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# The Ways of God in Garabandal

**I**t might be better to say the ways *to* God, rather than the ways *of* God.

Many souls have found the way *to* God at Garabandal—many more than we know about. Some have simply found the faith there; others have grown strong in it; and through Garabandal others have gone on to give generously of themselves.

The purpose of Garabandal is more to aid in our salvation than to regale us with visible miracles. The final goal of salvation is what can be expected from its *mystery*.

This was previously mentioned in the first chapter, but we now present it again, giving new examples that occurred during the weeks of *reactivation* between winter and spring of 1962.

## Finding a Vocation

In the early days of 1962, the news of Garabandal was making itself known in the old Castilian city of Segovia. Father Ramón María Andreu had been giving retreats for the religious there, and the Marquis and Marquise of Santa María had made several public talks on the subject.

Such interest was aroused that in the middle of the winter a bus excursion was organized for the distant village. Among those on the trip was a young woman who until then had certainly not distinguished herself by religious fervor. It was not that this woman led a dissipated life, but rather that she was frivolous and worldly, clashing with the traditional style of that strict Castilian city. She was the first in line for a dance, always ready for amusement, for the beach . . . What was now bringing her to Garabandal in the frigid January of 1962? . . . Even she herself could not explain her reason for being there.

The excursion group arrived at the place of the apparitions on January 18th, a Thursday. That evening her companions, after gathering information by talking to the people in the village, went to situate themselves in the various settings of the anticipated ecstasies. The young girl tried to squeeze into Ceferino's house; but it was too crowded. She had to remain near the door. Fortunately she found

a little bench there against the wall, and she stood on top of it. Thus she was able to observe after a fashion, although from a distance, what she did not have the opportunity to follow up close.

The time for the ecstasy arrived and Loli was in the kitchen, as during so many other ecstasies. The young woman from Segovia had to resign herself to hearing what was going on indirectly, by what was relayed from the spectators in a better position. But even this alone had quite an effect as the atmosphere that normally formed around the ecstasies had a deep religious reverence, even on the part of those most accustomed to it.

In such a climate of silence and waiting, she was able to reflect . . . Withdrawn into herself, in a strange way she was able to feel the frightening proximity of the mystery . . . There came a time when her spirit could not contain itself in that attitude of reverent silence and burst out in prayer: a prayer tremendously obligating:

*Most Holy Virgin, if this is true . . . And God wants something from me . . . I am ready for whatever it is . . . Even to renouncing everything to become a religious! I only ask you, in exchange, for the salvation of . . . whom you know.*

During the terrifying silence following such a prayer, in the depths of her soul there seemed to resound most clearly the answer: *I hear you. I hear you. Yes. Yes.*

This unexplainable refrain left her trembling with emotion. But it did not take long for uncertainty to settle in. *Who can assure you that this is the voice of God? Couldn't this have been your imagination? Are you losing your mind?*

Full of distress, she once more raised up an inward request to the compassionate Mother who could well be present there, not far from her.

*Most Holy Virgin, if this is true, if all this comes from you . . . Let the girl come to give me the crucifix to kiss. Let her come to me ahead of everyone else!*

Hardly had the petition been formulated in the hidden recesses of her conscience, when Loli got up off the kitchen floor where she was kneeling. She made her way through the shoving and surprised

spectators and went directly toward the young woman, who had some idea of what was going to happen. Indescribable emotion swept over her, but she did not have time to think or do anything. Loli was there in front of her, and without looking at her, Loli raised the crucifix firmly to her lips, and gave it to her to kiss twice. Overcome, the young woman got down from the bench and tried to hide and disappear from the many people who were there; but it was futile. The little visionary followed her, without seeing her, and repeatedly put the sacred image on her lips.

Could God's answer have been more clear?

But it did not stop there. During the rest of the day, each girl that went out into the street in ecstasy<sup>(1)</sup> unfailingly went in search of the young woman from Segovia in order to offer her, and to her ahead of anyone else, the figure of the Savior.



**By presenting the crucifix to be kissed, the visionaries confirmed a vocation.**

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1. In the previous chapter it was shown that Jacinta and Mari Cruz also had apparitions on January 18th.

It was a distinction that gave both pleasure and pain. Although it showed the greatest profession of love, it also implied a frightening program of self-renunciation and self-denial.

It would be expected that the young woman in the flush of youth, who was being unequivocally asked to make a total gift of herself, spent the next hours with sentiments never previously felt.

She had come to Garabandal accompanied by her mother; both had found lodging at the house of Piedad, who had furnished them a little room. It was well into the night when they returned and went to bed. But those few hours in bed were not hours meant for sleeping; at least not for the daughter, who did not cease weeping.

The mother, unaware of what had happened in her daughter's conscience, commented on the following day, *Something tremendous must have happened to her . . . She didn't stop sobbing all night long. And I don't recall her ever crying before.*

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For years now the young woman in this story has lived her consecration to God in a religious order. And she can never forget that her road toward God definitely passed through the faraway, controversial village of san Sebastián de Garabandal.

## Encounter with the Faith

Shortly after this woman found her vocation in Garabandal, the time came for Máximo Föeschler to find the Faith. (I write the word with a capital to indicate that this does not refer to *a faith*, but to *the Faith*, the Catholic religion, the only one which I consider truly authentic . . . without in any way, showing disrespect toward the others, provided that they are practiced with what we call *good faith* and good will).

With the best of good will, Máximo practiced the Protestantism in which he had been brought up by his devout parents. He was German by race and by birth, an engineer by profession. In 1931 he had married a Catholic Spaniard, and had spent many years stationed in Spain, but it had never occurred to him to change his religion. He devoutly lived his protestant Christianity.

Máximo was stunned by the death of Fr. Luis María Andreu, whom he had known since he was a child. For this reason, one day he decided to go up to Garabandal, with the desire to see the places and the persons that meant so much to the beloved deceased in his last days.

