

A Predilection for Priests

By William F. Kuhn

History attests to the love and devotion that children of the humble and poor show to religious leaders in their communities. Garabandal is no exception.

The entrance of priests into the Garabandal events was inevitable, especially that of Father Valentin Marichalar, the non-resident pastor of the village who also shepherded a parish in Cosio at the foot of the mountain. The day after the first apparition, which was of a silent but splendid angel, Father Marichalar went up the mountainside to question these pre-adolescents about the rumors he had heard concerning the evening before.

He was discharging his responsibilities as shepherd of this mountain flock.

He met three of the girls, Conchita, Mari Loli and Jacinta, on their way home from school and he found Mari Cruz already at home. Their answers were direct, cheerful and full. He offered a suggestion; that they ask the angel his name and why he had come. The suggestion was accepted gladly and they willingly asked the angel the next time he appeared on June 21,

1961, in obedience to the pastor's request. Father Valentin however, would have to wait until further in the events to learn of St. Michael's identity eventually revealed by Our Lady. The young visionaries also spoke to Our Lady about their pastor whom they described as "plain looking but very good."

Several other priests became involved in the story. On the favorable side were the Andreu brothers, Fathers Luis and Ramon, and Father Priests were always allowed to closely observe the girls in ecstasy. During almost every apparition, Our Lady spoke about priests to the young seers.



A Predilection for Priests

Jose Ramon Garcia de la Riva plus a number of interested theologians who made copious notes of the events they witnessed.

Unfavorably inclined priests visited the village as well: Father Luis Odriozola, Father Francisco Pajares, Father Jose Luis Descalzo and Father Augustin Tobalina, among others. But to all these priests, favorable or unfavorable, the youngsters, around whom the Garabandal events swirled, always showed respect and affection.

Disquieting Information

The girls had been brought up by their parents to have great respect for priests. In the apparition of August 29, 1961, Conchita was greatly surprised at the disquieting information related to her by the Virgin concerning priests and exclaimed in astonishment, "Aren't all priests good?" The

following day, still amazed, Conchita remarked while in ecstasy, "I thought all Jesuits were good."

Five years later, speaking with Sister Maria Nieves Garcia at the boarding school in Burgos, Conchita reminisced about this ecstasy and said, "Before the Virgin told me about it, I thought all priests were good. It had never occurred to me that they could commit mortal sins too!... At first, I was friendly to all, but noticing that my trust was badly interpreted, I changed."

Priestly Involvement

Father Ramon Andreu, in his notes on the Garabandal events, wrote:

In the beginning of the events the girls demonstrated a special predilection for priests and religious. Frequently, they counted those who had come, observing their [religious] habits. And in their trances they always spoke about priests with the Vision. If they were asked,

"Whom do you want to come the most?" they always responded, "Priests."

The high point of this natural regard and affection for priests had already come in two ecstasies before the existence of unworthy priests had been revealed to Conchita's understandable surprise. The two ecstasies were the second one of August 8, and the ecstasy of August 16, 1961. The priestly brothers, Luis and Ramon Andreu, had been following the events closely making detailed notes. They had become acquainted with the girls who accepted them completely without fear or doubt.

In the second ecstasy of August 8, 1961, Father Luis was close to the visionaries when he himself was drawn into the ecstasy. While in this ecstatic state, he saw Our Lady and the Miracle that would occur at Garabandal intended to convince the world of the validity of these events. The girls would not become aware of this Miracle, apparently, until September 5, 1962, when Conchita made mention of a Miracle to be expected in addition to the "milacruco" (Miracle of the Visible Host) that had occurred earlier that same year on July 19. Father Valentin was informed of this new Miracle at least by September 24.

Upon seeing the Miracle, Father Luis was heard to exclaim four times, "MIRACLE!" The girls were surprised to see Father Luis within their field of vision since one of the characteristics of the ecstasies was the blotting out of all experiential and immediate knowledge of the world around them. The inclusion of Father



A priest questions from left: Mari Cruz, Conchita and Mari Loli. Later in life when asked what the main thrust of the Garabandal apparitions was, Conchita said, "The Eucharist and the priesthood."

