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## **Sister Lucia of Jesus, a pathway of light**

My dear brothers and sisters in the Teresian Carmel: Peace and Hope!

Carmel is all Marian. Since the beginning of the Order, the life of prayer, so characteristic of our identity, has been intimately united to the Marian life. Throughout our history, so many outstanding Carmelites have lived a special relationship with the Blessed Virgin Mary, enriching our Carmelite charism with their Marian experience! On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of June of 2023, Pope Francis filled our Order and the entire Church with utmost joy through the publication of the decree on the heroic virtues of Sister Maria Lucia of Jesus and of the Immaculate Heart. What Marian experience did our sister live? How does her Marian life enrich our Carmelite charism?

On this day of the Solemnity of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mount Carmel, I wish to share with the whole Order some brief aspects of the biography, spiritual itinerary and mission of this sister of ours.

### **1. Biographical overview**

Lucia of Jesus was born in Aljustrel (Fatima, Portugal) on March 28<sup>th</sup>, 1907, Holy Thursday, baptised on March 30<sup>th</sup>, 1907, and made her first communion at the age of six years old.

In 1916, along with her cousins, Saints Francisco and Jacinta Marto, she witnessed, for three times, the Apparitions of the Angel of Peace and, in 1917, the Apparitions of the Virgin of the Rosary on the 13<sup>th</sup> of May to October (except August). After the death of her cousins, she became the sole guardian of the Message of Fatima, with Our Lady as «refuge and the way that leads to God».

She entered the Institute of Saint Dorothy in Spain on October 24<sup>th</sup> of 1925. In Pontevedra, on December 10<sup>th</sup> of the following year, she had the Apparition of Our Lady and the Child Jesus, in which she was given the Devotion of the First Saturdays. In Tuy, on June 13<sup>th</sup> of 1929, she witnessed another Apparition of Our Lady and the Most Holy Trinity, in which she received the request for the consecration of Russia to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. She made her Solemn Profession on October 3<sup>rd</sup> of 1934 and remained in Spain during the Spanish Civil War and the Second World War. Between 1935 and 1941, by request of the Bishop of Leiria, she wrote her *Memoires* concerning her cousins and the Apparitions and, on January 3<sup>rd</sup> of 1944, she wrote the third part of the Secret of Fatima and, also out of obedience, began, around the same time, to write her diary, *My Pathway – O Meu Caminho*.

With the desire for greater solitude and silence and because she always felt that this was her vocation, on March 25<sup>th</sup> of 1948, Holy Thursday, she entered the Discalced Carmelite Order at the Carmel of Santa Teresa in Coimbra, taking the name of “Sister Maria Lucia of Jesus and of the

Immaculate Heart”. She received the Carmelite habit on May 13<sup>th</sup> of 1948 and made her Solemn Profession on May 31<sup>st</sup> of 1949.

In Lucia’s life and in the context of the Apparitions, of which she was a witness and a prophet, we can understand a tangible relationship between elements associated with Carmel and the Fatima event. In the apparition of October 13<sup>th</sup> of 1917, Lucia identified the figure of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, whom, in an interrogation at the time, she described as a Lady who «had some things in her hand»<sup>1</sup>. This would most certainly have been an image she knew well, as it was part of the iconographic elements of her parish church, located just to the left of the «altar of Our Lady of the Rosary»<sup>2</sup>, who had smiled at her at her First Communion. Furthermore, regarding the Seventh Apparition she had in 1921, when she left Fatima towards Oporto, Lucia states: «I remembered my beloved Our Lady of Mount Carmel, and at that moment I felt the grace of the vocation to religious life and the attraction of the Cloister of Carmel. I took as my protection my dear Soror Therese of the Child Jesus as my protector»<sup>3</sup>, whose devotion had already reached Fatima at that time. Her vocation to Carmel was then established, although it only came to fruition in 1948, as already mentioned.