As we have seen in the first part of this book, on Saturday, October 14th, 1961, he arrived for the first time at Garabandal, in spite of an almost tragic automobile accident at the mountainpass of Piedras Luengas.<sup>(2)</sup> He did not come alone; his wife accompanied him, together with Fr. Ramón Andreu, Mr. and Mrs. Fontaneda from Aguilar de Campoo, and several friends. What he saw and felt on his first visit has already been described: in brief, it did not have much of an effect on him.

But after some months, as if waiting for some mysterious rendezvous, Máximo decided to return to Garabandal. Let us listen to his description:

«Fr. Ramón Andreu was beginning the Spiritual Exercises in Loyola on March 19th, 1962. He wanted me to assist at them. Frankly, I was reticent to go, and I wondered what a Protestant could do in a sanctuary like Loyola.

For that reason, I decided to return to Garabandal, hoping for some solution to this.

We came there on Saturday, March 17th, with several friends from Madrid; also with my wife and one of my children. We saw the first ecstasy—with Mari Loli—at 9 at night. And I observed that she was almost entirely concerned with my wife, my son, and also myself. To describe this in detail would be an unending story.

At six at night on the following day, Sunday,<sup>(3)</sup> we all assisted at the holy rosary, which for me was really moving.

When we went out, I found Jacinta, whom I had not seen since the early morning of the past October 14th or 15th. I asked her why she hadn't given me the cross to kiss at that time. She didn't answer me. On insisting and telling her that I knew the reason (I thought it was due

to my being Protestant), she repeated that she certainly didn't know.

Then I asked when she had last seen the Virgin and she told me, with great sadness, that 5 days had passed without seeing her.

—*But I petitioned during the holy rosary for you to have a vision this very night. I have to leave tomorrow morning, and I need a great sign from the Virgin by means of you.*

Actually, without telling anyone, I had asked that if *this were from the Virgin*, that she would give me an unmistakable and outward demonstration in an ecstasy with Jacinta: *that something would happen to me! And to me alone!*

At 9:30 at night, Mari Loli went into ecstasy in Jacinta's house to tell her that at 12:00 at night she would see the Most Holy Virgin.

And so it was. The girl went out onto the street in an ecstatic march, and every 10 meters she gave the cross to the 8 or 10 of us who were following her. Later I left the group and the girl went toward the church, where she prayed; and there she returned to the normal state again.

Since *nothing in particular* had happened to me, I thought that Loyola was not my destiny.

But Jacinta announced that there was going to be another vision at 3 in the morning. And still waiting, I went there by her house. At 3 on the dot the trance began, and as usual she went out on the street. I accompanied her during her trip; but finally I separated from the group and went into Loli's house, where they had a tavern. But toward 3:30 Jacinta came in there in ecstasy, and she made her way toward me through the many people that were there, gave me the cross to kiss, and made the sign of the cross over me three times. On that occasion no one else had the good fortune of kissing the cross. For me, this was very clearly the sign that I had asked.<sup>(4)</sup>

\*..\* \*

I considered that call of the Most Holy Virgin as a definite answer. And on the evening of

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2. Between the provinces of Palencia and Santander. It is one of the highest mountains in the Cantabrian range.

3. Liturgically the second Sunday of Lent, as we have seen in the previous chapter.

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4. Actually what was done by Jacinta corresponded exactly to what Mr. Föeschler had requested secretly in his conscience.



**Fr. Ramón with Jewish convert Catherine and Protestant convert Máximo, prototypes of the massive conversions that will follow the Miracle.**

January 19th, I was in Loyola, beginning the Spiritual Exercises in the house of St. Ignatius.

I had come there with such feeling—having known the Most Holy Virgin for the first time—that I derived the greatest fruits from the days of retreat.

On the third day, while at the holy Mass that they had in the Chapel of the Conversion, on seeing that the others who were making the retreats were receiving Jesus (*in Holy Communion*), and that I was not, I broke out in tears.»

The reader can suspect what happened later. Máximo Föeschler received baptism according to the rite of the Catholic Church on March 31, 1962, and on the following day, April 1st, with great feeling he received his First Communion.

«I will be eternally grateful»—he confessed—«for all the special graces I received through the Virgin's mediation, and which actually brought

me into the arms of baptism. And I don't know how to give Our Lord and the Most Holy Virgin the thanks that they deserve for the miracle worked in me.»

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With his entrance into the Catholic Church, did the affairs of Garabandal end for Máximo?

«A great many things happened to me on further visits, which would lengthen this report excessively. I only wish to mention a few:

One day, after Mari Loli had come out of ecstasy, she called me aside and told me what the Most Holy Virgin had said about me. In spite of the timidity that the girls had and though they were 12 years of age at the time, Mari Loli talked a long time to me with the greatest naturalness. She told me about me life, what I had done, and what had happened to me from my early youth until the present date. Absolutely no one in the village could know those

details (some, not even my wife!) and many of them came to my memory again, due to hearing them from the girl.»

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It occurs to me at this point: Why do some continue to say that all this is the fruit of *a game of children*, of their ability to deceive, a result of the *atmosphere*, or *mass hysteria*, that in all its elements *has a natural explanation*? Why do they not rather proceed without delay to do a work of charity by illuminating the darkness in those who continue believing in the Miracle, convinced that this is *the finger of God*?

This reminds me of what St. Paul wrote in his first letter to the Corinthians:

**For it is written: I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and the prudence of the prudent I will reject.**

**Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this world? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?**  
(1: 19-20)

But we are not thinking evil of anyone. All of us are in need of mercy.

## Mercy in Discipline

In spite of leafing over and over again through many papers and notes, I am not able to determine the exact date, but I think that it is approximately here, in the final days of March, that something very interesting took place. I came upon this unexpectedly one day in Santander, from the lips of Jacinta. All she remembered was that it was in 1962 at the end of the winter.

