

Garabandal Saved My Priestly Life

By Father Richard Gilsdorf

I learned about Garabandal in 1966 and it saved my priestly life. Near the end of the Council and in 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 ingenuously 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.

St. Peter's Square illuminated on the night of the opening of the Council.

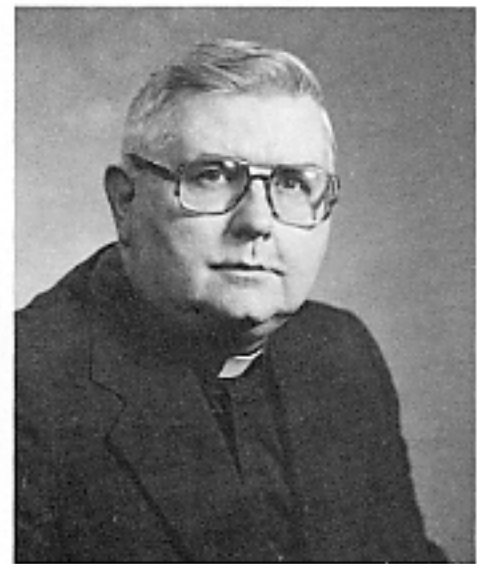




This revolution was most acutely experienced in the seminaries and convents. I was an instructor in a seminary during the dawn of this bold new age. I followed the Council avidly and was elated by its progress and promise. But I was beginning to be seduced by the pseudo-spirit which was blowing all around us.

At this crucial point, in 1966, I read a brief news account about the apparitions of Garabandal in Spain. I sent for the pioneer account of Sanchez-Ventura. It was a special grace, a gift

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of discernment from Our Lady of Good Counsel. I was sent away for further studies in Scripture. The need to discern became all the more urgent in a time of scholarly ferment and systematic demythologizing.

When I returned with my doctorate, the seminary was already near dissolution and I was assigned to pastoral work. Through all these years, I kept carefully informed on the events and messages, the "words and deeds," of Garabandal. A memorable day was a visit to my parish by Joey Lomangino.

Against this briefly sketched background I would like to note just a few of the many elements of Garabandal that have sustained and literally "saved" me during years of spiritual peril and acute interior suffering.

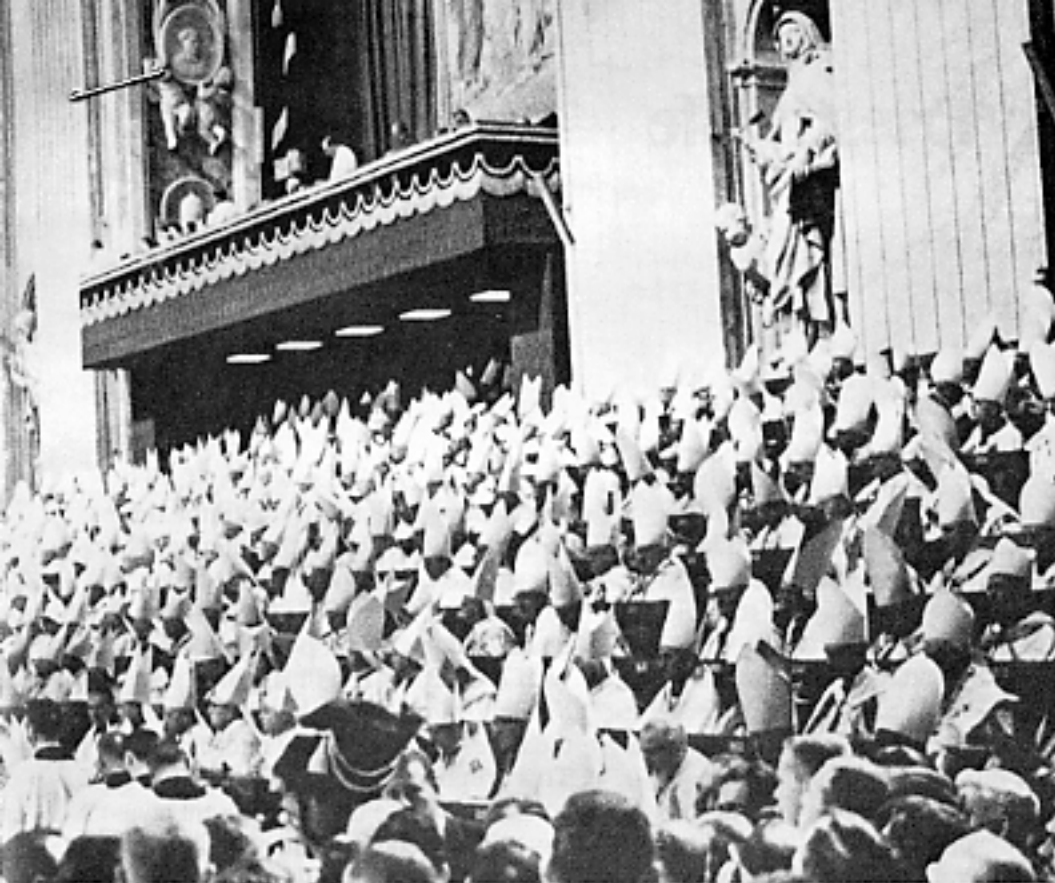
I was powerfully stimulated, as I said, by the announcement and progress of Vatican II. It was an unexpected joy that so early in my priestly life such a historic event should occur. If any label could be stuck on me, I was rooting for what then was tagged the "liberal" or "progressive" side. When I learned, in 1966, about the reported apparitions in northern Spain, it struck me as more than a coincidence that the years of Mary's "residence" in Garabandal concurred with those of the ecumenical council. Just how one should interpret that fact