The spiritual journey of Lucia of Jesus as a Discalced Carmelite, like her biography, is varied, long and rich, with the indelible signs of her childhood experience, strongly permeated by the supernatural, and effortlessly takes roots in the best tradition of Carmel and the spirituality of its Saints and Doctors. We can even state that her journey brings a new freshness and depth to this charism, particularly regarding her relationship with the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Eucharist.

## **2. Distinctive features of her spirituality**

### **2.1 Devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary**

#### *2.1.1 Mystagogue in her spiritual journey*

Throughout her life, the wise and discreet guidance of the Blessed Virgin Mary is noticeable, as the true teacher and mystagogue of her journey of union with the Triune God in Jesus-Eucharist. Through the daily prayer of the Rosary, the Virgin Mary led Lucia, through the contemplation of the mysteries of Christ, until the configuration with Him, in docility to the Holy Spirit.

The Virgin Mary is one of the most tender secrets of her path to holiness, as she writes in her Diary: «“My Immaculate Heart will be your refuge and the path that will lead you to God”. Here it is: the life of my soul, the strength of my heart, and the joy of my pilgrimage on earth»<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> *Documentação Crítica de Fátima, Vol I: Interrogatórios aos videntes: 1917*. Fátima: Santuário de Fátima, 1992, p. 127-128.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Documentação Crítica de Fátima, Vol I*, p. 414.

<sup>3</sup> Lucia of Jesus – *My Pathway*, vol. I, p. 12 apud Carmel of Coimbra – *A Pathway under the Gaze of Mary: Biography of Sister Maria Lucia of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart O.C.D.* 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Fátima: World Apostolate of Fatima, 2017, p. 118.

<sup>4</sup> Lucia of Jesus – *My Pathway*, vol. XXIII [July 13<sup>th</sup>, 1998].

### 2.1.2 From an “external” relationship to a life lived inside Her Heart

This is a relationship that deepens over time in a growing process of interiorisation. The Immaculate Heart of Mary was her path and her refuge, as the Blessed Virgin Mary had promised her at the Second Apparition, until it progressively became her dwelling place at the stage of transforming union. Until entering Carmel, Lucia established a relationship with the Virgin Mary that was mainly external, mediated by her images, before which she prayed. After entering Carmel, she progressively embarks on a path of purification that makes her ever smaller and more abandoned, an interiorisation in Mary until she comes to live in Her Immaculate Heart without ever leaving it.

### 2.1.3 A “marieform” woman

Her existence becomes a “marieform” existence, i. e., a woman who resembles more and more the Blessed Virgin Mary, the poor and humble Virgin of the Gospels, without any leading role, totally faithful to God and always obedient to His will, expressed in the will of her Superiors. Her community life, totally hidden, was «a normal life – one among many – putting into practice the motto “Outwardly like everyone else; inwardly like no-one else!”»<sup>5</sup>. With her heart entirely centred on Christ and a great love for the Church and the tragedies of humanity, she prayed and offered herself incessantly, without fainting, convinced that this was the way to be faithful to her vocation in Carmel: «This is my mission, the apostolate of prayer, sacrifice and love»<sup>6</sup>. Her funeral, with its display of white handkerchiefs and hymns to Our Lady of Fatima, was the popular culmination and recognition of the simple people of God to this existence all transformed into Mary<sup>7</sup>.

## 2.2 Eucharist

Lucia’s relationship with Jesus-Eucharist is also one of the essential characteristics of her spiritual journey, which deepened over time, in a movement of interiorization, and of which we can distinguish some stages.

### 2.2.1 The grace of her First Communion

On May 30<sup>th</sup> of 1913, Lucia received her First Communion, recording it in her *Memoirs*, as follows: «But he [the priest] had no sooner placed the Divine Host on my tongue than I felt an unalterable serenity and peace [...]. Then it seemed that in the depths of my heart, our dear Lord distinctly spoke these words to me: “The grace granted to you this day will remain living in your soul, producing fruits of eternal life”. I felt as though transformed in God!»<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> Sister Maria Celina de Jesus Crucificado, ocd – *Our Memories of Sister Lucia*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Coimbra-Fatima: Coimbra Carmel-Fundação Francisco e Jacinta Marto, 2016, p. 16-17.

