

OUR LADY GIVES A PROOF

(To a Dancer from the "Folies Bergeres")

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The story of the proof given by Our Lady at Garabandal to a dancer from the "Folies Bergeres" is just one of many beautiful instances of this kind that happened during the days of the apparitions. This particular story has a very special meaning for me personally since it was told by a friend, Dr. Ricardo Puncernau, who witnessed it and in a sense was directly involved in it. During the summer of 1968, when I was trying to make up my mind about Garabandal, I spent a most fruitful evening with the doctor in his home in Barcelona. He had a wealth of information about the apparitions and was particularly well informed about the Commission of Investigation of Santander. In 1970, I spent another evening with him in Barcelona. This time I was with Joey Lomangino and a group of people on our summer European trip.

Dr. Puncernau is one of the important witnesses of Garabandal. He travelled all the way across Spain from Barcelona several times while the apparitions were taking place and was present at some fifteen or twenty of them. A highly qualified neurologist and an assistant professor at the Barcelona Medical School, he examined the girls very seriously and found them to be healthy and normal from every point of view. He has delivered about ninety lectures on Garabandal, many of them to medical groups of mixed faith. He is undoubtedly one of the top medical and psychological experts on Garabandal.

In December of 1974, the doctor wrote a very personal report on some of the things which happened at Garabandal on the occasion of his visits which he has never mentioned before, things "seen through the prism of a Christian doctor" that he believes need to be said. We are grateful to him for sharing this authentic, first hand information with us. There is nothing sensationally new in the doctor's report. Basically, he witnessed the same type of things that others did who came to the village. The real merit of the document derives rather from its great confirming value, coming as it does from a man of complete honesty whose medical training and background equips him to be a critical and objective observer.

The incident of the dancer from the "Folies Bergeres" occurred during Doctor Puncernau's first visit to Garabandal and on his very first day there. He

had come with his wife, Julia, and young daughter, Margarita. They had travelled with another important witness of the apparitions, Mercedes Salisachs, in her auto. After taking up lodging in one of the houses at the edge of the village, the doctor and his daughter walked to the square in front of the combination restaurant-store owned and conducted by Ceferino, father of Mari Loli, one of the four seers. Ceferino was in the middle of the square talking with some friends. After speaking with these people for a while, word came that Conchita had gone into ecstasy. Shortly thereafter, Jacinta and Mari Loli went into ecstasy, and finally Mari Cruz.

As happened so often at Garabandal, although the four girls had not gone into ecstasy together, Our Lady eventually led them together and they began walking, side-by-side, through the narrow, stony streets of the village reciting the rosary. People began to gather behind them, following them and answering the prayers of the rosary.

Doctor Puncernau watched them for a moment, then went into Ceferino's little establishment to get a coca-cola. There he encountered a young lady and soon engaged her in conversation. He discovered that she was from Uruguay but working at the time at the "Folies Bergeres" in Paris. He soon learned that not only did she not believe in the apparitions, but that she did not believe in anything at all. She said she had come to Garabandal simply out of curiosity.

The doctor suggested that they go out into the village to see what had happened to the four girls. The young lady agreed and they left Ceferino's. They hid themselves in the shadow of a house and observed from a distance that the girls were in ecstasy and reciting the rosary, while walking toward the village church of Saint Sebastian. As they continued to watch the girls from the shadowed wall of the house, they noticed that Conchita, still in ecstasy and holding a small crucifix in her hand, was leaving her three friends and starting to walk normally, but with unusual speed toward them.

The doctor thought to himself: "This girl has learned that you are a doctor, and now she is coming to impress you." However, he also wondered: "But how did she notice you hidden (in the shadows)?"

He soon discovered that his surmise was wrong. Conchita went directly to the young lady from Uruguay and placed the crucifix with force against her lips for her to kiss, once, twice, three times. Her mission accomplished, Conchita, still in ecstasy, departed to rejoin her friends and continue reciting the rosary with them.

The dancer from the "Folies Bergeres" began to cry profusely, with great, deep sobs. She seemed inconsolable. The doctor feared she was having an attack of some kind and took her to the benches along the outside wall of Ceferino's establishment. People gathered around as the doctor attempted to comfort and calm her.

Finally, she was able to speak and she told the doctor what had shaken her so profoundly. As a considerable number of people were drawn to do, she had asked for a personal proof of the reality of the apparitions. She had thought to herself: "If it is true that the Blessed Virgin is appearing, may one of the girls come and give me a proof of it."

"The thought had hardly crossed my mind," said the dancer, "when Conchita came quickly toward me to give me the crucifix to kiss. But, I did not want to kiss it and I held her hand back. However, with unusual strength she placed the crucifix against my lips and there was nothing I could do but kiss it, once, twice, three times. I, the incredulous, I, the atheist, I, who believed in nothing at all. I was exceedingly moved by this."

The happy ending of the story occurred sometime later. The doctor and the dancer wrote to each other occasionally and eventually he learned that she left the "Folies Bergeres" and returned to her family in Uruguay. ●

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