

GARABANDAL AND THE PASSION OF JESUS

By Robert François

In the following excerpt taken from *O Children Listen to Me*, the author shows how the cross was a major focal point during the Garabandal events.



THE LAST WORDS OF THE LAST Message of Garabandal were, on June 18, 1965: "Think about the Passion of Jesus." On the following December 11, Conchita, echoing these words, wrote to Father Alba: "We must think about the Passion of Jesus and meditate upon it. Not only should we do it ourselves, but get others to do it as well. Then we shall feel ourselves at the doors of God's bliss and we shall accept our crosses with joy for the love of God." Conchita knew that Father Alba was a chaplain to students in Barcelona and that he led a prayer group, and that the contents of her letter would be divulged. Her letter's heading bore the words, "† Ave Maria . . . For Father Alba's group of Barcelona." Conchita also knew from the Angel's words that "we should make more sacrifices" because an exhortation on these lines came just before the sentence on the Passion. The two are tightly linked.

Photography played an important part in the story of the apparitions, and the photos themselves are forcefully eloquent. One cannot be but struck by the importance of the crucifix and the sign of the cross in most of these photographs.

It was in August 1961, according to Father José Ramon Garcia de la Riva that the girls began the habit of holding the crucifixes during their ecstasies. When they received their first call, they found crucifixes and hid them in their clothes. They held them out at their third call. During the ecstasy, they presented them to be kissed, sometimes kissing them themselves, or crossing spectators with them.

When interviewed later, the villagers recall again and again seeing the visionaries presenting their crucifixes to be kissed, or crossing people with them, these people often being those who had asked for certain 'proofs' in their secret prayers. The visionaries crossed people in bed asleep, the foreheads of the sick, the tops of beds (twice if the bed were shared by two people), and the cars of the visitors. Once they spent a whole hour presenting a crucifix to be kissed

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by a certain woman, Clementina Gonzalez, who was in bed with her baby, Tonin, in a cradle beside her. The good woman wondered why this was and whether it was because she was good or bad, and she did not stop weeping. Perhaps it was because she was nine months pregnant, for we know that childbirth is both distress and joy, as is the Passion of Jesus (John 16:21).

One night Conchita stretched out her arm through the bars of her kitchen window, thus showing her arm and hand holding a crucifix for all those outside to see and kiss. She only withdrew her arm when a married couple came up to kiss the crucifix. They had hidden themselves, thinking they were unworthy.

It is in fact recorded that the visionaries nearly always held crucifixes.

They usually offered the crucifix to be kissed without looking at anyone except the Vision. On October 14, 1961, Jacinta offered the crucifix to be kissed over and over again to the six or eight persons following her, and they stopped to do this every ten yards. Sometimes the girls scoured the village, continually presenting the crucifix to be kissed. On January 29, 1962, in ecstasy, Mari Loli and Conchita did this in spite of the cold, from 7:20 to 9:30 in the morning and again from 8:00 to 9:00 o'clock in the evening. On February 2, Mari Loli and on February 3, Conchita, both did this, even entering houses to present crucifixes to the sick. Mari Loli did this for her father on September 24, 1962. A startling photograph shows Conchita giving the crucifix to her mother to be kissed.

The custom of kissing the crucifix at Garabandal was so well established at the time of the apparitions that after the second Message was given on June 18, 1965, everyone wanted to kiss the one that Conchita had held during her ecstasy, and she held it out

to be kissed when returning home. She then returned it to its owner who continued to present it for the same purpose at the door of Conchita's house.

At her last apparition on November 13, 1965, the Blessed Virgin suggested to Conchita that she should place her crucifix in the hands of the Infant Jesus Whom she carried on her arm. Conchita did this and later she stressed to Paul P. Scott, who was interviewing her, that the Infant stretched out His arms in the form of a cross, and when she presented Him with the crucifix, He folded His tiny hands over it. This gesture of the Infant Jesus shows that He embraced the cross from His birth: in fact He appeared at Garabandal as a new-born baby. "Jesus' first act, when entering into the world, was to give Himself up to God and take the place of all the

victims, whatever be their nature, to accomplish His will, whatever it be" (Bossuet, *Elevations on the Mysteries*, Oeuvres, 2, p. 336).

