

The Story of Garabandal

Where and what is Garabandal?

San Sebastian de Garabandal is a small farming village located in the foothills of the Cantabrian Mountains of northern Spain. It is an isolated hamlet of some 300 people located 55 miles by car in a westerly direction from the provincial capital of Santander and about 15 miles inland from the Cantabrian Sea.

San Sebastian de Garabandal is situated at the very end of a winding road cut into the side of the mountain. A solitary cluster of nine pine trees stands starkly on a rise against the horizon to the south. The village itself consists of some eighty rustic stone buildings huddled together on a small strip of land overlooking a wooded valley.

Like Fatima and Lourdes, Garabandal is a place of unearthly serenity and beauty. The villagers were known throughout the region for their piety and their faithful observance of devotional prayer which they offered together as a community several times each day.

In 1961, it was the poorest and most isolated of all the agricultural hamlets in the region. The only access to the village was via the three and a half mile oxcart path that went up from Cosio, the next closest village.

The priest of Cosio served as the pastor of Garabandal, riding up on horseback to say Holy Mass, to hear confessions and to teach the children of the village the Catechism.

+ All the information in the following account is based on eyewitness reports and interviews with the visionaries.

Visit from an Angel

On June 18, 1961, four girls, **Conchita Gonzalez** (12), **Mari Cruz Gonzalez** (11) **Jacinta Gonzalez** (12), and **Mari Loli Mazon** (12) were playing on the outskirts of the village when they heard a sound like thunder.

Suddenly, there stood before them a radiant angel. He said nothing and soon vanished. Pale and visibly shaken, they ran to the village church and told of the apparition.

Over the next few days, the girls continued to see the angel. On July 1st he spoke: *"Do you know why I have come? It is to announce to you that tomorrow the Blessed Virgin will appear to you as Our Lady of Mount Carmel."*

"On this day we saw [the angel] had a sign beneath him... We asked him what it meant but he only smiled and didn't say anything."

– **Conchita's Diary**

The Blessed Virgin Appears to the Children

On July 2, 1961, at just past six o'clock in the evening, the Blessed Virgin appeared in the rocky path which leads up to the pine grove above the village. Our Lady held the Infant Jesus in her arms and was accompanied by two angels, one on each side.

The angel the children recognized was later identified as Saint Michael the Archangel. The second angel was nearly identical. Above and to the right was a large eye that the children referred to as the eye of God.

Word had spread quickly and several priests were counted among the crowd of visitors who joined the villagers to witness the apparition.

Without the slightest fear the girls spoke to the Lady about their families, the priests who had come and the chores they did at home and in the fields. The Lady smiled.

Conchita said speaking with the Lady was easy, like talking with her mother who had gone away on a trip and had just come back.

In her diary, Conchita recorded the appearance of the Blessed Virgin, *"The Blessed Virgin appears with a white dress, a blue mantle and a crown of small golden stars. Her feet are not visible. Her hands are wide open with the scapular on the right wrist. The scapular is brown. Her hair is wavy and parted in the middle. She has an oval shaped face and her nose is long and delicate. Her mouth is very pretty with rather full lips. The color of her face is dark but lighter than that of the angel; it is different. Her voice is very lovely, a very unusual voice that I can't describe. There is no woman that resembles the Blessed Virgin in her voice or in anything else."*

At Our Lady's request, they prayed the rosary together. The Blessed Virgin taught them to recite the prayers slowly, thinking on the meaning of the words. After they had learned to pray in this way, Our Lady joined them only in reciting the *Gloria* bowing her head gracefully in humble reverence.

"The Blessed Virgin was smiling as usual. The first thing she said was, 'Do you know the meaning of the sign that was beneath the angel?' 'No

we don't,' we exclaimed together. 'It has a message that I am going to give you so you may announce it publicly on October 18th,' she said."

-Conchita's Diary

Interior Calls Precede Ecstatic Raptures

The total number of apparitions of Our Lady of Mount Carmel at Garabandal exceeded two thousand between July 2, 1961 and November 13, 1965.

The ecstasies were preceded by three interior calls, each one more intense than the last. After the third summons the children ran to the place where they were to see the vision and abruptly fell to their knees entranced; heads thrown back, faces upturned with pupils dilated.

Their countenances shone with an unearthly beauty more luminous than the photographs of the time could capture.

