

Sister Maria's Diary Part I

By Father Eusebio Garcia de Pesquera, O. F. M.
(taken from "She Went in Haste to the Mountain")

In October of 1966, seventeen-year-old Conchita Gonzalez enrolled as a boarder in a school operated by the religious of the Concepcionistas Misioneras de la Ensananza in Burgos. Those looking out for her welfare thought this would provide both for her isolation and education. As a retreat, it would serve to shelter her from the indiscreet attention and curiosity that surrounded her in the village; and it would serve for her education since she was behind in her schooling and spiritual instruction.

While there, Conchita was under the care of a young religious, the directress of the school. Her name was unexceptional, Maria Nieves Garcia, but not her personality. She didn't know much about Garabandal except for the episcopal *notas* that said "no."

Nevertheless, she set out to help the new student whom she sensed to be out of the ordinary.

To be helpful, she put herself completely at Conchita's service, disposed to receive and hear her anytime. Conchita responded well to that attitude

and soon an excellent spiritual relationship grew between them with many periods of prayer, confidential words, and animated conversations.

The diary that Sister Maria Nieves preserves from those times begins like this:

Feeling herself strange to everything, Conchita came to the school in such a bad state that she had to struggle very hard. And furthermore, she continually had to hide her identity. She needed a friend in whom she could confide everything she was holding inside, and to whom she would be able to unburden her worries and speak of "everything that had happened" naturally and simply. Because of this, I told her she could come to see me in my free hours whenever she wanted to. I left this completely to her preference; I never called for her myself.

From the statements of the "former child visionary," I am only going to mention here the ones that refer to the apparitions which then seemed to be far away. From time to time her memory would flash back to the events, inspiring her to speak out. It should not be forgotten that all the conversation recorded in Burgos was occurring when the girl was beginning a period of great darkness, that is, in the full phase of doubts and denials. Because of this, Sister Maria Nieves never openly broached the subject of what happened during those exceptional days at Garabandal. Sister Nieves's diary continues:

October 19, 1966

Finally, they brought Conchita to see me. She made an excellent impression, simple and candid with an unusual and penetrating look: I was very pleased.

Her mother talked to me alone and informed me of certain things. She was worried about her daughter's vanity and

Conchita was the picture of confidence when this priest visited at her home. She could not foresee the clouds of doubt and confusion that would soon envelop her.





The famous Cathedral of Burgos dominates this view of the city where Conchita attended school and was befriended by Sister Maria Nieves.



lack of piety. She urged me not to let anyone see her except six people. Two days later, on the 21st, confidential conversations began.

October 23

I was with Conchita for some time. Her conversation was confidential, simple, and frank. We discussed several matters. I advised her of her excessive spending; she recognized it and accepted it well.

Because of something Conchita discussed during the course of the interview (during this period of doubts and denials, Conchita had denied receiving the Visible Host from St. Michael on July 18-19, 1962), Sister said to her:

"How could you have said you put the Host on your tongue if it were not true?"

"When I said it, it was because at that time it appeared to me that way. If not, how could I have said it?"

Seconds later, Conchita said,

"I love the Virgin as if she were my mother. One can talk with her about everything. I remember one day she told us, 'Be very clean; I took care to be that way when I was living on earth.'"

The Sister showed Conchita photos of a picture painted by an American who wanted an opinion. Conchita said,

"I don't like it."

"Why not?"

"The expression is very different from the one she had. She wasn't wearing a crown, only stars. Her hands were not so stretched out. Her hair was parted in the center and not so wavy. The head wasn't

bowed down; she moved it, but she didn't hold it like that. When she carried the child, she didn't hold His robe, although He wore it without a clasp."

Everything was said with the greatest simplicity and spontaneity, without stopping to reflect.

October 25

A long interview. At one time Conchita stated,

"What should I do so as not to have empty hands? I examine myself and I see that I don't do bad, but..."

"It is not only not doing bad, but also practicing good."

"That is just what the Virgin said to me!"

October 26

I said to Conchita,

"I heard that the Virgin called you prior to your falling into ecstasy. What were those calls?"