The visionaries shared Jesus' Passion, thus suffering deeply. They were accused of being sick or insane. Stones were thrown at them from the very beginning. Some threatened to put Conchita into an asylum. A doctor of the Commission repeatedly told Conchita, "Listen, Conchita, if you don't deny all this we'll think you are mad, and you'll be locked up in an asylum. As for your parents, they'll be put into prison." For a while her mother was influenced by this doctor and told her, "You nasty little girl, don't you see your ecstasies are not true?" They were subjected to unpleasantness such as being forbidden to talk to each other except on Sundays, or to go to the pine trees. Most



The presentation of the crucifix during the events served as a reminder of the gratitude we owe to our Blessed Lord for all He suffered for us.

"Listen Conchita, if you don't deny all this we'll think you are mad."

of all they suffered deeply from the unbelief of those to whom they spoke of their visions.

One day about June 20, 1961, they entered the church crying and were heard to say, "My God, they don't believe us!" Mary Cruz in ecstasy was heard telling the Vision, "Oh my God, how I suffered when the others were telling me I couldn't see you." Her mother was there and said, "Oh my child! My child! How she suffered." The parents shared in the visionaries' sufferings. For instance, Jacinta's father, Simon, admitted he had suffered greatly from the contradictions of certain men in Santander, to such an extent that he went alone up to the mountain so that no one would see him crying. He even thought that he was going mad.

They went through a mysterious trial similar to the 'nights' of the

great mystics. During one ecstasy, darkness overcame the four girls and an unknown voice called them. Mari Cruz, more than the others, suffered deeply. She said, "What?... Tell me who you are, or else I shall go back home. Tell me who you are..." They were frightened. They moved from one side to another, and back and forth. Even some of the spectators were frightened. It was easy to see that this 'night' was horrifying, especially for Mari Cruz. When the Blessed Virgin reappeared they cried out, "Oh thank God, we see you!"

Conchita went through awful doubts in matters of faith, even when very young. She lost her father and her best-loved brother. She suffered a lot from certain priests. She has not given details but we know that two of them accused her of having simulated the Miracle of the Host. Another de-

clared she was under the devil's influence. Another priest set unjustified conditions for granting her sacramental absolution.

At Pamplona on February 13, 1966, in a locution, Christ told her, "The remainder of your life will be a continual suffering." On this same day Jesus told her that she was not called to be a nun, and this caused her to suffer greatly.

Mari Cruz suffered from experiencing fewer apparitions than her companions. This is clearly apparent in one of her letters.

On October 24, 1965, in a locution with the Blessed Virgin, Mary Loli was warned that "she would have much to suffer in this world and that she would endure many inner ordeals, but that she [the Blessed Virgin] would help her." She bears the name Maria Dolores, Mary of Sorrows. She lost her father on June 4, 1974.

The seers suffered both from the indiscretions of the curious and the fanatics, which has been admitted by Jacinta. It seems that Conchita and Mari Loli suffered more from their doubts and negations than Mari Cruz, who was still very young when she began to deny the visions as early as 1963, and Jacinta because of her extreme humility.

Conchita finds much religious satisfaction in making the Way of the Cross, spending about forty minutes "thinking about the Passion of Jesus." She invited young French people to think, too, about the Passion of Jesus.

The Cross was at the very center of Jesus Christ's life and mission. Let us sum up this doctrine.

Jesus was crucified for the forgiveness of sins insuring us Salvation and Redemption, manifesting His love for us, leading us to Himself, showing us the way to the Father, communicating to us a power and a wisdom from on high. This was preached by Jesus Christ's apostle, Paul (1 Cor. 1:18), compelled by his love for the Crucified One, exhorting us not to live for ourselves but, as he did, for Christ's sake (II Cor. 5:14). □

WHAT WOULD A MAN GAIN?

In the 1965 Message of Garabandal, Our Lady reminds us to meditate on the passion of her Son. John Tauler, a great mystic of the Middle Ages, once wrote that when a venerable servant of God asked Our Lord, "What would a man gain if he devoutly strove to meditate on the Passion?" Our Lord answered:

- ☐ *His sins would be washed away.*
- ☐ *His negligences would be made up for by the merits of My sufferings.*
- ☐ *He would be given great strength so that he would not be easily overcome by his enemies.*
- ☐ *My grace will be renewed in him as frequently as he meditates and reflects on My sufferings.*
- ☐ *I will not deny him anything that will serve for his own good if he prays sincerely to Me for it. I will lead him to the state of perfection before his death.*
- ☐ *I will assist him in his last hour, protect him from his enemies and I will give him assurance of salvation.*



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