

The Blessed Virgin's emphasis on the priesthood at Garabandal underscores the prophetic quality of the events.

Garabandal and the Priesthood

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In 1978, after a series of interviews with visionary Mari Loli LaFleur and her mother, Julia, Father Joseph Pelletier said: It is now unmistakably clear to me that the main reason why Our Lady came at Garabandal was the crisis of the Church and of the priesthood. And if we analyze what Our Heavenly Mother said, that crisis has not yet reached its peak." Prophetic words indeed as we can now attest.

In 1980, Conchita told Dr. J. Dominguez: "In almost every apparition— I think in all the apparitions—the Virgin asked us to pray for priests."

This was the first time in any of Her major appearances that Our Lady specifically asked for prayers (and sacrifices) for priests. As Father Pelletier pointed out: "The message of atonement, of prayer and sacrifice, was a very important part of what Our Lady told us at Lourdes and Fatima but then it was aimed at sinners in general and not specifically at priests as it was in Garabandal."



PICTURE: From left: Conchita, Jacinta, Mari Loli and Mari Cruz in ecstasy in July, 1961. Priests are on the top left and bottom right.

Concern for priests by the Blessed Virgin at Garabandal was something the young visionaries would not have thought of on their own. In small Spanish mountain villages like San Sebastian de Garabandal in the early 1960s, clericalism was strong—at least among the women—and priests were the last ones anyone would have considered to be in need of spiritual help from the rest of fallen humanity.

So when the Blessed Virgin told the visionaries to pray for priests, they were surprised. Shouldn't *they* be praying for *us*?

By asking for prayers and sacrifices for priests, the Blessed Virgin was anticipating the crisis that would erupt after Vatican II when sweeping and not always authorized changes sent the Church reeling. Father Richard Gilsdorf described the situation: "Near the end of the Council and the heady years following this epochal event, the lethal 'spirit of Vatican II' was spawned. The letter of the Council, its genuine and orthodox interpretation, was quietly laid to rest. Few bothered to read the documents, the *acta*. A whole 'new church' as it was ingeniously called, was conjured up by liberated lecturers and publicists. It was not only the traditional ritual and devotional forms which were declared open to radical change, but the very dogmas of faith and morals were soon considered fair targets for revision and dissent."

The root causes of sexual abuse cases involving priests that recently have been so widely publicized, can be traced back to this post Vatican II period. The breakdown of discipline fostered by its liberal guiding principle of "self-fulfillment" replacing the traditional "self-sacrifice" opened the way for men who were totally unsuited for the priesthood to be allowed to enter seminaries and advance to ordination. Today the Church is paying the consequences.

During the dissembling process that immediately followed the Council, many priests agonized over an "identity crisis" and continuing until today is an ongoing attempt to subvert the traditional role of the priest by those who envision a "new model of Church" run by lay ecclesiastical ministers. In this "new model," the priest is downgraded to a "sacramentary minister" placed alongside music ministers, youth ministers, hospitality ministers, etc.-

OUR LADY'S ANSWER

At Garabandal, the Blessed Virgin responded in advance to the future attack on the priesthood by reaffirming the lofty status and unique character of the priest.

When a priest is validly ordained, he enters into a higher order which surpasses all earthly dignities. Just as no saint no matter how great, can surpass the Blessed Virgin or Saint Joseph because as members of the Holy Family, they are of a higher order, no king or head of state can surpass the dignity of a priest who alone can change bread and wine into the body, blood, soul and divinity of Jesus Christ. Our Lady impressed upon the visionaries this superior calling of the priest as Conchita explained to Dr. Dominguez: "The Virgin told us that if we ever saw a priest and an angel together, we should greet the priest first and then the angel. If the Blessed Mother gives us this example, you can imagine how much we admired and loved priests—any priest; because in the eyes of the Virgin, any priest was superior to an angel, and an angel was the greatest creature we knew after the Virgin."

A PREDILECTION FOR PRIESTS

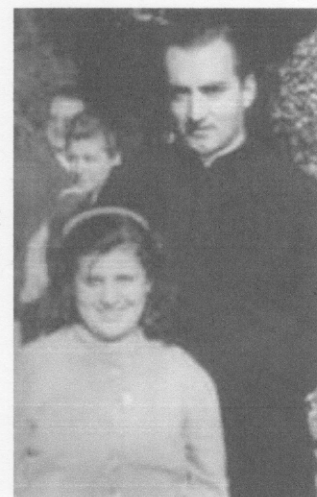
Conchita affirmed the Blessed Virgin's predilection for priests at Garabandal: "In every apparition we noticed that the Virgin would speak with special, very dear love about priests and I guess this was contagious; since the priests were the main objects of the Virgin's love, they were also our most beloved persons."