"The first was a sudden feeling of mild joy. The second was a stronger joy. The third made us go outside, overwhelmed with joy. Oh, what it was like to live in those times when we were seeing the Virgin so often! Although we had to go without sleeping, it didn't matter to us. We were so happy!"

"Did the people from the village harass you?"

"Yes, but it didn't matter to us. We were so happy that we didn't suffer."

October 29

Also a long interview. Conchita spoke at length about the times when the Virgin was appearing to them. I said to her,

"Certainly the Virgin prefers to appear

to children. Since they don't have human respect, they'll transmit her messages better.

"I think I would have done the same, even if I had been an adult." Conchita continued. "One day, when I had finished speaking to her, the Virgin told me to turn around toward a couple standing behind me and tell them, 'You aren't living right.' I did this although it was hard for me. I know they were moved since they began to cry and went to confession on that same day. She told me many things like that.

"What do you think the angel was like—an adult?"

"No, he was about nine years old with a blue tunic and rose-colored wings. We didn't see his hands except when he gave us Communion. Many times the Virgin didn't look directly at us but further away at the people who were behind us. Sometimes she changed her expression but she didn't stop smiling. I asked her, 'Who are you looking at?' She said to me, 'I'm looking at my children.'

"We talked to her about everything, even about our cows—she laughed very much. We also played together (see box).

How did they play?

In their visions of Our Lady, the girls could also see each other. To play this game of hide-and-seek, one of the girls would leave the plane of vision of the others and run off to hide somewhere in the village. The Virgin would then lead the others to the place where the girl was hiding. There was always gleeful joy when they came together.

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How happy we were then! We didn't suffer a thing although some of the people bothered us.

"She (the Virgin) seemed to be about 17. Because of this I rejoiced when a retreat master said that we would see the Virgin about this age. I like to hear the Virgin talked about. I've only heard a few priests speak about her. One of them told me one day, 'If these things about Garabandal aren't true, I won't put faith in anything.' Do you think that's good? It troubled me."

Sister wrote down that she was preoccupied with the expression of that imprudent priest and recalled it frequently.

Conchita recalled,

"How nice it was to be with the Virgin! She was really like a friend, just as if she were living with us. And she called us by our nicknames just as the people did. She didn't say Maria Concepción but Conchita; not Maria Dolores but Loli. Now we get tired during our periods of prayer, but then we didn't feel tired or sleepy or anything. We saw her so many times."

October 30

"I learned many things in my village since the people confided their problems to me. Some of them were tremendous. The ones that made the biggest impression on me were those of priests; these troubled me! A confessor told me to ask the Lord for the desire of suffering and also to accept pain with joy. I couldn't speak to the Lord like that since it doesn't come from me. I'm afraid of suffering."

Sister answered,

"I understand, but we ought to trust in Him and know that we ought to serve for something in His hands. God wishes to take us as little instruments, perhaps as tapers for lighting the large candles."

"That's true. We are instruments; people shouldn't notice us. In the village, the visitors shoved us, they pulled on our clothes, they sought after us. And although so many went up to the pines, not

all of them approached the tabernacle."

November 1, Feast of All Saints

To make use of extra free time, Conchita and the Sister spoke for a long time, taking as a topic the life of the blessed in heaven and what they should do to get there.

"One day in an apparition with the Virgin, we were wearing hair shirts although very loose. So she would notice we were wearing them, we felt them from time to time. She said to us, 'Yes, I know you are wearing them but that is not exactly what I ask of you or what pleases me the most. Rather it is *faithfulness in everyday life*.'

"Once she also said, 'If you see an angel and a priest together you should first show respect to the priest.'

"I asked the Virgin, 'Will the end of the world be during the time of these future happenings?' She answered me, 'No, the end of the times.'

"The Warning will be a purification, a preparation for the Miracle, and everyone will see it. It will make people aware of the evil they do with their sins.

