

destroyed (this was more than three months before October 20 when Lenin left his hideaway hut in Finland to launch the Russian Revolution).

Secondly, the children mentioned a promise from Mary that, in answer to their request, two of the three would soon join her in heaven (a flu epidemic at the end of the decade took the life of Jacinta and Francisco, but Lucia lived to be almost a hundred).

One Last Reason to Believe

Still another factor in the “belief equation” is the fact that Lucia and her two cousins were remarkably mature from a spiritual standpoint. No ordinary children, they prayed the rosary in the fields prior to 1917. They also fasted, abstained from water, wore coarse rope around their waist next to the skin — all in response, they said, to the prompting of three angels who appeared to them in the summer of 1916. The angels, after teaching them how to pray, had informed them of the need to embrace suffering for its redemptive value.

Conclusion

Fatima is the most thoroughly authenticated miracle since the Resurrection of Christ. Along with Lourdes, it is also the best known, and it is interesting to note what the two have in common. In both instances, the Blessed Mother appeared to Catholics. Secondly, both miracles remind us of things recounted in Scripture.

Fatima harks back to the miracles of the sun witnessed by Joshua (Josh. 10) and Hezekiah (1 Kings 20), while Lourdes takes us back to what transpired at the Pool of Bethesda when a man was cured by wading into water stirred by an angel (John 5). Those who find it hard to believe in biblical inerrancy find their faith strengthened by modern-day miracles. Conversely, those inclined to doubt the story of Fatima are spurred to belief by what they find in Sacred Scripture.

The Big Picture

In the final analysis, Fatima is much more than a miracle. It is many miracles rolled into one. The miracle of the sun is undeniably wondrous. But just as wondrous is the fact that the event was predicted three months in advance — to the exact day — by children.

In the case of predictions forecasting when Jacinta and Francisco would die and what would happen to Russia, they are again miraculous because the

outcomes were highly unlikely. The joy and enthusiasm with which children as young as Lucia, Jacinta, and Francisco embraced prayer and penance is awesome.

Last of all, the fact that the children were strong enough psychologically to cling to their story in the face of bitter opposition from naysaying parents, incredulous church officials, and hostile civil authorities is nothing short of marvelous.

Endnote

It is not unusual for Muslims to come to Fatima on pilgrimage because they love Mary, and it should be added that Fatima is not only the name of Muhammad’s daughter, said by Muslims to have given birth virginally.

It is also the name of a Portuguese princess who converted from Islam to Christianity during the thirteenth century when her people were driven out of the country. The princess lived the Faith, and when she died, her husband honored her by giving the town of Fatima its current name.

Written By

Frederick W. Marks, Ph. D.

Payer of Consecration to Jesus

Lord God, I thank You for the gifts of life and of Your boundless love for me. “I praise you, because I am wonderfully made; wonderful are your works!” (Psalm 139)

Yet I know that many times I have sinned against You and against those You have called me to love. I am truly sorry. I know that You love me despite my sins, and have sent Your Son to die for me, to save me from sin and hell.

Today, I say “yes” to Your love, revealed in Your Son Jesus. I give my life to You and ask You to fill me with Your Holy Spirit.

Lord Jesus, come into my heart as King. Rule my thoughts, words, and actions, that I might always live as Your disciple. Amen.

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Fatima

The Greatest Miracle of Our Time



St. Paul
Street Evangelization

The Greatest Miracle

On October 13, 1917 in the Portuguese village of Fatima, there occurred a miracle that is far and away the most stunning event of modern times because it was witnessed by an estimated 70,000 people, atheists included; also because the facts in question were acknowledged by Portugal's anti-clerical press.

The Story

What happened may be simply told. On May 13, 1917, a ten-year-old shepherdess by the name of Lucia Santos, accompanied by her cousins, Jacinta and Francisco Marto (aged 7 and 9), came home after pasturing their sheep and reported that Mary, the mother of Jesus, had appeared to them, urging prayer and mortification in reparation for sin. She had said, additionally, that she would return on the 13th day of each succeeding month and work a great miracle on October 13 so "that all may believe."

The Circumstances

The faith of the people was under heavy siege at the time because the Portuguese government had fallen into the hands of totalitarian leftists. Priests and nuns had been jailed. Celebration of the Mass had been severely restricted — to the point where it was practically extinct in urban areas. Portugal was well on its way to becoming the first Communist state.