Luis Andreu in the ecstasy was a magnificent favor to have been bestowed on him; it was not repeated with him nor with any other priest. Early the following morning, during the ride home in a car with friends, Father Luis died quite unexpectedly.

In spite of the obvious happiness Father Luis had felt and expressed immediately after the ecstasy, the sudden loss of his brother depressed Father Ramon Andreu. On his return to Garabandal on August 14, the four girls met him as he was entering the village and related to him their sorrow and how they had wept when they heard of Father Luis' death. They then told him that the Virgin had spoken to them about this incident, and when they protested that she hadn't told them enough, she laughed. Before Father Ramon could assimilate this unusual information, he was told that the girls had been heard saying during an ecstasy that they were going to speak to Father Luis again, soon.

To Father Ramon, this was depressing news. He had no conviction that this expectation was viable. He became certain that the girls were suffering under some auto-suggestion due to the suddenness of his brother's death.

But Our Lady was now showing clearly her own predilection for priests and she continued to do this in a myriad of ways in subsequent apparitions. An immediate exposition of that affection was the ecstasy of August 16, 1961, in which Father Luis was indeed permitted to speak with the girls, although he was not visible to them. And this was only eight days after his death. He taught them words in French, English and German; he taught them the Hail Mary in Greek; and he gave them a message for his brother, Father Ramon. This phenomenon was

repeated a few times and introduced another unusual set of activities.

The Recognition of Priests

As the events unfolded, the girls showed the uncanny ability to recognize priests attending the events, but dressed in civilian clothes to escape detection. Apparently the first time something like this occurred was in Mari Cruz' ecstasy in August (the date is uncertain), somewhere between the seventeenth and twentieth, in which she was told by the Vision that there was present a Dominican priest dressed as a civilian. A forecast of this extraordinary capability came in the first ecstasy of July 27, 1961, when the girls announced how the crowd was to be organized further up in the lane leading to the Pines to witness the next ecstasy that was to occur there. In this

instruction, they mentioned "the nuns." Father Marichalar did not know of the presence of any religious and asked Father Ramon Andreu who likewise was not aware of the presence of any. But, during that ecstasy, after the girls had gone up to the Pines, the nuns appeared moving up the lane.

As the events spun out, the girls continued to show recognition of priests who had deliberately concealed their identity. Father Ramon noted this faculty:

The capacity that the girls in ecstasy possessed to know hidden things about the spectators has been shown in many other instances. But attention is called particularly to the facility with which they discovered

Father Valentin Marichalar with Conchita and Mari Cruz. The girls spoke to the Virgin about their pastor and said he was "plain looking but very good."



A Predilection for Priests

some of those around them were priests.

Many times they said that priests were there when no one could have suspected it. Or that there were more priests than there appeared to be (due to their disguises) and it was always proven to be so.

Of course, this happened not out of any special psychic abilities of the girls. In the undated August, 1961, ecstasy experienced by Mari Cruz at the Pines, it was Our Lady who told her of the disguised Dominican in the

crowd, a fact later verified by a spectator to whom the priest revealed himself.

Jacinta had an undated ecstasy in October of that year in which she was informed that there was a priest in civilian clothes in the crowd to whom she was to give three signs that he was indeed a priest in spite of his doubting the validity of his ordination—and she found him. Maximina, Conchita's aunt, witnessed an ecstasy in which

five priests in disguise were uncovered by Conchita. She also testified that the girls in ecstasy continued to show great respect for priests and that when during their ecstatic walks they offered priests the crucifix to be kissed, they most often knelt before the priests.

In June of 1962, a Carmelite and a Passionist priest were present at one of Conchita's ecstasies, themselves kneeling in reverence. Conchita came to them and "gently lifted up the two of them making them stand on their feet." Our Lady was also showing a deep respect for priests.