It was a cold night. Jacinta wanted to remain awake in the kitchen since an apparition had been foretold for 4 o'clock in the morning; but her father, Simón, told her to go to bed to rest, that he would advise her in time.

The girl resisted, became stubborn, even obstinate. Her father did not permit her to have her way and forced her to obey. Then she went up to her room in a bad mood, crying and protesting. She was afraid of falling asleep and missing the apparition.



**Jacinta showed disrespect and disobedience to her father.**

And so it happened. After some time she woke up abruptly (her father had made a noise in getting up) and she immediately asked him:

—*Papa, what time is it?*

—*A quarter to six.*

—*You see? I haven't had an apparition on account of you!*

And she began to cry, as much with pain as with regret.

*You can go now to pray in the Calleja*, Simón answered her.

The girl did this; but she waited futilely for *a visit* to take place as had happened on so many other days at that time.

She returned home unhappier still; and during the days that followed her unhappiness changed into real suffering, on seeing that what she hoped for so much was not coming. Her companions, on the other hand, continued with their ecstasies and apparitions just as before.



**“You must obey your parents.”**

Jacinta began to languish. Her parents started to worry seriously as the girl’s mental suffering began to affect her health. Her color became pale, she lost weight, she stopped smiling.

Jacinta had to ask herself, *Why is the Virgin doing this? Will I ever see her again?*

She could not support this last thought. She leaned on her companions whenever they had an apparition and anxiously said to them, *Ask the Virgin why she isn’t coming to me. Ask her if I will see her again. Ask her . . .*

And Loli and Conchita asked and asked . . . But their questions remained unanswered day after day.

Finally, after almost a month, Loli came to Jacinta with important news, *The Virgin told me that you are going to see her on . . .*

For Jacinta that was as if she had suddenly come into the light at the end of a long dark tunnel. She smiled again, her face regained its color, her heart filled with hope.

The longed-for visit came on the day predicted. As soon as Jacinta found herself again before the gracious countenance of Mary, she could not hold back the question, *Why haven’t you come? Why have you kept me so long like this?*

—*For the wrong that you did with your father on that night. How many times do I have to tell you that you must obey your parents, even before obeying me?*

The punishment had been strict, but it had been full of mercy. The Virgin only sought the welfare of her little girls, so full of good will, but also so full of defects. They had to change.

The punishment had lasted a month.

The lesson would last forever.



**Jacinta with her mother**

Does the case of Mari Cruz have something to do with this *mercy in discipline?*

Let me state that I do not wish to get involved in explanations as to why she was the least favored of the four girls with regard to the number of ecstasies. But I cannot evade the question that comes up from time to time about the possible reason for this undeniable fact.

Is it simply that the plans of God were not the same for all four girls? He allots his gifts gratuitously as He pleases, not always as they are merited. Could it have been that the girl, because of external pressures, was not able to correspond to what was asked of her?

We do not know, nor probably will we ever know. Furthermore, we should not judge rashly. Nevertheless, as a point of illustration, I want to put here what a person from Garabandal wrote to Doctor Ortiz in Santander during the Holy Week of 1962:

«With regard to the apparitions, they are the same as always, as you know.

I think that in a month Mari Cruz has had only one apparition, and that was a small one. She had it on Tuesday morning while she was praying at the Calleja. She was told that the Virgin would return again on Saturday. But, as you know, she went to bed following that, and so didn't have it.



Mari Cruz in ecstasy

Here is how I interpret this. From the beginning the Virgin has asked for sacrifices.<sup>(5)</sup> And Mari Cruz hasn't been making them, since on many days she was in bed at nine o'clock. So how was she going to have an apparition? As you are aware, the other girls, when they were told they would have one, stayed up until the hour that it happened.»

I am putting down these observations and opinions; God alone knows for whom they can be instruc-

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5. Another eloquent confirmation of the need for sacrifices is mentioned in these lines from Conchita's diary:

**During Holy Week, she told me to go out at five in the morning, (to pray the rosary at the Calleja).**

**And so I went, since the Virgin always wants us to do penance.**

tive. I do not wish to disparage the girl to whom I refer, nor her parents; they thought they had to act like this, and she believed it was her duty to obey.

## Easter Joy

The police chief Juan Alvarez Seco tells of the arrival of a visitor at Garabandal:

«I don't remember the date, but I do remember what happened.<sup>(6)</sup> I was present in the village on that night and I went to the bar of Ceferino, who came out to meet me, remarking to a woman: *This is the Police Chief, who has been present first hand at many apparitions.* And afterwards he brought her up to me. *This woman is from Barcelona and wants someone to explain some of this to her.*

Turning to the woman, I greeted her courteously. And she immediately asked me if I believed in the apparitions. I answered that I did and she recorded it on a tape recorder.

Later she did the same with a cattleherder from the village. He declared sincerely, *Look Señora, I don't know what this is that's happening, but since I have been present at the apparitions, I don't talk as I used to. Before I blasphemed a lot, but I don't do it now.*

The woman also questioned a priest<sup>(7)</sup> who was there, and recorded his answers. This priest stated confidentially that he believed too.»

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The woman mentioned here is Mercedes Salisachs of Juncadella, known in Spain as a writer. (Some years previous to her visit to Garabandal, she had won the prize *Ciudad de Barcelona* for a novel.) She herself confessed her reasons for coming to the site of the apparitions during these days of April, 1962, in a report that Sánchez-Ventura quoted in his book *Apparitions are not a Myth*.

She began briefly explaining whom her son Miguel was, what he meant to her, and consequently, the terrible pain that had struck her when

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6. It was on Good Friday of 1962: April 20th.

7. Perhaps this was a Jesuit who is mentioned later in the woman's narration.



on October 30th, 1958, with life just beginning—18 years of age—the young man had met death on the highways of France in an automobile accident.