I have seen the photos, but even the photos can't compare to the real thing." -Witness Clinio Sans Lopez

They could not see or hear anything except the vision and each other. They were unresponsive to pin pricks, being burned by the tips of hot matches and blinding lights aimed directly into their eyes.

While the girls moved gracefully in ecstasy, examiners found them rigid and were unable to turn their heads or change the position of their limbs.

The perceived weight of the visionaries changed so that two men could not lift one 12-year-old off the ground while the children were able to lift each other with ease to offer kisses to the Virgin.

Breathtaking Ecstatic Falls

August of 1961 introduced a new type of phenomena. As the girls knelt in ecstasy, they would rapidly tilt backwards until their heads reached the ground behind them. They fell slowly in perfect synchronization forming beautiful sculptures, their clothing never immodestly ruffled. At other times they suddenly fell backwards hitting the floor to the surprise of onlookers, but they were never hurt and would rise up without the use of their hands or arms.

Ecstatic Marches Defy Natural Laws

At this time, the girls also began to walk about in ecstasy through the entire village, their eyes fixed above. Given the position of their heads and the direction of their gaze they were unable to see where they were going as they traversed the rock strewn paths often in complete darkness.

Sometimes they moved with such swiftness that even the young men of the village running at top speed could not keep up. Afterwards they were neither fatigued nor perspiring. Their pulse rates were normal. During these ecstatic flights, they were able to come to a dead stop – seeming to defy the laws of physics – as those trying to follow were carried by momentum right past them.

At the Virgin's indication, the visionaries would offer a crucifix for veneration to those around them. The children were not aware of the identity of the person kissing the crucifix. After one notable ecstasy, it came to be known that everyone to whom Conchita had just offered the crucifix was a priest dressed in ordinary clothes.

The Vision Kisses Religious Objects

To amuse the Infant Jesus, the girls offered Him small stones. Taking these pebbles, Our Lady kissed them and told the girls to give them to certain persons in the crowd.

When the spectators heard this they gave over their rosaries and medals as more suitable to offer to the Virgin. The practice became a custom and continued throughout the apparitions.

People often gave religious articles to the girls through a third person, or placed them on a table set aside for this purpose in the visionaries homes when they were not present. There was no way for the girls to know to whom each of the articles belonged, yet they never made a mistake in the thousands of times in ecstasy they returned religious articles to the rightful owners.

"Through the kiss I have bestowed on these objects, my Son will perform prodigies." –Our Lady to Conchita, November 13, 1965

The Jesuit

Among the priests who went up to Garabandal to study the events was Jesuit Father Luis Andreu. He was a brilliant young theology professor who had the reputation for being a very holy priest. Father Andreu was reserved on his first visit but after closely studying the girls in ecstasy he concluded something truly profound was happening.

On August 8, 1961, Father Andreu made another visit to the village.

That night he was observing the girls in ecstasy when he became visibly tense, tears filling his eyes, and cried out: "*Miracle, miracle, miracle, miracle!*"

"I was very close to the girls in ecstasy and Father Andreu. I heard him say, 'Miracle, miracle!'

Afterwards, as we were coming down from the Pines, Father Arroyo and I both heard him say, 'I don't have to come to Garabandal anymore because for me, this is supernatural.'

At Loli's house before leaving, Father Andreu said, 'This is the happiest day of my life.'"

-Witness Clinio Sans Lopez

On the drive home with friends during the early hours of the next morning, Father Andreu said, "*What a gift the Virgin has given me. How lucky we are to have a mother like that in heaven. This is the happiest day of my life.*" He then made a slight coughing sound and lowered his head.

Father Andreu had died, most peacefully, in a state of holy joy.

Later, Our Lady told the children that on the Eighth of August, Father Andreu had been permitted to share in their vision and had been witness in ecstasy to the Great Miracle set to occur at Garabandal in the future.

THE FIRST MESSAGE

October 18, 1961 arrived, the day the girls were to announce the much anticipated message from the Blessed Virgin. It was a day of apocalyptic overtones with thunder and lightning, cold gusts and rain. At least three thousand made the sacrifice to be there on this singular day, but as the hours went past and the weather worsened many left.

That evening, the Message was read aloud at the Pines to the crowd that remained:

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

All of the extraordinary supernatural phenomena of the past months had been accomplished in order to emphasize the importance of this Message in the same way the miracles of Jesus Christ established the authority of His words.