"After Paul VI there will be only two more popes and after that the *end of the times*. I told the date of the Miracle to Cardinal Ottaviani and the Pope's confessor. The Pope gave me the impression of being an oppressed person, as if restrained by the cardinals and the hierarchy. The Miracle will show the great love of God."

November 3

"After his death, Father Luis Andreu taught me to pray the Hail Mary in Greek. We heard his voice during an ecstasy but we didn't see him. Also, he gave me a message for his brother (Father Ramon Andreu) and a French song that I don't remember any more although Father Ramon knows it by heart. He told us how they buried him. His voice was the same as when he was alive."

November 6

The Sister spoke to Conchita about



detachment, about the need for her to restrain herself in the satisfaction of her desires.

"I was surrounded by so many ridiculous tastes and received so many gifts that I became accustomed to waste things, but I understand what I ought to do and know that you are telling me this for my own good.

"Today, a Burgos newspaper printed an account of the Garabandal events but it didn't say where I was."

"Are you happy when you see Garabandal publicized?"

"Before, very much, but now it's as if it weren't my affair, as if it were something completely separated from me.

"The people pray that the Miracle will take place. Don't you see that this is foolish? It will take place whether they pray or not. I only request that the Message will be fulfilled. Many pray for the Miracle in order that others who have not believed will be put down. This doesn't seem good to me. I think my mother is anxious for the Miracle to come so she'll be free from doubts and worry.

"It's wonderful to love God and to have faith without seeing anything. I would like to do it that way, but..."



A moment of respite for Conchita and Mari Loli on August 15, 1966, the day when they entered a period of deep darkness about their visions.

"God is patient," Sister interrupted. "He gives us light by steps. The Virgin taught you slowly but never showed herself displeased, isn't that right?"

"No, never! We never saw her that way, even when she was speaking to us about the Chastisement. We have seen the Chastisement; did you know that? But whether or not it will take place, that depends. When we told her our faults, she was silent.

"When saying good-bye, she kissed us, and it was like this: we didn't feel any physical contact and at the same time we weren't able to advance further since there was something there that prevented us from doing so. We wanted to touch but our hand did not touch anything as we reached out, nor was it able to continue further. We held the Child Jesus in our arms and we felt no weight nor did we feel any physical contact, but He was there.

"The Virgin told us one day that she put perfume on the sides of her sandals while she was living on earth.

"The Virgin never wept although the people cried with us when they saw us weep. On seeing the Virgin, tears escaped from us many times, but it was from emotion.

"At the time of the prediction of the Chastisement, the whole village confessed."

November 8

"Helping others has done me much good. When I visited the hospitals, I noticed that I benefited. Then I remembered the things that attracted me at other times like amusements or fine clothes and I saw that they weren't the trouble."

"Suffering leads to God."

"Yes, but also joy. Joys have helped me many times. I think of heaven; how good to be there! The first thing I'm going to do is give a big hug to the Virgin and the *Three* (the Blessed Trinity).

"God does exceptional things, isn't that so? And the people don't respond well. I recall many times what happened in my village. We saw many cases of hysteria. They touched my body thinking they would be cured. And there were even those who didn't go there because they believed I could read consciences. That made me laugh. How was I going to read consciences? The things I said to certain people at the time were told to me by the Virgin."

The Sister showed Conchita a picture of a holy card that attempted to show the

Virgin as she appeared at Garabandal. Conchita exclaimed,

"Heavens! What this does to me!"

The Sister noted: We laughed and she described again how she saw the Virgin with such exactness and said nothing different from what she had repeated so many times before. Sometimes she spoke of everything as if her "denials" had not existed. This is really marvelous, and at the same time there is tremendous mystery here—indescribable.

November 9

The Sister tried to lift Conchita's spirits telling her that when the darkness passed she would enter into the fullness of God.

"What a joy if it were like that! But could I possibly experience more joy than I have experienced in the past? The apparitions of the Virgin filled me with happiness. But the locutions of Jesus are much better. I don't understand; it is something superior. I pray that He accomplishes His will in me.

