, to see it always.**

**But they that understand
shall shine as the brightness of the firmament:
and they that instruct many to justice,
as stars for all eternity.**

(Daniel 12: 1-3)

Garabandal, an important era in the process of Salvation!

The Virgin, just as the Angel who preceded her, and the angels who later accompanied her, came for our welfare, not for our entertainment. Through them, one time more:

**For the grace of God, Our Savior has appeared to all men;
instructing us, that denying ungodliness and worldly desires,
we should live soberly and justly and godly in this world,
looking for the blessed hope and coming of the glory
of the great God and Our Savior, Jesus Christ,
Who gave Himself for us,
that He might redeem us from all iniquity,
and might purify for Himself an acceptable people,
that pursues good works.**

(Titus 2: 11-14)

* * *

On finishing this chapter, my glance chanced to fall on a postcard received several months previously, showing under a thickly clouded sky, the difficult trail to Garabandal. High up in the near foreground, the Pines; behind them in the background, the mountains with their peaks hidden in the clouds. This unique panorama is commented on by some verses written on the card, and regardless of what literary quality they may have, they certainly have put down concisely what Garabandal is; and furthermore announce what it will be. Who was the author? Presently I do not know; but in these verses, he speaks to us as *the voice of the whole village*, the voice of the uncountable people who have gone up that trail with a heart free of prejudice.

**March on . . .
With your eyes fixed on the hopes
From those ancient pines;
With your steps firm,
Gazing in the distance
Where alone God can be reached
by the penitential path of rosaries.**

**Coming up! Straight ahead!
The Throne of Mary!
the Pulpit of her Prophecy!
Where a misty veil shrouds a mystery,
On which shines the light of God,
Creating a New Day.**

**Trail traveled a million times;
Forever resounding with prayer;
Where the Psalm has found its home,
And the voice of heaven trumpets its call.**



The trail of prayer and penance that ascended up to Garabandal.