PICTURE: Mari Loli with Fr. Ramon Andreu in 1962.

When asked if she and the other seers obeyed Our Lady's admonition to pray for priests, Conchita responded: "Oh yes! We were always praying for priests; it was like an obsession with us at the time of the apparitions, and we loved them very much. Whenever there was a priest at the village, he was our hero; we stayed at his side most of the time, we listened to him and talked to him. Every priest was our most important visitor."

MESSAGES FOR PRIESTS

In her interview with Dr. Dominguez, Conchita mentioned that on several occasions the Blessed Virgin gave them private messages for particular priests "but we would give them to the priest and then forget about them."



"I remember once that there was a priest, a Dominican, dressed as a layman and the Virgin was telling us jokingly how ugly the secular clothes were on that Dominican compared to the beautiful habit he was supposed to wear. She made us laugh and when the apparition was over, we told the priest the reason for our laughter."

On one occasion, the Blessed Virgin, acting through the young visionaries, relieved the anxieties of a priest in a striking way. It occurred in the first year of the apparitions in the early days of September, 1961. This excerpt is taken from *She Went in Haste to the Mountain* by Eusebio Garcia de Pesquera, O.F.M., Cap.

Father Ramon Andreu was in Ceferino's tavern and store when a priest in a foul mood entered brusquely, and aggressively made his way toward him.

"Listen, are you Father Andreu?"

"At your service."

"Well, I'm here to tell you that I don't like any of 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."

"*Hombre!* I've 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, Father Andreu called over to Dr. Ortiz of Santander, who was passing by, and said to him, "Listen, Dr. Ortiz, this priest here is very interested in this and since you are an intellectual, you can explain some things 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 at all the same man he had been before.

"Father Andreu, it's for real! I'm convinced!"

"Listen, let's go slow. Ten minutes ago you didn't like it at all. And now you are already a convert? Don't you think you're in a bit of a hurry?"

"Judge 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 little 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 little 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, senor."

"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 little man. Then she gave me the cross to kiss and she gave it to the little man to kiss...."

"Hold on a minute," Fr. Andreu interrupted. "Let me know who that little man is, for it seems to me that the

What Jesus Wants from His Priests

HOLINESS

In 1980, Fr. Pelletier asked Mari Loli, "Is there something Our Lady said about priests that you remember more than anything else?" Loli replied, "Our Lady asked us to pray for the sanctification of priests" (emphasis added).

really important one in this case is the little man and not you."

And so it actually was, as soon became evident. That little man was a parish priest from one of the villages. For some time he had been tormented by doubts about his priestly ordination: whether or not he had 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 his priestly functions improperly and without effect.

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 Father 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 more could be asked for to bring peace to his 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, hoping to see if on the following day he would obtain the absolutely convincing proof that he needed so much.

The new day came and the poor man did not have to wait for nightfall as would ordinarily be the case. Already in the morning there was an important ecstasy; many people 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 the girl could do it more easily. 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 kissing it, one after the other.

To sanctify means to "make holy" so what Our Lady was asking of the visionaries was that they pray for priests to be holy. And the Virgin didn't ask only for prayers. "Our Lady asked for prayers and sacrifices for them," said Loli.

In a 1963 letter to Fr. Luis Lopez Retenaga Loli wrote: "The Blessed Virgin made me understand when a priest is in a state of sin, and she also made me understand that he needs much prayer and sacrifice."

Loli took this message to heart and said in 1982 that "one of the main things in my life is to make sacrifices and pray for priests."

In 1970, Fr. Pelletier interviewed Conchita who said, regarding the priestly dignity mentioned in her later interview with Dr. Dominguez: "[Our Lady] told us about the worth—*el valor*—of a priest. She compared him with an angel and said that if we saw an angel and a priest, we should acknowledge the priest first, or fall on our knees in front of the priest rather than the angel. She said that it was because the priest consecrated, because he held Jesus Christ in his hands and the angel did not. Yes, She talked to us about this in this manner on various occasions. She told us that it was a greater grace to receive Jesus (in Holy Communion) than to see Her."