«I don't know»—she said—«what other mothers would have felt in losing a son of Miguel's quality. But I doubt that they could have overcome an emptiness and grief like the one that fell upon me.

His death destroyed the main reason for my life; and on losing him, I felt myself crushed by a horrible darkness.

They told me that I would adjust with time. And, although I would not forget him, his memory would fade away, to remain a pleasant remembrance. They told me that, little by little, I would become accustomed to not seeing him, to not hearing him, and accept my situation without regret.

But time passed and I continued in despair. Although I tried to hide my melancholy, especially so as not to hurt my other four remaining children, as time went by the void increased, together with despondency and suffering.

People used religious arguments to help me. They talked about Christian resignation. They reminded me of Miguel's faith, his exemplary life, and they told me that I should give thanks to God for having taken him in conditions so conducive to the welfare of his soul. But resignation didn't come and all these arguments struck me as inapplicable and inconsistent.

There came a time when doubts against faith revolved over me obsessively. And all that I had previously professed without effort began to waver, leaving me all the time more discouraged. I changed into a different person, without any future except the past, without any hope except to die; but with the feeling that death ended everything, that hope was a great lie, and faith a childish device for holding us in line.

But my doubts were not always strong. At times, without knowing why, hope returned. *And if Miguel could see me . . . If the Communion of Saints<sup>(8)</sup> were a real thing . . .*

At the time I couldn't keep on praying. I was

always smashing against a wall of doubt. On one occasion I remember my mother suggested praying the rosary together, and (I am still ashamed of my reaction!) I refused, considering it *vulgar*.

I needed a sign. Something that could make me realize that life could continue after death.

But the sign didn't come; nor did I seek it. For example, my devotion to the Virgin was practically nil.

Until one day—the feast of the Most Pure Heart of Mary—I instinctively went before an image of the Sorrowful Mother, requesting her to give me a sign if Miguel were saved.

It was not long in coming . . .

From that day onward, I had no more obsessions than to return to God. And five months later, on May 4, 1958, after a general confession, I came to God finally, with the intention of never separating an instant from Him for the rest of my life.

From that time everything began to change for me. Although my enormous loneliness for Miguel continued, and solitude continued tormenting me, my interior tranquility was great. Praying the rosary stopped appearing *vulgar* and my devotion to the Virgin increased day by day.

Then when I heard talk about the girls of Garabandal, I thought of visiting that isolated village not only out of curiosity, but also with the intention of rendering honor to the Virgin, even though the phenomena were open to discussion.

Taking advantage of the absence of my family, who had gone to Suiza, I left Barcelona on Holy Thursday in 1962,<sup>(9)</sup> accompanied by José, my driver, and his wife Mercedes.

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8. The Communion of Saints is one of the most beautiful dogmas of Catholicism. Catholics believe by this that there is an ineffable communication between *those who have gone*, and *those who still remain*; and also a mysterious interchange between them, in Christ and for Christ, in the Church and for the Church.

9. In Spain, half the day of Holy Thursday, and all of Good Friday are observed as feastdays, and are government holidays.

We arrived at Cossío at noon on Good Friday, and there I met the pastor of Garabandal, Fr. Valentín Marichalar. While we were waiting for a vehicle to take us to the village, I used the occasion to converse with him. In spite of his understandable reserve, he finally admitted to me that he was basically convinced that the phenomena occurring there were supernatural, and that the girls were the proper persons, because of their innocence, to receive the Virgin's visits.

It was already two in the afternoon when the car appeared that would transport us to Garabandal. Its driver, Fidel, informed us that Fr. Corta (a Jesuit priest who had come to help Fr. Valentín with the services of Holy Week) would give Communion up there, and that the whole village was congregated in the church.»<sup>(10)</sup>

Once in the village, Mercedes was able to establish contact with the visionaries and their families, perhaps through the services of the Police Chief Juan Alvarez Seco to whom, as we have seen, she was introduced by Ceferino at his tavern. She was also helped by the Marquis and Marquise of Santa María who were staying there again.

«That same night»—continued Mercedes—«I handed Jacinta some objects for her to give the Virgin to kiss, and I made the same request to her that I had made to the other three, *When you see the Virgin, ask her about my son.*

I think Jacinta asked, *And what happened to your son?*

I answered, *He died.*

Everyone had gathered at Mari Loli's house, waiting for the apparition. I gave her a paper, written on both sides, and while giving it, I said to her: *I don't expect an answer. The only thing that interests me is knowing where my son is. I didn't give his name.*

I didn't yet know how the visions took place.

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10. In Garabandal as in so many other villages in Spain (at least at the time), Holy Thursday and Good Friday were days consecrated to the observance of religious devotions; no one missed the liturgical services.

Good Friday services took place at one o'clock in the afternoon, seeking to correspond with the time in which Jesus expired His last breath.



“When you see the Virgin . . .”

Although it had been explained to me, it was difficult to picture them actual happening. Now, after having been in Garabandal several times and having seen so many ecstasies, I still feel that there can be no possible way of describing either the *falls* of the visionaries, their expressions and motions, or the attitude of respect that, in spite of the character of some of the visitors and the customs of the village, occurred whenever *an apparition came*.

At first glance, nothing that the girls do seems to have a meaning: their movements, their oscillations, their swift runs, their low-pitched conversations, their insistence on presenting the crucifix to be kissed . . . In summary, everything from the beginning causes wonderment because of its incongruity and appearance of being something without much depth. (There is a priest who, in his report, states that all this is “not very serious” probably being oblivious of the “not very serious” things that happened at Lourdes too.) Nevertheless, one finishes by expecting that everything that is occurring there has a meaning. The bad part is that, in



**“Mari Loli went up to the table that held the objects to be presented to the Virgin.”**

order to understand it, one has to *live* in the village at least three days. As soon as one familiarizes himself with some of the apparent incongruities, everything becomes clear; the explanation, immediate or delayed, always comes.