<sup>6</sup> Lucia of Jesus – Letter to Bishop Ernesto Sena de Oliveira, April 29<sup>th</sup> of 1952 apud Carmel of Coimbra – *A Pathway under the Gaze of Mary*, p. 357.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. P. Luigi Gaetani, ocd – *Sister Lucia, Discalced Carmelite. At the heart of the Church and the world*. Magazine of the Portuguese Province, Order of Discalced Carmelite Fathers, no 133 (March-April). Marco de Canaveses: Edições Carmelo, 2005, p. 8-11.

<sup>8</sup> Lucia of Jesus – *Fatima In Lucia’s Own Words: Sister Lucia’s Memoirs. Second Memoir*, 16<sup>th</sup> ed. Fátima: Secretariado dos Pastorinhos, 2007, p. 72-73.

Later, in a note from her Diary dated of the 13<sup>th</sup> of January of 1944, when remembering this event, Lucia mentions that she would have felt these same words deep in her soul, at the time she was making her consecration to Our Lady, on the eve of her First Communion: «I saw Your smile, O Mother! – I heard Your Yes! And I heard the sound of Your Voice: “My daughter, the grace that is given to you today will remain forever alive in your heart, producing fruits of eternal life”. It was not an apparition, but a presence. These words so indelibly engraved on my soul that they are still the bond of my union with God»<sup>9</sup>.

It was, therefore, a Eucharistic and Marian grace, so memorable, that it is with the memory of her First Communion that Lucia begins her Diary: «The smile of my First Communion»<sup>10</sup>. It seems to be established in the sacramental grace of her First Communion, the first stone of the spiritual building that the Lord wanted to build.

### 2.2.2 *The Apparition of May 13<sup>th</sup> of 1917*

After the Blessed Virgin Mary asked them if they wanted to offer themselves to God, Lucia – along with her cousins – generously gave her yes, which would be continually renewed until the end of her life. It is a continuous refrain in her writings: «I renew once again the yes I gave on May 13<sup>th</sup> of 1917». When the Blessed Virgin Mary communicates them, for the first time, that reflection of the immense light that is God, such communication moves them, by an interior impulse, to fall on their knees and pray intimately: «O most Holy Trinity, I adore You! My God, my God, I love You in the most Blessed Sacrament»<sup>11</sup>. Her whole life is a development of this May 13<sup>th</sup> of 1917.

### 2.2.3 *The grace of April 6<sup>th</sup> of 1951 until the transforming union: «I am his Living Tabernacle»*

The Decree on her heroic virtues states that Lucia, «docile to the Holy Spirit, walked the path to the transforming union with Jesus-Eucharist, the Spouse of her life»<sup>12</sup>. Until she entered Carmel, her entire relationship with Jesus-Eucharist was established with Him present at the Tabernacle of the chapel, during the moments of Eucharistic Adoration. From this date onwards, even though she continued to cultivate the attitude of adoration focused on the “outer Tabernacle”, her attention now turned inward in a new way, in an interiorization of the grace of the Sacrament, as the experience of an inhabitation centered in the Eucharist. This is how she describes it in his Diary: «First Friday, I make the monthly retreat, I feel the presence of God. I feel that I am His living Tabernacle where He lives with Infinite mercy, Triune in Persons. He possesses me and I am His, I repeat to Him in the depths of my soul: “O Most Holy Trinity, I adore You! My God, my God, I love you in the Blessed Sacrament.” And I feel the echo of these distant words: “The grace that is given to you today will always remain alive in your chest, producing fruits of eternal life”»<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> Lucia of Jesus – *My Pathway*, vol. I, p. 1 [January 13<sup>th</sup>, 1944] apud Carmel of Coimbra – *A Pathway under the Gaze of Mary*, p. 38.