After a locution with Jesus on July 20, 1963, Conchita wrote down what Our Lord said regarding priests:

"Concerning priests, He told me that we should pray much for them so that they may be holy and fulfill their duty properly and make others better. He said: 'May they make Me known to those who do not know Me, and may they make Me loved by those who know but do not love Me.'"

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 went 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 her face was 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 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 had given the crucifix to everyone without exception to kiss, and if on me, only on me, she had made the sign of the cross three times, then there definitely would have been no doubt."



PICTURE: Marl Loli in ecstasy could well be speaking to Our Lady about the priest closely observing.

He had not finished thinking this when the girl stopped in her tracks and made her way back to the beginning of the line, to once more begin holding out 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 crucifix for 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 brought 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.

PURSUING PRIESTS

In showing her predilection for priests at Garabandal, there were times when the Blessed Virgin, through the visionaries, actually pursued them. The following episode occurred during a nighttime ecstasy in 1961 and is taken from *She Went in Haste to the Mountain*:

Watching the different facets of that vigil was a large group of spectators, among whom were the Asturians.... These were mainly young boys, but two men among them appeared to be their guides or leaders. One said to the boys, "Observe very closely and don't let yourselves be influenced, because these things..."

At 10:30 at night they gathered in front of Ceferino's ancient house. Then Conchita arrived in ecstasy, drew near, and began to hold out the crucifix to be kissed. The two men kept themselves away from her, and in order to hide better, went up the outside stairway of the house next door.

However the girl—with her head tilted far back, without seeing either them or the stairway—miraculously

climbed the stairs and held out the crucifix for them to kiss. The first man was visibly shaken and turned away, but the girl managed to make the sign of the cross on him twice with the crucifix. She insisted again that he kiss it and once again the man refused. A third time the girl made the sign of the cross over him with a most gentle expression on her face. Only then did the man relent and put his lips to the crucifix! Almost the same thing happened with his companion.

Conchita majestically descended the stairs and went toward the captain of the Civil Guard to give him the cross to kiss. Unexpectedly she turned and again walked toward these two men and held the crucifix in front of them. Once again they refused to kiss it! The onlookers were both indignant and scandalized. The girl suddenly came out of the trance, and everyone could see the most obstinate of the two trembling as if he were in pain. He went to hide in a corner, where some of the young boys followed him.

"Father X, what happened?"

"Leave me alone, leave me alone."

In the end he confessed: "You saw how I refused the crucifix that the girl offered me. Well, after finally kissing it, I mentally asked God for proof. 'My Lord, if all that is happening here is truly supernatural, let the girl come to me another time and let her ecstasy stop immediately; that way I'll be able to believe.' You saw what happened. Don't ask me anything more."

Those two men were priests; one of them appears to have been a pastor in Turon, the big mining center in Asturias.

VISIBLE REMINDER

Garabandal's focus on the priesthood could not have been more dramatically emphasized than by the events involving Jesuit Father Luis Maria Andreu.

On August 8, 1961, while observing the girls in ecstasy at the Pines, Fr. Luis also saw Our Lady and—a preview of the great Miracle to come, something the visionaries themselves did not see. His story has been well-publicized so there is no need to give a complete description here. Suffice it to say that he was the only other person besides the visionaries to have seen Our Lady at Garabandal and one of only two people we know of to have seen the great Miracle in preview (the other being Padre Pio) and the only person to have seen it where it will actually occur in time.

In the early morning of August 9, 1961, while being driven by car back to his place of residence following his vision at the Pines, 38-year-old Jesuit Father Luis Maria Andreu, with no health problems other than hay fever, quietly and peacefully passed from this life to the next. Rafael Fontaneda, who was in the car along with his wife, daughter and chauffeur, could find no other explanation for Fr. Luis's mysterious death than to say that "he died of joy," and recorded for posterity these memorable words uttered by Fr. Luis during his final hour on earth:

"I feel overwhelmed with joy. How lucky to have a mother like that in heaven! We shouldn't be afraid of the supernatural. The children have given us an example of the attitude we should take to the Blessed Virgin. I haven't the slightest doubt that this business of the children is true. Why can she have chosen us? Today is the happiest day of my life."

The final chapter of Father Luis Andreu's part in the Garabandal events will be written on the day after the great Miracle when, according to the prophecy, his body will be found incorrupt. We can look forward to the

public display of such a miraculous relic which will serve as a visible and permanent reminder of the centralized importance of the priesthood at Garabandal.

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