

The Apparitions of Our Lady at Garabandal



Garabandal is a quaint hamlet of three hundred souls isolated in the gorgeous Cantabrian mountains of northwestern Spain. It lies about sixty miles southwest of the provincial capital and episcopal see of Santander. Some seventy solid rustic stone houses stand huddled together on a narrow strip of land overlooking the delightful wooded valley which stretches northward toward the plain below.

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 other only eleven. However, because of the backward village environment, their mental and psychological age was considerably less. The angel came back eight more times during June.

Our Lady Comes

The first time the angel 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.

A Mother and Her Children

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 that several times 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.

First Formal Message

On July 4th, Our Lady gave the girls what has come to be known as the first message. This message affirmed that it was important to make many sacrifices, to perform much penance and to visit the Blessed Sacrament often. It said that first, people should lead good lives, and that if they did not do this, a chastisement would befall them. It warned that the cup was already filling up and that if men did not change, a very great chastisement would come. This message had been inscribed on a sign that had appeared under the angel's feet in June, but the children had not understood the inscription at the time. Our Lady told the girls to announce the message publicly to the people on October 18th, which they did.

Second Formal Message

The second message was given much later toward the end of the apparitions. The Blessed Virgin told Conchita on January 1, 1965, that the archangel Saint Michael would appear on June 18th, and would deliver a message in her name. Through Saint Michael, Our Lady complained that her first message had not been complied with and warned that this message would be her last. She said that the cup which previously had been filling up was now flowing over. She stated that many priests, bishops and cardinals were on the road to perdition and taking many souls with them. She deplored the fact that less and less importance was being given to the Eucharist. She said that we should turn the wrath of God away from us by our efforts and that God would pardon us if we asked forgiveness with sincere hearts. She affirmed that if we asked with sincerity, our requests would be granted. Her final words were to exhort us to make more sacrifices and to reflect on the passion of Jesus.

Message Doctrinally Sound

Bishop Eugenio Beitia, one of the former bishops of Santander, 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."

Rosary Message and Renewal of Private Prayer

Bishop Beitia mentions "an exhortation to... veneration of our Blessed Lady in traditional praiseworthy ways" as part of the spiritual recommendations of Garabandal. He is apparently referring to the rosary message of Garabandal. Now this is not part of what could be termed the official or formal messages, those given by the Blessed Virgin, either directly, as in 1961, or through Saint Michael, as in 1965.

But the broader message of Garabandal definitely does involve an exhortation to that traditional Marian prayer, the rosary. The Blessed Virgin took the pains to teach the girls how to say it properly, that is, very slowly and attentively. She also made them recite it during every apparition and she commanded them to recite it daily.

It is interesting to note that Our Lady taught the girls how to say other vocal prayers in the same deliberate manner. Her first lesson in private prayer was given on August 8, 1961, to Maria Cruz, who at the time was in ecstasy in the village church. Here is how Conchita describes this in her Diary: "...She started to say the Credo

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 how to pray slowly. After the Credo, she said the Hail Holy Queen and then she made the Sign of the Cross very slowly, very properly.”

Tape Recordings Informative

Tape recordings of the children saying the rosary and other prayers in ecstasy reveal two features of these “very slow” prayers. Each word is pronounced very, very slowly and there are distinct pauses between each grouping of two or three words, for example, 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

Renewal of Rosary and Private Prayer

will follow. This slow, meaningful and affective praying of the rosary and other vocal prayers adds a whole new and rewarding dimension to them.

Informal Message

These specific instructions for the renewal of private prayer, and many other things which the Blessed Virgin told the children during the numerous apparitions and locutions (interior voices or messages communicated interiorly and without any accompanying vision), comprise what could be called the informal, but truly authentic message of Garabandal.

Private Messages

Many of the messages delivered by Our Lady were of a purely private nature. Some were words of enlightenment or comfort directed to people who came to the village with personal problems. Others were statements that revealed the hidden thoughts or actions of visitors, some of whom were doubting priests. The Blessed Virgin told Conchita that the great American apostle of Garabandal, Joey Lomangino, would recover his sight on the day of the great miracle. She also told Conchita and her three friends other things of this kind.

Divine Commands in Times of Spiritual Crisis

The messages given on the occasion of apparitions do not involve new doctrine. The content of our faith can know no increase. Divine revelation came to a close with the death of the last apostle. The messages of apparitions are divine commands telling us what to do in times of spiritual crisis. In this regard it is interesting to note that the message of Garabandal warned us in advance of the things that we should hold to and that were soon to be the object of direct or indirect attack in the Church: Mary, the rosary, the Eucharist, sin, penance and repentance, meditation on the passion (which gives us our insight into sin and the role of penance and reparation). Her request for prayers for priests and members of the hierarchy who are on the road to perdition is particularly prophetic and significant.

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 in the following words:

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 the 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 1:40 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, who was standing inches from Conchita, took some 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 exceptional and humanly unexplainable phenomena encountered at Garabandal.

Kissed Objects and Prodigies

The kissing of objects started early in the apparitions, but it 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, and she told Conchita in advance that she would come for that purpose. "It was to be a special apparition," Conchita writes, "to kiss religious objects that would be distributed afterwards, for they have great importance." Conchita has written a report of this apparition.

The following are the significant parts of the report.

She said to me: "You will recall what I told you on your patronal feast (the Immaculate Conception, December 8), that you would suffer much on earth. Well, have confidence in us and offer your suffering generously to our Hearts for the welfare of your brethren. In this way, you will feel how close we are to you."