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In my case, I have to confess that, although I desired much, I expected little. I had envisioned my voyage as one should envision a pilgrimage: ready to face hardships and obstacles.

Waiting, as I said, at Loli's house, we were not long in hearing the characteristic thump of the *fall* in ecstasy; it came from the upper floor. This caused a general silence, and a little later we saw Mari Loli coming down the stairs, holding the hand of another girl, looking upward with an enraptured expression. I don't think the greatest actress could imitate that expression.

Mari Loli went up to the table that held the objects to be presented to the Virgin, and began to give them to be kissed. I saw how she took my paper, lifted it up, turned it to the other side, and set it down again on the table. Later she went out into the street holding a cross.»

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In order to better understand this, it should not be forgotten that this was Good Friday, celebrated in such an extraordinary way in Spain. Loli's ecstasy took place at nightfall after an afternoon sanctified first by liturgical services, at which the whole village had assisted, and afterwards, by the way of the cross that many people had made. And Loli's going out on the street coincided with the hour in which, through all the towns of Spain, the traditional processions of Good Friday were in progress, accompanied by tambourines and music from the best orchestras. In Garabandal during that year the processional marches had a very different sign. There were no marching steps, no music, no gatherings; but certainly it was lived like no other. Through one or another of the girls, the people participated in the mystery that the other processions could only recall.

Mercedes continues:

«The girls step was light, rhythmic, regular.

It appeared that she was walking on smooth and flat pavement; for her there did not exist all the things that we had under our feet: ruts, gravel, stones, rubbish.

As well as I could, I clung on to the arm of the girl that Loli held; but when, after stopping at the door of the church, the visionary undertook the ascent up the hill, I had to let go. I couldn't follow them, I had the feeling that my heart, which was racing, was going to stop at any moment. The slope going up to the Pines was so steep! Exhausted, I rested halfway up the hill waiting for them to come down.

I began to think. The night,<sup>(11)</sup> up until then, had not been too pleasant for me. Whenever the girl had given the crucifix to kiss, she had obviously avoided my lips. The suspicion that, if this were true, it was the Virgin who was refusing my kiss, hurt me deeply.

When the descent finally came, I saw Mari Loli running backwards—her gaze always looking upwards—avoiding the obstacles and obstructions as if she had eyes on the back of her head.

On arriving at the village, she joined Jacinta. They laughed on meeting, and later they presented the crucifix to be kissed, and they walked onwards, holding arms.

Jacinta *woke up* at the door of the church, but Loli continued to her home still in a trance.

Then I went to search for Jacinta and I questioned her about Miguel. She told me that the Virgin had not answered her question. Dismayed, I went to the place where Loli was, who told me the same.

—*Did she at least read my paper?*

—*Yes, she read it.*

Father Corta was there, and on noticing my dejection, asked the girl if the Virgin would return. *Yes, at 2 or 2:30.* Then Father recommended that I come back to talk about the matter of my son.

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11. It was the night that for centuries had been consecrated to the solitude and sorrows of Mary, who had just seen the death and burial of the most perfect of Sons.



“Mari Loli . . . joined with Jacinta, also walking in a trance through the street.”

At the hour foretold, Mari Loli fell again into ecstasy; she went out of her house and immediately joined with Jacinta, also walking in a trance through the street. They presented the crucifix to be kissed by all those who were there; but again they passed over me, as if avoiding my lips.

And the worst was what they told me *on waking up*. Both Jacinta and Loli gave me this answer: *The Virgin has answered me; but I can't tell it to you.*

That outdid everything. I didn't deserve that the Virgin notice me; and Miguel, in spite of everything that I supposed, was in a place . . . That it would be better not to know!<sup>(12)</sup>

I still had the courage to ask Mari Loli whether the Virgin's answer was good or bad.

She was evasive: *I can't . . . I can't . . .* And the expression on her face was truly impenetrable.

Again Fr. Corta tried to help me. (He saw my defeated look, and undoubtedly had pity on me.) He asked the girl, *Could you tell her tomorrow?*

Loli shrugged her shoulders and limited herself to answering, *Perhaps.*»

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Her first day in Garabandal was really becoming a day of testing for Mercedes Salisachs, an actual Good Friday, with its sorrows, its humiliations, its confusions, almost with its agony.

«When I awoke (*undoubtedly in the early hours of the morning*),<sup>(13)</sup> I had the impression of being changed into a block of ice. The suspicion that neither God nor the Virgin were on good

12. In spite of the present policy of not preaching about hell in the churches, its existence hangs inexorably over every Christian's future, with the possibility of a final fall into absolute disaster.

13. We know that the nights of Garabandal were not made to give pleasure, nor for restful sleep. Ordinarily they consisted of penitential *vigils*, long periods of prayer, waiting without sleep, and *marches* with their inconveniences.

terms with me left me as defeated as the thought that Miguel could be undergoing punishment . . . although it seemed illogical to doubt Miguel's salvation.

Before going to sleep, I reviewed one by one all the phenomena that I had witnessed during the hours of the day and later throughout the night. And I wanted with all my heart to find some *error* that would show its falseness; something that would make me see that all this affair at Garabandal was pure superstition. But the more I thought over the events, the more authentic everything seemed. I had to be the one in error! For that reason, undoubtedly, the crucifix hadn't been given to me to kiss.»

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We do not know if Mercedes made it to sleep that night; but we do know that the next day did not bring her much consolation.

The calendar read: April 21st, Holy Saturday.

Liturgically it was a day full of quiet peace, of holy waiting. The prayer that was recited at each hour of the Divine Office beseeched: *Almighty God, while we piously await the resurrection of Your Son, concede to us, we pray you, to be participants one day in the glory of His resurrection.*

For assisting us in difficult times, there is nothing like the support of holy hope, of expectation based on faith.