<sup>10</sup> Lucia of Jesus – *My Pathway*, vol. I, p. 10 apud Carmel of Coimbra – *A Pathway under the Gaze of Mary*, p. 117.

<sup>11</sup> Lucia de Jesus – *Fatima in Lucia’s Own Words: Sister Lucia’s Memoirs. Fourth Memoir*, p. 176.

<sup>12</sup> Dicastery for the Causes of Saints – *Decree on the heroic virtues of Sister Maria Lucia of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart* [June 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2023].

[https://www.fatima.pt/files/upload/documentos\\_do\\_magisterio/20023-06-22decretosobreasvirtudesheroicasdairmaluciadejesusedoimaculadocoracao.pdf](https://www.fatima.pt/files/upload/documentos_do_magisterio/20023-06-22decretosobreasvirtudesheroicasdairmaluciadejesusedoimaculadocoracao.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> Lucia of Jesus – *My Pathway*, vol. I, p. 321-322 [April 6<sup>th</sup>, 1951].

From this moment onwards, we can identify in Lucia an ever-growing conscience of inhabitation, the presence of the Triune God in her soul, united to the Eucharistic presence. In this process, she comes to experience, in the last stage of her inner journey, a true Eucharistic transformation, perceiving herself as a “host of love”. The novelty of her path is the fact that the experience of the inhabitation of God-Trinity in the soul is related to the Eucharist.

To express this grace occurred in 1951, Lucia goes back to the founding experiences of her childhood – the grace of her first Communion and the experience of the First Apparition on May 13<sup>th</sup> of 1917.

In a note written in her *Diary* from 1985, when she already was in her full spiritual maturity reached in the 1980s, she writes: «“Most Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit... I offer You the most precious Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ, present in all the Tabernacles of the world”. Wooden Tabernacles, marble Tabernacles, bronze Tabernacles, silver, gold, I don't know, living flesh Tabernacles, those like mine, so poor, where You dwell, where You live, communicating Your own Life to me, life of grace, life of forgiveness, life of power, life of being lost in You, hidden, light that merges into another Light from Whom it receives the radiance of its Being. This is the only way I want to live: in and for You!»<sup>14</sup>

And in the book *How I See the Message*, written in the 1990s, this same experience of being a living Tabernacle for Jesus Eucharist and transformed in Him into a host of love is still present:

«Tiny Host, I long to be with you,  
Make me, for You, Your living tabernacle.  
There You can dwell, like this burning furnace,  
which your Love, there present, does not allow to go out.  
There you must dwell, truly hot flame,  
that your Love keeps burning with the light of your gaze»<sup>15</sup>.

### 2.3 Obedience

Obedience is one of the heroic virtues of her life present from the Seventh Apparition: «“Here I am for the seventh time. Go, follow the path which the Bishop wants you to take, this is the will of God”. I repeated then my ‘yes’, now much more conscious than that day of May 13<sup>th</sup>, 1917. [...] Days later, on the advice of the Bishop, I took the standard rule of obedience and the motto of the words of Our Lady narrated in the Gospel, “Do whatever He tells you”»<sup>16</sup>.

A global reading of her writings allows us to see that, until the end of her life, this virtue was a constant on her path, increasingly radicalizing in her the gift of self, being perceived, throughout her itinerary, an ever more theological form of living it. Due to her mission in spreading the message of Fatima, she had to interact with several Popes, different instances of the Vatican, with the Apostolic Nuncio, the Bishops and, being a Carmelite nun, with the General Fathers of the Order, the

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<sup>14</sup> Lucia of Jesus – *My Pathway*, vol. X, [December 22<sup>th</sup>, 1985].

<sup>15</sup> Lucia of Jesus – *How I see the Message in the course of time and in the light of events*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Coimbra-Fátima: Coimbra Carmel-Secretariado dos Pastorinhos, 2017, p. 24.

<sup>16</sup> Lucia of Jesus – *My Pathway*, vol. I, p. 11-12 [June 15<sup>th</sup>, 1921] apud Carmel of Coimbra – *A Pathway under the Gaze of Mary*, p. 117-118.