In this Message, Our Lady of Mount Carmel both announces a divine chastisement and the four means by which that chastisement may be averted:

- 1) Making Sacrifices
- 2) Performing Penance
- 3) Leading Good Lives
- 4) Visiting the Blessed Sacrament frequently

Our Lady requested her Message be made known throughout the world and the visionaries began in a most humble way to recruit others to help them accomplish this mission.

Communion from an Angel

From the onset of the apparitions, Saint Michael dispensed Holy Communion to the visionaries on days when Mass was not held in the village. The Host was perceived and seen by the visionaries but remained invisible to onlookers. The angel taught the children to receive with reverence saying first the *Act of Contrition* and reminding them to think on Whom they were about to receive. Following reception they recited the *Anima Christi* of Saint Ignatius Loyola as part of their thanksgiving.

At Fatima it had been asked, "How could the visionaries receive Communion from an angel when only a priest had the power to consecrate?" This question arose again at Garabandal. When the girls asked the angel, Saint Michael affirmed the truth of this teaching and told the seers that the consecrated Hosts had been taken from tabernacles on earth.

Miracle of the Visible Communion

For some time, the girls pleaded with the Blessed Virgin and Saint Michael to perform a miracle to convince those who would not believe. On June 22, 1962, Saint Michael told Conchita, that in response to this request, God would permit the invisible Host to be made visible on her tongue. Conchita announced this "little miracle" fifteen days in advance.

On July 19, 1962 at 1:30AM Conchita left her house in ecstasy, turned a corner and dropped to her knees in an adjacent lane. She put out her tongue. Those just inches away affirmed that it was bare.

In a startling flash, a brilliant white Host materialized on the girl's tongue. Alejandro Damians, a businessman from Barcelona with a borrowed movie camera and flashlight illumination, took several frames capturing in black and white contrast this miracle of the Visible Host. Multiple eyewitnesses present that night, standing near Conchita, also testified publically to the sudden appearance of the Host.

The Visions End for Three of the Girls

By the end of January 1963, the ecstasies had ended for Mari Loli Mazon, Jacinta Gonzalez and Mari Cruz Gonzalez. Although Conchita continued to have visions these were now fewer and far less frequent.

During this period, both Conchita and Mari Loli began to experience locutions - an interior voice without any accompanying vision - of the Blessed Virgin and Our Lord which continued to guide them and supplement what they had already come to know in ecstasy.

Great Prophesied Events

The young seers announced three coming, supernatural events;

The **Aviso** or Warning

The **Great Miracle** and its accompanying Sign

The conditional **Chastisement** - to come if the world does not change following the Warning and Miracle.

The first of these three events to occur is the Warning. It will be seen in the sky and then felt interiorly by everyone on earth. No one will escape it. No one will doubt it comes from God.

At a moment in the not too distant future, when the world is in the midst of a great turmoil, everything will be held in suspension.

Everyone will see the wrong they have done and the good they have failed to do – what the Church calls sins of omission.

It will be shocking and uncomfortable. Many would prefer to die rather than go through it, but it will cause no physical harm.

The Warning will serve as a purification to “correct the conscience of the world” and prepare it for the Great Miracle.

The Great Miracle will take place at the grove of the nine pine trees above the village of Garabandal. It will occur on a Thursday evening at 8:30PM on or between the 8th and 16th of March, April or May.

Conchita knows the date of the Miracle and will announce it eight days prior to the occurrence.

It will be on the feast day of a young martyr of the Eucharist and will coincide with a great ecclesiastical event in the Church.

All those either in the village or on the surrounding mountains will see it. The Holy Father will also see it regardless of where he is at that time.

The sick present will be cured, sinners will be converted and the incredulous will believe.

It will be the greatest miracle that Jesus will have ever performed for the world.

As a result of the Miracle, Russia will be converted.

After the Miracle, a permanent, visible, supernatural sign will remain over the Pines until the end of time.

If, after the Miracle, the world still does not change, God will send the Chastisement.

This supernatural Chastisement will be far worse than anything man could bring upon himself. It will be in keeping with what he deserves for his crimes.

The Second Message

On January 1, 1965, Conchita again saw the Blessed Virgin at the pines. During this apparition, the Blessed Virgin stated that because the world had not acknowledged the Message, she would give another, a final one, to be delivered by Saint Michael on June 18, 1965.

On that day, thousands came including many from nations outside Western Europe. As Conchita went into ecstasy, Saint Michael recited the final message to her:

"As my message of October eighteenth has not been complied with and has not been made known to the world, I am advising you that this is the last one.