But for the unfortunate woman from Barcelona, this seemed to have ended:

«Holy Saturday was no better. In spite of the cordiality that the marquis and his wife, Father Corta, Father Valentín, the Police Chief, and even the mothers of the girls lavished on me, everything in the village seemed hostile. It was undoubtable that all this courtesy was due to the pity and suspicion stemming from the isolation to which the Virgin had sentenced me. But what the people thought mattered the least to me; what hurt me the most was perceiving the continuing disdain coming from above.

Finally I began to have a premonition that what was happening had some relation with the significance of the days that we were celebrating. Could all this have a liturgical meaning? I almost dared not think it, for it seemed too far-fetched.

But what was certain was that after that premonition, the anxiety left me. I resigned myself to everything and submitted myself to the will of God.

That night I ate dinner early, alone in the tavern. Afterwards the Chief of the Civil Guard took me to Conchita's house. Her mother received me politely, and offered me a place next to her daughter.

The heat of the fireplace was stifling, and my physical state was getting worse; but my moral state was improving as each hour went by.



“What is happening seems normal to them.”

We talked of a thousand things. The most striking thing about the girls is their naturalness in the current of everyday life. They accept the supernatural with a simplicity bordering on the unbelievable. *Seeing the Virgin* seems to them to be within the reach of everyone; and what is happening seems normal to them.

What really concerns them is observing the incredulity of the people. They ask this question endlessly, *Do you believe? Do you believe that we really see the Virgin?* They probably think that upon this belief depends whether the Virgin will perform the great miracle that they

have been predicting since the beginning. Outside of this, they always show signs of great certainty concerning theological matters. In spite of their evident lack of education, the knowledge with which they give out comments is astounding.

When Conchita fell into ecstasy, I had gone out of the kitchen (because of the unbearable heat) and so I couldn't observe exactly how the phenomenon occurred. Nevertheless, on going out on the street, I could observe well what happened to Mr. Mándoli,<sup>(14)</sup> a recent arrival at Garabandal. Although a man of faith, he didn't accept the apparitions. Soon I saw Conchita detour from her path and come right toward us (Mr. Mándoli was at my side) to present him the crucifix. But the man, either embarrassed or as a test, evaded it. Conchita, always with her head thrown backwards so as to make it impossible for her to see what was ahead, pursued him tenaciously with the cross until she managed to have him kiss it.

Turning then toward me, Mr. Mándoli admitted with feeling that he had petitioned the Virgin that, if this were true, Conchita would seek to make him kiss the crucifix. If my memory doesn't fail me, on that night also, she didn't give it to me to kiss.

Later Conchita joined the other three girls who were walking through the village in ecstasy too. All four held hands and with their customary light step made their way through the streets, followed by the crowd with flashlights.

I remember that other apparitions (Lourdes and Fatima) had been stationary and quiet. And it seemed as if the *actions* or *movements* in the ones which were now presenting themselves could have something to do with the characteristics of our times. It was as though the Virgin, just like John XXIII,<sup>(15)</sup> wanted to adapt her mercy to the *restlessness* of modern needs. Ecstasies like those at Lourdes or Fatima could

have appeared incongruous in our times. The people needed another style. And what the girls of Garabandal demonstrated was well adapted to our ways.

The apparitions were accessible through the girls; everyone could, keeping a distance, participate. Each person, if he took the trouble, was able to take part, although indirectly, in the dialogues that the visionaries held with the Apparition. From the beginning—according to the girls—the Virgin showed signs of *wanting to approach* the spectators; she allowed them to ask questions, answered their prayers, accepted articles to kiss . . . Certainly this gave the impression of wanting to break down barriers.

Nevertheless, I found myself at the time so disconcerted by the ostensible *disdain* that the Vision was showing toward me that—without thinking of the unquestionable generosity that she was demonstrating to others—I made up my mind definitely not to ask any more questions, or to expect the least sign from the girls.»

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The woman's reaction, although not perfect, is easily explainable. What had happened was not what she had expected when she had set out on her *pilgrimage*.

We do not know at what time the ecstatic processional march, led by the group of visionaries, came to an end; but it must have been before 11:30, since at that hour the solemn pascal vigil services began in the church.

The streets were then deserted, as were most of the houses; the villagers and visitors had gathered in the sacred precinct to participate in the beautiful liturgy that concluded the Mass of the first pascal alleluias.

When the people left the church, the most beautiful Sunday of the year had begun, the day that celebrated the Resurrection, the true *Day of the Lord*.

There was not much time to rest, at least for this woman. Let us return to Mercedes:

«The women of the village, following an ancient custom, began to sing the rosary in the

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14. This man is completely unknown to me.

15. It should be taken into consideration that Mercedes Salisach's report was written in the spring of 1962, a period when the popularity of the Pope at the time, John XXIII, had reached its apogee due to innumerable demonstrations of his good-natured personality and by the appearance of speed with which he was preparing the second Vatican Council.



“walking through the village in ecstasy”



streets.<sup>(16)</sup> In spite of my exhaustion, I felt impelled to follow them. The devotion that one sensed in the atmosphere was really moving. I cannot remember experiencing a more fervent Easter than that one!

The night seemed to get clearer as the rosary went on. The tile roofs shone in the darkness almost like the moon and the stars.

We must have been on the third mystery when the unexpected happened. Someone tapped me lightly on the shoulder. On turning around, I met the marquise of Santa María who was holding Mari Loli's arm. She spoke to me confidentially, *Mari Loli says that she has something to say to you.*

At the time I was confused. It didn't occur to me what this could be for. I already had many disappointments and I wasn't expecting anything.

But Rosario Santa María added, *This concerns something that the Virgin told the girl yesterday, with the request not to mention it until after one at night* (that is, until after the pascal vigil).