is not easy to surmise. Perhaps Garabandal was to stand as Heaven's commentary on the *acta* of the Council, giving the faithful a key to the genuine meaning of Vatican II and an antidote against the "spirit" which soon would be propagated. Whatever the case, the mere coincidence sounded an alarm for me to evaluate the tides of change with utmost care.

Fatima and Garabandal

I also became convinced that the Message of Garabandal was a restatement of Fatima with an updating, interpreting what had happened before and what lie ahead in the near future. The fact that these events took place so soon after the expected date for the revelation of the "third secret" of Fatima had passed with the subsequent disappointment of many who, perhaps with disordered curiosity, had eagerly awaited a public disclosure, led me to see a relationship of the two visitations of Mary in our century.

The whole atmosphere of the apparitions at Garabandal, as well as the summary of its themes in the final Message, seemed to convey what many experts believe to constitute a major part of the Fatima secret, namely, crisis within the Church, grave assault against the Holy Eucharist, the priesthood, the papacy, devo-



Opening session of the Second Vatican Council in St. Peter's Basilica. The "spirit of Vatican II" that prevailed after the Council was a far cry from what the Council Fathers intended.

tion to Mary and the virtual apostasy which could only be made possible by a divided hierarchy. At Fatima, Mary warned that Russia would spread its errors throughout the world. Russia's errors were, by definition, a godless "dialectic materialism." I realized that, without political or military conquest, the Church in the western nations had unwittingly succumbed without struggle to the "errors" of Russia.

Summit of Christian Life

The final Message recaps the major themes of Garabandal. The Most Holy Eucharist, the Mystery of Faith, is the core of Mary's Message. As the Council so magnificently asserted, this Sacrament is "the source and summit of all Christian life." Throughout the days and years of her visitation on the mountain, Mary directly and indirectly focused our attention on the Real Presence of her Son. "Why don't you visit my Son more often? He waits for you night and day." The frequent reception of Holy Communion by the girls through the ministry of an angel, crowned by the "milagruco" of the visible Host, are woven into the pattern like a mystic thread. One of the thousands of astounding episodes touched my heart: that of the vanity compact that

had been used during the Spanish persecutions to carry the Sacred Host to prisoners for the Faith. Both the children and the crowd were puzzled when Mary asked to kiss it before all else: "It belongs to my Son." What a reminder of reverence for the sacred vessels!

While the first Message (October 18, 1961) admonishes us to "... visit the Blessed Sacrament frequently," the final Message (June 18, 1965) transmits the heartrending verdict of Heaven: "Less and less importance is being given to the Eucharist." This came at a time when the waning of Eucharistic faith with the consequent neglect, doubt, denial, contempt, abuse and sacrilege had scarcely commenced. For centuries the Church had nurtured a protective hedge around her most precious Treasure, the Eucharist, *inaestimabile donum*—the Gift beyond price. Yet, in the past few chaotic decades, this hedge has been dismantled piece by piece until now the Sacred Species stands exposed to the whims and foibles of everyone. The doctrine of this Mystery of Faith has been all but lost to most of our generation. The practical results: few visits, few signs of reverence, let alone of adoration, for what is often casually treated as mere bread and wine, impotent symbols more of secu-

lar themes than of sacred Realities.