Before, the cup was filling up. Now it is flowing over.

Many cardinals, many bishops and many priests are on the road to perdition and are taking many souls with them.

Less and less importance is being given to the Eucharist.

You should turn the wrath of God away from yourselves by your efforts. If you ask His forgiveness with sincere hearts He will pardon you.

I your mother, through the intercession of Saint Michael the Archangel, ask you to amend your lives.

You are now receiving the last warnings.

I love you very much and do not want your condemnation.

Pray to us with sincerity and we will grant your requests.

You should make more sacrifices. Think about the passion of Jesus."

The Last Apparition

November 13, 1965, was a day of great joy mixed with sadness for Conchita - one last farewell in the rain.

In these final hours, as it had been at the first, The Virgin appeared with the Infant Jesus.

This was to be a special apparition for kissing religious objects.

After kissing the articles, the Virgin said, "Through the kiss I have bestowed on these objects, my Son will perform prodigies. Distribute them to others. Talk to me, Conchita, talk to me about my children. I hold them all beneath my mantle. This will be the last time you will see me here but I shall always be with you and with all my children. Conchita, why don't you go and visit my Son in the tabernacle? He waits for you night and day."

Conchita said to the Virgin, "I am so happy when I see both of you. Why don't you take me now to heaven with you?"

The Virgin replied, "*Remember what I told you on your patronal feast day? When you present yourself before God, your hands must be filled with good deeds done for your brothers and for His glory. At the present time your hands are empty.*"

This was the end.

Those joyful moments when our Heavenly Mother, always near, had been visible to Conchita would now cease.

For a short time, Conchita continued to vividly feel the presence of the sacred around her and even experience personal locutions. She said, "*They have left my soul filled with peace and joy and a great desire to overcome my faults and to love with all my strength the Hearts of Jesus and Mary who love us so much.*"

The View of Medical Science

While the apparitions were still progressing, more than forty physicians and psychiatrists conducted examinations of the four girls; observing both their normal behavior and the quality of the ecstatic states.

Pediatrician **Dr. Celestino Ortiz** studied the visionaries for twenty consecutive days. Outside of the ecstatic state, he found these children to be normal and well balanced. Of their ecstasies he said, "To keep silent would be true scientific cowardice. We do not find any convincing explanation for such phenomena."

Dr. Ricardo Puncernau, an internationally renowned neuro-psychiatrist, widely regarded among the elite in his profession, performed the most extensive series of tests on the girls over a twelve day period. He concluded that the quantity and the quality of the phenomena ruled out any natural explanation. He said, "From a strictly scientific point of view, one cannot deny the possibility of a supernatural cause in all these phenomena."

Another prominent psychiatrist connected with the events was **Dr. Luis Morales**. In 1961, he was appointed chief medical examiner of a commission formed to study the apparitions. The opinion of this commission, which Dr. Morales endorsed, found the phenomena to be of natural origin.

On May 30, 1983, Dr. Morales officially reversed his position and gave a public lecture in Santander's largest conference hall to a full house, including members of the Spanish press, stating the reasons why he believed the apparitions to be genuine.

Epilogue

Conchita Gonzalez as principal visionary was summoned to Rome in January of 1966 by Cardinal Alfredo Ottaviani, Pro-prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, where she was formally deposed concerning the apparitions at Garabandal.

At this time, Conchita was received by Venerable Paul VI in private audience where she received the Petrine blessing, "*Ti benedico, e con ne ti benedice tutta la Chiesa*" or "*I bless you and with me the whole Church blesses you.*"

This form of blessing is customary and must not be interpreted as that Holy Father's personal sanction of the Garabandal events.

During this 1966 trip to Italy, Conchita was welcomed most cordially by Padre Pio of Pietrelcina at the friary in San Giovanni Rotondo. At the end of their conversation, in

the presence of her mother Aniceta, Conchita received the blessing of the stigmata from the hand of the saint.

Upon his death on September 23, 1968, Padre Pio entrusted the veil that obscured his face during the public viewing of his body to Conchita, a sign of predilection and encouragement which she possesses to this day.

During the week of October 17, 1968, at Lourdes, Father Bernardino Cennamo OFM, a close friend of the saint, informed Conchita that Padre Pio had also been granted a vision of the Great Miracle of Garabandal in the days before his passing and had spoken of this to him in person.

At the time of this writing, The Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has not publically declared its opinion on the authenticity of the apparitions at Garabandal.