Mari Loli repeated somewhat bashfully, *Later, later I will tell it . . .*

Bewildered and intrigued, I did not know what to say. But Rosario—who had been with me during my bad times—intervened, *Not later. You are going to tell it right now. You aren't going to let this woman worry like this any longer.*

Then Mari Loli and I went apart from the group. I leaned toward her and she whispered a message in my ear, but in a very clear voice: *The Virgin says that your son is in heaven.*

What I experienced afterwards, I can't describe. Everything, absolutely everything dissolved in that wonderful statement.

I only remember that I embraced Mari Loli as if I were embracing Miguel. Later I found

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16. This custom seems absolutely admirable to me. Hopefully it will not be abandoned, but rather spread to other areas! Could there be anything more indicated than a rosary at dawn to celebrate and relive that unique dawn of our history when the Son of Mary came forth from the sepulcher?

myself in the arms of Rosario; she was crying too, and was telling me so many things that I couldn't understand. The people gathered around me, and in the throng I vaguely saw Father Valentín, Father Corta, Eduardo Santa María, the chief of the Civil Guard . . . All were looking at me, astonished and excited. Conchita's mother also came, alarmed by the commotion, and wanting to help, exclaimed, *Tell that woman, that if she is crying because she hasn't received the crucifix to kiss, that she shouldn't be disturbed, that during the whole night it hasn't been given to me either.*»

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This must certainly have been a gripping scene since years later the chief of the Civil Guard mentions in his memoirs:

«The scene that occurred around the lamp-post was imprinted on my heart, and I think that it will never be erased. The same had to happen to the others who were there at the time.»

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«The rest of the rosary»—continues Mercedes—*«was like an ascent to heaven. I remember that I handed my cane to Rosario Santa María and seized Mari Loli's arm; never in my life have I felt so light and so secure. Still crying, we continued with the rosary, walking forward, onwards into the early morning. I think that I prayed more with my eyes than with my lips, since Mari Loli kept repeating, Don't cry, don't cry. But it was impossible for me not to; I had so many reasons for crying!*

I didn't need a flashlight, nor did I look at the ground; holding onto Mari Loli's arm and full of faith in the Virgin, I walked the remainder of the time looking only upwards. Never have I seen a sky so full of stars and so clear! Each star was a smile.

Toward 3 in the morning, we went into the tavern of Loli's father, talking about the things that had occurred on that memorable night. Still bewildered by what had happened to me, I saw that Rosario was whispering to Loli . . . A little later she came toward me, *Mari Loli says that the message she gave you is not complete; but since you started to cry so soon, she wasn't able to continue telling you about it.*

The girl confided to me what was missing, and what left me still more perplexed.

*She also told me that your son is very happy, most happy, and that he is with you every day . . . I know that your son is in heaven! I found this out yesterday when the Virgin told it to me. But I had to keep quiet about it since she said to me, "Do not tell it to the woman until after the Easter Mass tomorrow."*

Certainly such finesse could not have come from the young girl . . . »

It is easy to understand the reason for this statement. Heaven's response to Mercedes Salisachs' tremendous worry had to be too complicated, in effect, too intermeshed with the liturgical season, to be attributable to the inventive genius of an uneducated young farm girl.

During Good Friday and Holy Saturday, the time of the suffering and annihilation of Our Savior, and also of Mary, the co-redemptorist, this woman had to pass through long hours of humiliation and darkness . . . And only after the liturgy proclaimed the first alleluias of the Easter morning Mass, in the *most sacred night*, did she receive the gift of that unexpected and wonderful joy.



"The girl fell into ecstasy again."

«After that moment»—continued Mercedes—*«everything changed for me. Soon the girl fell into ecstasy again. To demonstrate that the game of silence of the previous days was concluded, she immediately came to me and applied the crucifix on my lips, once, twice, three times . . . Then making with it the sign of the cross on my forehead, on my lips, and on my chest, she gave it again to the Virgin to kiss. And to definitely seal everything that she had just confirmed, she offered it to me again. Afterwards, without offering it to anyone else to kiss, she went out on the street.*



Ceferino outside his home.

Outside the house, Ceferino, the girl's father, waved for me to come near. *She was talking about you with the Virgin*, he told me. *Briefly, this is what she said: "I told her that she shouldn't cry, that she had to be happy . . . But she didn't pay attention . . . And if she cries again when I tell her about it?"*

As soon as the ecstasy was ended, Mari Loli came toward me and whispered that she had another message. She waited until we were alone and then said to me:

—*While I was speaking now with the Virgin, I saw that she was laughing very much; and that she was looking upward. On asking her why she was laughing so much, she answered me, "that at the same time in which she was speaking to me, he was looking at you. And that his joy was great."*

—*Mari Loli, to whom are you referring? About . . .*

I didn't get to pronounce his name, for she interrupted:

—*Yes. Miguel. The Virgin told me, "Above all, tell the woman that while I am speaking with you now, Miguel is looking at her, and that he is very happy; he is pleased, very pleased."*

—*Tell me, Mari Loli! How did you know that his name was Miguel?*

—*Because I asked the Virgin, "Who is Miguel?" And she answered me, "The son of that woman."*

When this all ended in the early morning, our return to the house where I lodged was like walking on a cloud . . . The village nestled under a sky full of stars. The sun was rising on the other side of the mountain.»

## Encounter with Mystery

The first Holy Week in Garabandal during the apparitions (April 15th to 22nd) left indelible traces engraved on many hearts.

In the same places and at the same time that Mercedes Salisachs had the personal experiences that have just been mentioned, another distinguished visitor to the village was also having his own deeply felt experiences. The visitor was a doctor from the city of Vitoria named José de la Vega. A believer, but not easily aroused, he went up to Garabandal like many others, simply out of curiosity to see what was happening.