Many other priests received particular attention especially in matters of conscience. In addition to the extraordinary favor Father Luis Andreu experienced in being drawn into the second ecstasy of August 8, another favor was granted Father Ramon Andreu, when on October 14, 1961, he was lying in bed at Garabandal with a badly swollen ankle diagnosed as a possible fracture. The pain was so severe he could not stand to have the weight of a sheet on that foot. At 3:30 the following morning, Jacinta arrived in ecstasy, and giving Father Ramon the crucifix to kiss, told him he was cured. His pain ceased immediately. Father Andreu then made a mental request that Jacinta offer the cross to Maximo Forschler, the non-Catholic friend who had brought him up to Garabandal. He was directly behind Jacinta, who immediately leaned backward without looking and gave him the crucifix to kiss.

Three days later, two priests in civilian clothes led a group of boys from Asturias to San Sebastian de Garabandal. As Conchita approached them in ecstasy, to avoid her, the



Father Ramon Andreu was dumbfounded by the visionaries' ability to know his most secret thoughts.

A Predilection for Priests

mark, spiritually, which can never be erased. It is like a bar of light that can be seen at all times under all conditions. The spiritual world can experience the brilliance of that light because it is a grace of God, shining, pervasive, and persistent. Our Lady eminently belongs to that spiritual world, of which she is Queen, and so, perceiving this brilliant luminescence in the souls of priests enmeshed in the darkness and murkiness of this world is not at all difficult for her. Day and night, year in, year out, forever, this

mark identifies a priest, and through this sacramental character, the grace of the Infinite God pours down into him.

As that grace enlightens and informs the priest, he becomes configured to Christ, the Priest. All her worldly life, Our Lady was bound up in her Son; she nursed Him, loved Him, and constantly exercised motherly concern for Him. What is any more natural than that her love and concern be generated for priests who are being configured more and more to the image of her Son? It seems inevitable that as priests begin to show more and more clearly their reformation into the image of Jesus, Our Lady's predilection for them should become stronger and stronger. How close to Christ's image must Father Luis Andreu have been to have been

so highly favored, not only with a vision of her while he was still on this earth, but only eight days later to be with her as she appeared to the children of Garabandal in their ecstasies! Although his presence was not visible, it was clearly demonstrated by his voice and by his instruction to the youngsters, confirmed by his message to his brother, Father Ramon Andreu.

The Virgin Mary showed a predilection for priests because of their sacramental character. They were unable to conceal from her that spiritual luminescence which was conforming them to the likeness of her Son. Even as they struggled with doubts and fears, that brilliant mark upon their souls brought her to their aid. So does she come to the assistance of those of us who also strive to assimilate and exemplify the teachings of our religious belief, who hold to Christ as Messiah, and who try to mirror the humility and the holiness of Jesus, her Son. □



Conchita with Brothers of St. John of God. Religious were also given preferential treatment by Our Lady at Garabandal.

Sister Justine and the Copper Knobs

I was still a postulant [related Sister Justine in her old age], and I had been given a job in the infirmary. Well, one day when we were giving the place a thorough cleaning, I had spent the whole morning dusting, rubbing and polishing. Then the bell rang and I was getting ready to leave when [St.] Bernadette said, "The work is not finished. There's still this and that, but you haven't time now. It will do some other day." Then I foolishly said with some satisfaction, "I've rubbed the copper knobs with polishing powder." This referred to the knobs on the iron bedsteads. Bernadette replied, "Yes, they are shining brightly. You've polished them well and thoroughly. You

have taken great pains with this work because it catches the eye."

She delivered me this reprimand so nicely that I wasn't hurt, but I felt the little pinprick to my vanity all the same, and I carried the lesson away with me, saying to myself: "You understood? You have taken great pains over the knobs because they show, but the work that doesn't show, the work that remains hidden and which God alone sees, did you do that so carefully?"

I have always remembered those copper knobs.