Provincials and the Prioresses. The practice of this virtue, in the relationship with each of these mediations, increasingly configured her with Christ “obedient to death, even death on a cross” (Phil 2:8), being all these relationships a significant part of her dark night of the spirit.

On the day of her death, on February 13<sup>th</sup> of 2005, the last gesture of her life was reading the fax that Pope John Paul II had sent her. This document in her hands is the symbol of a life in full communion with the Church and totally obedient to it. Just as Saint Theresa of Jesus, Lucia dies as a true daughter of the Church.

## 2.4 Unity

Another aspect that Lucia's mission embraces is the aspect of Unity. She has unity engraved on her heart and this is always one of the main intentions she brings to her prayer. For her, not being in communion with the Pope and the Church is not being in communion with Christ. She is constantly concerned about the unity of the Church, the unity of the Order, the unity of the Community.

She always sought, as testimony of an authentic life of prayer, to keep unity within her community: «To maintain unity in community life, it is necessary to know how to let it go, understand the deficiencies to excuse them, know how to appreciate the values, to take them into account. Our life of community unity must be a testimony of faith, hope and love, as Christ prayed to the Father: “That they may be one as You and I are One”<sup>17</sup>.

In addition to her constant prayer and commitment to the Unity of the Church, Lucia was also committed to the Unity of the Order, especially at the delicate time when the documents for the approval of the new Constitutions, according to the directives of the Second Vatican Council, were being studied. She always sought unity among the Carmelite Monasteries, and between them and the priests and superiors of the Order.

## 2.5 Humility

Despite her strong and determined temperament, one of the virtues that characterized her life was humility. She always recognized that she was only the instrument that God had chosen to carry out a mission: «I trust in Your protection as Mother, I know that You are the Messenger of the Lord to transmit His word to me, it is up to Him to carry it out, although using this humble and poor instrument»<sup>18</sup>.

Furthermore, she was very aware of her weaknesses: «She humbly asked forgiveness for the faults that she saw in her delicate but not scrupulous conscience, and with sincerity, promised to be ever more faithful. She felt a great desire for perfection and to grow in love, so that her prayer would have more power in the Heart of God. It was with pain that she saw her fragility, the tendencies of her independent nature to claim her rights – a very pronounced trait in her personality – and sighed with regret: “I am very sorry for everything that contradicts my way of seeing and feeling. I have to die so that others can live. Christ died to give me life”»<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> Lucia of Jesus – *My Pathway*, vol. IV, p. 3 apud Carmel of Coimbra – *A Pathway under the Gaze of Mary*, p. 337.

<sup>18</sup> Lucia of Jesus – *My Pathway*, vol. IV, p. 132-133 [December 31<sup>st</sup>, 1979].

<sup>19</sup> Carmel of Coimbra – *A Pathway under the Gaze of Mary*, p. 337.

She always loved the concealment of her life as a Carmelite, dedicating herself to simple tasks in the house: laundry, overseeing constructions, yard work, making rosaries, liturgical implements, and embroidery, executing everything with great mastery and perfection. She lived, as a Carmelite, for 57 years, a simple, laborious life, sacrificed and hidden, as must have been the laborious, poor and humble life of the Virgin of Nazareth with whom she became more and more configured, day by day.

She never attributed anything to herself, always saying that it was all because of Our Lady: «When her path became overwhelming from answering the numerous questions of many people, she would courteously reply, “It is all because of Our Lady!”»<sup>20</sup>; «As in her life when she received hundreds of letters, or was sought by both great and small, Sister Lucia will continue to say: “It is all because of Our Lady!”»<sup>21</sup>.