What happened there had such an effect on him that he felt it his duty in conscience to make it known. Under his name appeared an article in the newspaper *El Pensamiento Alavés* on April 27, 1962, during Easter Week:



“The Virgin passes almost daily . . .”

«From the 18th of last June, the Virgin passes almost daily through the winding streets of a little village lost in the hills of the Picos de Europa.<sup>(17)</sup>»

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17. For the sake of accuracy, the doctor’s statement should be clarified: Garabandal is not in the group of mountains composing the Picos de Europa, although it is near to it in the Peña Sagra chain of mountains to the northeast.



“ . . . through the winding streets.”

This is what is affirmed by four girls between 11 and 12 years of age, born and brought up high in the Santander mountains, without any more education than grade school and instructions by their parish priest.



the ancient village school

The entire village of about 70 families has lived for months in complete disorder. Once or more on almost every day at pre-fixed hours the girls pray, speak to, and kiss the Virgin, and are swept up in deep ecstasy. The simple parents of these young girls are frightened . . .

The Church prudently refrains from giving its opinion. The doctors, even the most incredulous, have recognized that this matter doesn’t have any logical explanation. But thousands of believers—coming each day to the village from the most faraway places—find in fervent and tearful faith, the only explanation for the extraordinary events that happen every night at San Sebastián de Garabandal.



“I was forced to believe in a miracle.”

I passed the Holy Week among these people. I listened to the inhabitants of the village and to the visitors. I talked with the *girls* before and after their visions.

And as I could find no professional explanation for what I myself had seen, I was forced to believe in a miracle.

\* \* \*

—*Have you seen the Virgin?*—some people asked me.

—*No. I haven't seen her. But I have felt her with my heart and soul.*

A Jesuit Father,<sup>(18)</sup> who was with me there, said to me:

—*I see you are very skeptical, doctor.*

—*No, Father, that isn't so. I'm completely*

*confused. My most vehement desire would be to feel like the girls and those that accompany them. But you know better than I that faith is a gift that God doesn't concede to everyone in the same way.*

Sometime after this conversation, I was able to follow an apparition for the second time and close at hand. It was the dawn of Holy Saturday. It was raining ceaselessly, and the entire village seemed to be covered with mud and stones. With flashlights in our hands, we hurriedly followed one of the visionaries who was running through the streets in ecstasy. With her hands joined, she was holding a crucifix; her head tilted sharply backwards; her eyes fixed on the sky, but smiling. From time to time, she knelt down, prayed, and kissed the cross . . . Half the village and all the visitors, including children, followed her as if hypnotized.

In the little kitchen of her house (where later she talked with us half asleep—it was 4 o'clock in the morning) we succeeded in seeing her enter abruptly into ecstasy, and fall on her

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18. Perhaps this was Father Corta who had gone to make the Holy Week in Garabandal.



“where the Virgin appeared for the first time”

knees without burning herself on the hot stones of the blazing fireplace. Later she got up, and as if transported by angels, she began to run through the village. Stumbling in the darkness and splashing in mud up to our ears, we followed after her, unable to stop ourselves.

I asked God fervently for the grace of faith.

In spite of the dim light, we ran through all the little streets of the village. We went to the courtyard of the church, the cemetery, and then to the hill where the Virgin appeared for the first time.<sup>(19)</sup>

The roughness of the way, the blackness of the night, the bad weather, and my flabby condition as a city dweller made me stumble so many times that I fell behind. Finally, I could go no more and decided to wait for them to

return. On the contrary, my wife didn't want to stop—in spite of being short of breath—and she continued onward, asking help for my lack of faith . . .

Soon the girl stopped without arriving at the crest of the hill, and came back on the trail down, marching backwards, hardly touching the stones, continuously looking upward and smiling at the sky.

On coming to my level, she stopped again, fell hard on the gravel with her bare knees, raised the cross to the sky and . . . gave it to me to kiss! Then she searched with her hands among the multitude of chains and rosaries that hung from her neck, seeking for a special chain, while whispering to the invisible Apparition, *Tell me which is it . . . Is it this one?*

With her hand she raised up the medal to give it to the Virgin to kiss in her vision. And we all heard her whisper again, *Tell me whom it belongs to.*

And then, without hesitating any more, she

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19. The doctor is referring to the hill of the Pines; but it should be remembered that the first apparitions, including those of the Virgin, did not take place there, but rather on the narrow road that leads up to the Pines, in the *Calleja*, nearer to the village than the Pines.



“Try to explain the mystery of the four village girls from the Montaña.”

turned toward my wife and put the chain around her neck, and without looking, latched the little gold fastener in place. Thrilled and weeping, my wife fell on her knees there, as I did and many of those that were witnessing the unusual scene. The girl had her kiss the medal blessed by the breath of the Virgin, and helped her to get up from the ground with an angelic smile that we will never forget.

Later my turn came. In the same way as with my wife, and with the same or similar words, she put on me my medal that had been kissed by the Virgin . . . I could not contain myself, and tears ran down my cheeks.

At the same time, I found the explanation for everything I had not understood. In the heavenly expression of the girl, I saw a reflection of the Virgin’s invisible presence over our heads. On my knees as I was, weeping copiously, I began to ask pardon from God for my lack of faith.

I will return to San Sebastián de Garabandal, as everyone who has come returns. I will bring doctors and friends, and will ask them to try to explain the mystery of the four village girls from the Montaña. But still more, I will ask God that the feeling I felt on the early morning of Holy Saturday never leave me. It is so beautiful to believe in a miracle!»

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The chapter finishes. The woman from Segovia, the Protestant engineer from Germany, the novelist from Barcelona, the doctor from Vitoria . . . These are just a few cases that have come by chance or by providence to our knowledge. How many others are still unknown? How many others will remain forever hidden from human eyes?

But by the few that we know about, we can say that many ways toward God for the help of souls, have passed, and will continue to pass, through . . .

## *Garabandal*