—Saint Bernadette Soubirous, Francis Trouchu

Sister Marie Bernard (St. Bernadette).



*"When you went up
you were happy, when you came
down, you came down sad."*

priests clambered up a set of outside stairs leading into one of the houses. Conchita pursued them and insistently offered them the crucifix to kiss. Both refused, but one was very obstinate. As Conchita moved back down the stairs to the street, he mentally requested that if indeed all this was of supernatural origin, Conchita should return to him and have her ecstasy stop there. Abruptly, Conchita turned back, mounted the stone steps again, made the sign of the cross over him and came out of the ecstasy.

Conchita then in her normal state of being was proceeding up the street to go home, when she fell into ecstasy again, returned to that obstinate priest, offered him the crucifix to kiss and again made the sign of the cross over him. He had made a second mental request that if Conchita supernaturally knew he was a priest, she should return to him and perform exactly the way she did. Thus Our Lady showed her patient love for priests.

Although there were many such incidents related to "discovering" priests who were trying to conceal their identity, and many other little incidents that indicated Our Lady was indeed interested in assisting priests assailed by doubts, let us look at just one more in detail before we think about the causes for these remarkable recognitions and affectionate favors.

On October 18, 1961, the first Message of the Virgin was to be released at 10:00 p.m., at the door of the church. Members of the diocesan commission which had been appointed August 26, 1961, decided that the place for the announcement would be the Pines, not the portico of the church.

Father Ramon was among the crowd as it made its way up to the Pines. About half way up, he experienced great bitterness and deep

depression. He felt he had entered into a severe moral dryness like a desert. He was desolate and thought to himself: "What are you doing here? These girls are nothing more than sick children and all this is a pathetic comedy of backward villagers."

The weather was bad and the Message extremely simple:

It is necessary to make many sacrifices, do much penance, and visit the Blessed Sacrament. But first we must lead very good lives; if we do not, a chastisement will befall us all. The cup is already filling up and if we do not change, a very great chastisement will come upon us.

This simple proclamation did nothing to alleviate his state of depression. After a time he found himself led into Mari Loli's home where she told him that Our Lady had let her know that he did not believe, saying:

Father doubts everything, and suffers much. Call him and tell him not to doubt anymore . . . Tell him, "When you went up, you were happy, when you came down, you came down sad."

Loli also told him that the Virgin had spoken at length to Conchita about him.

He immediately went to Conchita's home, where her mother, Aniceta, allowed him to visit with Conchita who had already gone to bed along with her cousin, Luciuca. Conchita said the Virgin had told her a lot, and she repeated the phrases that Loli had spoken. Then she related to him all the things he had been thinking, and where he had had those thoughts. She added that the Blessed Virgin

told me to say this to you and to advise you that all this happened so that in the future, remembering all this, you won't doubt again.

How many more incidents would we have to add to show that the Virgin indeed had the interests and welfare of priests in her Immaculate Heart? How much more would we have to explain

and expose as proof that Our Lady was showing a predilection for priests all through the Garabandal events?

An Indelible Mark

In her recognition of the priestly character of individuals hidden within a crowd, Our Lady had assistance which was not available to the girls. On December 7, 1965, the Vatican II Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests was promulgated. In Chapter I, paragraph 2, it states:

The sacerdotal office of priests is conferred by that special sacrament through which priests, by the anointing of the Holy Spirit, are marked with a special character, and are so configured to Christ, the Priest, that they can act in the person of Christ, the Head.

In this paragraph we find the secret of Our Lady's successful identification of priests who were incognito. In this paragraph we also find the reason for her predilection for priests. The sacrament conferring the sacerdotal office of the priesthood marks the souls of priests with an indelible

Father Jose Ramon Garcia de la Riva, pastor of Our Lady of Sorrows parish, Barro, Llanes, Asturias, with Jacinta. Regarded as a holy priest, he was one of those specifically mentioned by Our Lady during the apparitions.



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