## 2.6 Ecclesial mission

Her mission for the Church and the world was transmitted to her by Our Lady on June 13<sup>th</sup> of 1917: «I would like to ask you to take us to Heaven. – Yes. I will take Jacinta and Francisco soon. But you are to stay here some time longer. Jesus wishes to make use of you to make me known and loved. He wants to establish in the world devotion to my Immaculate Heart. – Am I to stay here alone? – I asked, sadly. – No, my daughter. Are you suffering a great deal? Don’t lose heart. I will never forsake you. My Immaculate Heart will be your refuge and the way that will lead you to God. As Our Lady spoke these last words, she opened her hands and for the second time, she communicated to us the rays of that same immense light. We saw ourselves in this light, as it were, immersed in God. Jacinta and Francisco seemed to be in that part of the light which rose towards Heaven, and I in that which was poured out on the earth»<sup>22</sup>.

This mission, which has been deepened over time, has a double dimension: the Transmission of the Message and the irradiation “in the world [of] the splendour of God’s merciful love”, according to the Decree on her heroic virtues. Regarding the transmission of the Message of Fatima, Lucia remained always faithful, a fidelity that lasted from age 10 until her death, that is, for 87 years.

At the same time, upon seeing herself in the light that spread over the earth, Lucia understands that she has the specific mission of radiating the light in which she was enveloped. Thus, with her life, Lucia shows us the «way to the dwelling of light» (cf. Job 38:19) and the way is the Immaculate Heart of Mary, in which dwells this immense light that is God: «It was a grace that left a mark on us for ever in the sphere of the supernatural. Oh! Had she not been the Refuge of sinners, the Mother of mercy, the Help of Christians, what would have brought Her down to us in order to introduce us, Lord, into the Ocean of your Love, of your Power, of your Immense Being, where this burning flame will cause us to live for ever, this mystery of love of the Three for me!»<sup>23</sup>.

As she purified himself, she became more and more of that light that spread over the earth. For this reason, from the 1970s onwards, numerous people from all parts of the world, have

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<sup>20</sup> Carmel of Coimbra – *A Pathway under the Gaze of Mary*, p. 19.

<sup>21</sup> Carmel of Coimbra – *A Pathway under the Gaze of Mary*, p. 430.

<sup>22</sup> Lucia of Jesus – *Fatima In Lucia’s Own Words. Fourth Memoir*, p. 177.

<sup>23</sup> Lucia of Jesus – *How I see the Message*, p. 44.

appealed, by letter, to her intercession, having received more than 70.000 letters since then. She truly becomes a light shed on the world, not only because she prayed for so many people, but also because she shows the way to that immense Light that is God. This is why, for her, holiness is «living the Light of God that dwells in me, living in the Light, living from the Light and living for the Light!»<sup>24</sup>. This was and continues to be, from Heaven, her wish for all of us: «I want my life to be a trail of light that shines on the path of my brothers and sisters showing them faith, hope and charity»<sup>25</sup>.

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I entrust you with these notes, born from the desire to appreciate Sister Lucia's gift to the Church, but, on this day, especially to Carmel, giving thanks to God because Lucia is a Discalced Carmelite. I wish we could discover her non so well-known experience as a Carmelite, with a prayerful, contemplative, Eucharistic, Marian, ecclesial and Teresian vocation, lived with obedience and simplicity, lucidity and sense of humour.

Today, the Solemnity of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, it gives me great pleasure to present her to you and I ask Lucia to teach us to walk with and for love of Jesus, being faithful sons and daughters of the Church, led by Mary and Joseph.

I invite you to pray for her beatification and canonization process. Let us pray together so that, God willing, she may soon be beatified. In the meantime, let us make of our lives a burning candle for the good of the Church and of the world.

HAPPY FEAST DAY OF OUR LADY OF MOUNT CARMEL!

Rome, July 16, 2024

P. Miguel Márquez Calle OCD  
Superior General

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<sup>24</sup> Dicastery for the Causes of Saints – *Decree on the heroic virtues of Sister Maria Lucia of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart* [June 22<sup>nd</sup> of 2023].

<sup>25</sup> Lucia of Jesus – *My Pathway*, vol. III, p. 183 apud Carmel of Coimbra – *A Pathway under the Gaze of Mary*, p. 433.