Mary Keeps Her Word

The Blessed Mother came every month, as promised, and though she was not seen by the vast majority of spectators, she manifested her presence in subtle ways. Some of the bystanders saw a cloud formation resembling the burning of incense. Others saw rainbow colors, along with a luminous globe in a cloudless sky.

On one occasion, there was a flash, on another a faint buzzing sound. Witnesses told of hearing the roll of thunder in fair weather. There was reference, as well, to the sight of glittering gossamer and flower petals falling from heaven. Lucia's radiance was particularly telling. The fact that she positively glowed during the apparitions brought more and more people to her side. On June 13 the crowd was estimated at 500.

By July 13, the number had risen to 2,000, and by October 13, the day of the miracle, 70,000 had

come from near and far. Agnostics, hard-bitten journalists, "doubting Thomas" academicians, anti-clerical officials — all were on hand awaiting what they confidently expected would be a non-event.

The First Miracle

It rained long and hard the night before October 13 — so hard that many were soaked to the bone. Around 1 PM on the 13th, Lucia called out: "Put down your umbrellas!" and many did so in spite of the downpour. Suddenly, as if by magic, everyone was dry as a bone. Scientists tell us that the amount of energy required to dry the clothes of 70,000 spectators in a matter of moments is enormous — so great, in fact, that it should have killed all present.

The Miracle of the Sun

With everyone comfortably dry, the sun, after spinning rapidly and throwing off a variety of colors, appeared to zigzag and hurtle at tremendous speed toward the earth, causing many to fall to the ground. Some fainted. Others wept as objects turned all colors of the rainbow. Eyewitnesses testified that they had been able to look directly at a sun shining unfiltered against the background of a blue sky.

Press Reports

On October 15, the anti-clerical, Masonic editor of Portugal's most influential newspaper, *O Seculo*, published an account of what he called "a spectacle unique and incredible" in which the sun resembled "a silver plate." "One would say that an eclipse had occurred," he wrote, describing the crowd as "pale with fear" and the sun as trembling, making "abrupt movements never seen before and outside all cosmic laws."

Two days later, on October 17, *O Dia*, another Portuguese paper with a high circulation, published a second account that dovetailed neatly with the first: "the silver sun . . . [was] seen to whirl . . . people fell on their knees . . . the light turned to a beautiful blue." Eventually, hundreds of eyewitnesses were interviewed.

Some of them had been miles away from Fatima when they observed the gyrations of the sun, and the recollections, which were in substantial agreement, have since been published. An atheist on the faculty of Columbia University wrote a vivid description of the miracle, and there is a massive volume in Portuguese containing a treasure trove of

information yet to be translated into English.

The Credibility of the Children

The credibility of the children is unimpeachable owing to the miracle itself. But there is more. Lucia's family grew poorer in its aftermath, and she had to face angry, unbelieving parents, as well as a skeptical pastor who didn't want trouble from the state.

Then, too, secular authorities used every ruse and threat they could devise to get the children to retract their story. After abducting them on August 13, the day they were to meet Mary for the fourth time, local officials threatened to throw them into a cauldron of boiling oil unless they changed their tune.

The youngsters were then separated and each told that the others had undergone martyrdom. Again, they stuck to their line, risking a cruel death. In the end, they wound up in jail with hardened criminals, some of whom, upon seeing them fall to their knees in prayer, did the same out of sympathy. One was even converted!

What They Endured

Small wonder that photographs taken of the children show them looking unhappy and scared. Their parents, clueless as to their whereabouts on August 13, suffered terribly, and in the aftermath, the Santos and Marto families were targets for ridicule. Doctrinaire anti-clericals kept on insisting that the miracle of the sun had been invented, that simple people had been deceived by means of collective suggestion.

Furious at the thought of a religious groundswell, the secularists did everything in their power to block Fatima processions, going so far as to threaten violence. Four bombs were placed in the Fatima chapel and a fifth by the holm oak where Our Lady had appeared. The tree bomb failed to explode, but the chapel roof was blown off, and Lucia was seriously endangered — so much so that she had to leave town.

Two Other Reasons

Two other reasons for crediting the children stem from things reported long before October 13. First, after meeting the Virgin on July 13, they quoted her as having said that without prayer and mortification, Russia would fall into error and spread lies around the world ... nations would be