Here the Message in a few words rescued my conscience. The loss of Eucharistic adoration has become a constant and increasing suffering in my priestly life. All pastors are commissioned to be custodians of the Eucharist. I find myself engaged in a daily front-line combat to protect Our Lord and keep my people in their instinctive reverence and faith. I have been blessed with deeply devout people who give me much consolation. Yet the general atmosphere they often meet elsewhere and the disedifying example of some visitors is perplexing to them.

The Message itself seems to be negative, but taken as a verdict from Heaven, it has confirmed my own assessment of what is perhaps the gravest threat to Catholic life.

Priestly Dignity

And the Eucharist can never be separated from the priesthood. This is another major motif of Garabandal—deep concern for priests. Conchita remarked that almost every day Mary spoke of priests. While many priests were agonizing over an "identity crisis," in a remote village, Heaven was proclaiming, in words and deeds, the grandeur and dignity of the priestly character, its true identity. Mary showed a personal maternal love for all priests, because they are her sons, other Christs. I cannot here elaborate on what most readers know so well. I will mention only the fact that the angel distributed Holy Communion to the girls only when the priest, the ordinary minister, was not in the village. When Conchita, prompted by observers, asked how the angel obtained Hosts since only priests could consecrate, the angel confirmed that indeed only priests could consecrate. The Hosts were taken from earthly tabernacles. Mary repeated to the girls that traditional admonition: if

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they met a priest and an angel at the same time, they should first reverence the priest.

But after all this, we hear the shocking lines of the final Message: "Many cardinals, many bishops and many priests are on the road to perdition and are taking many souls with them." We can understand the reluctance of Conchita to divulge these words. Had not Mary herself formed the girls in loving reverence for priests? There was even a pious temporary evasion on Conchita's part. The first version mentioned only "many priests." When the bishop asked her whether this was exactly what the Archangel said, she then added: "Many cardinals, many bishops..." When asked why she had not included this fuller formula, Conchita replied, "Aren't they also priests?"

Two Divergent Roads

How can we reconcile the contrast? The words of the Message give us the very reason why the sublimity of the priesthood needs to be emphasized and why the faithful must pray fervently for the shepherds of their souls.

While the words are so indicting and seem so negative, they rendered a special service to me. I, too, had experienced the reluctance of Conchita. In the early days, I struggled to explain the drift of so many brother priests in matters of doctrine and discipline. Was I misjudging after all? But then the bitter realization: priests were now divided into two groups traveling along two divergent roads. And despite accumulating evidence, it was several years before I could force myself to the fuller truth. Indeed, cardinals and bishops were also priests, and like their priests, they, too, were divided on the two roads: allegiance or alienation.

Throughout the apparitions, Mary, Mother of the Church, underscored the supreme unifying authority of the papacy. The two roads we have spoken of, in the final analysis, are those of allegiance to the Pope or alienation from him. The Pope is the rock, the key-bearer, the vicar, the universal shepherd, and all who dissent, even the highest pastors, are "on the road to perdition..." It is this defection that is mainly responsible for the phe-

nomenon of *confusion* which Mary foretold would intensify until the time of the Miracle. When the shepherds are stricken, the flock will be dispersed. The mysterious "count-down" on the recent popes ending with John Paul II, will signal *el fin de los tiempos*, literally "the end of the times" but variously interpreted. This prophecy does, however, give us consoling notice that the present anarchy will not endure. There will be a time limit to Satan's illusory triumph.

Warning-Miracle-Chastisement

As the crisis deepens, it becomes increasingly evident that the prophetic elements must be the solution. When nothing on earth can avail, then Heaven will intervene. And of all possible forms that intervention could take, the sequence of Warning-Miracle-conditional Chastisement seems to mirror most perfectly the mercy and justice of God. The Warning, "a correction of the conscience of the world," an anticipation in time of our individual judgment in eternity, is surely the ultimate appeal of God's mercy. I have often noted the connection of these events with the revelation of Divine Mercy to Sister Faustina.

The great Miracle will be an outpouring of the healing love and cleansing mercy of Christ's Heart to those who have responded to the Warning. Will the Cross of Christ, appearing in the skies and illuminating the earth, as foretold to Sister Faustina, be somehow linked to the Miracle? In this age of electronic and satellite communication, the impact of



Mari Loli, left, and Conchita receive invisible Communion from St. Michael. The crisis of the Eucharist that developed later seems to have been anticipated at Garabandal with its great emphasis on the Eucharist.

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