And 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: "Do you know, Conchita, why I did not come myself on June 18th, to deliver the message for the world? Because it hurt me to give it to you myself. But I must give it to you for your own good, and if you heed it, for the glory of God. I love you very much and I desire your salvation and your reunion here in heaven with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. We can count on you, Conchita, can we not?"

"If I were to see you continually, I would say, yes. But, if not, I don't know, because I am so bad," I answered.

"You do everything that you can, and we will help you."

She stayed only a very short while.

"This will be the last time you see me here—Sera la ultima ves 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."

I told the Blessed Virgin: "I am happy when I see both of you. Why don't you take me now to heaven with you?"

"Remember what I told you on your patronal feast day," she replied. "When you present yourself before God, your hands must be filled with good works done for your brothers and for His glory. But at the present time, your hands are empty."

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.

Abundance of Favors

The kissing of objects with the resulting favors, both temporal and spiritual, was meant by God to be one of the principal means for developing and maintaining faith in the apparitions during the wait for the great miracle. These favors, temporal and especially spiritual, have been very numerous and this is certainly one of the reasons explaining the phenomenal growth of the Garabandal movement throughout the world, notwithstanding the negative attitude of the various bishops of Santander.

Message of Love

The most significant thing about the November 13, 1965, vision, is that the apparitions of Garabandal closed on a warm note of love: "I have come for all my children, so that I may draw them closer to my heart...Talk to me about my children. I hold them all beneath my mantle.... I shall always be with you and with all my children." It was a love backed by a promise of prodigies that would be continual proofs of that love. But the purpose of Mary's love and concern for us is to draw us to love her Son, who proves His love by staying in our tabernacles, where He waits for us day and night.

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, not to mention a very special charm.

Various Degrees of Involvement

There are other interesting points of similarity between Fatima and Garabandal in regard to the visionaries. In both cases there were several children involved, which assures the authenticity and accuracy of the message transmitted. Also, in each instance there is a difference in the degree to which each of the visionaries is involved in the event. At Fatima, Lucia did all the speaking to the vision and Francisco never heard the Lady's voice. At Garabandal, Conchita saw Our Lady more frequently than any of the other three girls and she was the one most involved in the locutions, which are something quite peculiar to this contemporary Spanish event as compared to Lourdes and Fatima.

Loli is next in importance and she enjoys considerable more prominence than either Jacinta or Maria Cruz. We really know very little of Jacinta, who is silent and reticent by nature, and even less of Maria Cruz.

Mission of Suffering

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.

Views of Doctors and Theologians

In the summer of 1962, a Spanish theologian prepared some notes on Garabandal for Doctor Ricardo Puncernau, a neurologist and Assistant Professor at the Medical School of Barcelona. (The theologian's name is withheld because of the private nature of the document.) Here are some of the more pertinent observations made by this theologian. A study of the information given by the doctors (Dr. Ortiz of Santander, a children's specialist, spent 22 consecutive days studying the girls) convinces me, that any normal or abnormal psychological explanation is unthinkable.

(Author's note: Doctor Puncernau is himself one of the top medical authorities on Garabandal. He saw the girls in ecstasy some twenty times and examined them very thoroughly both in and out of ecstasy. He concurs that there is no natural, either normal or pathological, explanation for the happenings at Garabandal.)

The rules suggested to us by the great masters of the spiritual life for the discernment of spirits gives us no indication, in the case of San Sebastian de Garabandal, of possible diabolical possession. There is no trace of worldly spirit, vainglory, desire for money, or pride.

Numbers of religious men, wise, prudent and virtuous, who have visited San Sebastian de Garabandal, are inclined towards a supernatural interpretation. Among them are some of the outstanding theologians that we have in Spain today...

I believe that there is a serious and more than sufficient foundation for belief in the reality of the apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary to the four little girls at San Sebastian of Garabandal.

Attitude of the Church

There have been several statements from the various bishops of Santander since the start of the apparitions—all have refused to admit the divine origin of the events at Garabandal. Although Rome has steadfastly left the matter of the apparitions in the hands of the local Bishops, it has nevertheless shown a personal interest in them.

Conchita was called to Rome by Cardinal Ottaviani and went there in January of 1966. She visited the Holy Office and spent two and a half hours there in a very cordial interview. A few days after this visit, she was received privately by the Pope, who during his conversation with her said: "I bless you, and with me the whole Church blesses you." This cannot be interpreted as approval of Garabandal, but it is not without significance.

Also, there have been a number of private statements relative to Garabandal that have emanated from high places in the eternal city. Although none of them would warrant saying that Rome has approved the apparitions, they do indicate that Church authorities there are much more open to Garabandal than Santander has been up to now, and that they do not consider the matter closed because of statements that have been issued by Santander.

Apparitions Still Under Investigation

...A formal approval of the Garabandal event, either by Santander or Rome, would not appear likely until we have had the great miracle, which precisely was promised by heaven to authenticate irrefutably this most unusual and fascinating series of happenings that God has provided for his Church in crisis.

The late Fr. Joseph Pelletier studied theology in Rome where he received a Baccalaureate and Licentiate in Sacred Theology. Later he obtained a Master's degree in Sociology from Boston College and was associated with Assumption College, Worcester, Massachusetts for most of his priestly life. A noted authority on Marian apparitions, he wrote extensively on Fatima and Garabandal. This article was republished with permission from Garabandal Journal, PO Box 1796, St. Cloud, MN 56302-1796, U.S.A.