"The Virgin taught us to pray the litany and the mysteries of the rosary that we didn't know. She only prayed the Gloria; if she began with the other prayers, it was only in order to instruct us.

"The last time I saw her was on November 13th of the past year at the pines. She told me I wouldn't see her there again."

Conchita understandably made a long pause of silence and sentiment.

"Sometime ago, while in my village, the Virgin pointed out a Redemptorist father, a close friend of Mercedes Saliachs (from Barcelona), for me to confess to him. This priest advised me not to dress so well, that he didn't like to see me so well dressed. I didn't feel inclined to tell him my affairs; it didn't come out of me. I told this to the Virgin and she was silent; she left me without a response. One day I made up my mind and told this priest what had happened. This made him very happy but I was never able to communicate anything to him; it was impossible for me."

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November 12

Conchita seemed to need a day of rest, especially spiritually, to restore peace in her mind agitated by a thousand confusions and doubts. The Sister understood and responded to this need. At an early hour, the two went out, walking down the road leading toward the famous Monastery of Miraflores, taking lunch and a couple of harmonicas. On the way, Conchita spoke of memories that she held inside and needed to share. For example:

"You know Father Collin? Now he is trying to pass for the Pope. (He was a Frenchman with a small group of followers who called himself Clement XV. He died several years ago.) He was in my village and wanted to speak with me but my mother wouldn't allow it. The people finally forced him to leave. Well, when I was in Rome, they showed me a picture from a newspaper in which I was shown at Father Collin's side. And it mentioned there that he had been with me and many

Sixteen-year-old Conchita Gonzalez inside the cloister of Santillana del Mar.



other lies. I deny this since I have never been in his company. They make up many things like that.

"One day a woman came to my village and insistently asked me to inscribe a card for her. I wrote nothing more than, 'Ask that God bless our only Pope, His Holiness Paul VI.' I don't know why it occurred to me to write that. A little later, a priest I knew well came running up to me and said, 'What have you written for that woman? She is a Mason, a supporter of Father Collin.'"

The Sister's diary continues:

The way was delightful, a little cold but bearable. We stopped for a while on top of a little hill overlooking the city and I taught her how to play the harmonica. She learned almost the complete *Noche de Paz* and the *Ave Maria* of Lourdes. Then going on in silence, we prayed a rosary under the sky. After this we entered the monastery and sitting down, we talked about a painting. At six in the evening, people came to pick us up in a car. The afternoon had passed devoutly and swiftly in wonderful peace.

We returned and at night the two of us got together in the chapel while everyone was resting. Conchita was in the chapel there at the beginning of November 13th on which she was going to have the first anniversary of the last apparition of the Virgin.

We began by meditating on the rosary. The chapel was dark; only the statue of the Virgin was lit up. The silence was complete and the presence of God was felt. During each mystery we paused, and I expressed thoughts that came forth spontaneously. Never in my life have I prayed with more fervor! We were on our knees in the same pew.

After reposing a while in silence, seated in the first pew, we began our litany of petitions. With quiet around us we spoke our requests for one person or another in a hushed voice. The moment was tense, with an extraordinary peace; we seemed to be a single person praying simply and with immense confidence. She began the petition and I completed it, or vice versa. She prayed for a whole multitude of people and intentions, her

glance fixed on the statue of the Virgin. She began to say in a whisper,

"My mother and my brother suffer. Chon (Ascension de Luis Sagrado of Burgos) has told me this and I see it from the letters I receive. I don't know why it is that upon returning from the monastery I am finding such sorrow. This morning I didn't have the desire either to pray or think during Mass. My head was bowed low; I don't know if I accomplished anything. It would make me very happy if this dryness would leave me. Do you think that wanting this is opposed to the will of God?"

"No. Christ also said, 'Take this chalice from me.' You still have doubts, don't you?"

"Just as before. That is, the same as after August 15, 1966 (when Conchita's mind was enveloped in deep darkness concerning the apparitions). I see all the apparitions as though they were a dream that has gone away."

"Can you deny them completely?"

"No, no! I couldn't do that. I would feel remorse. When I deny I feel something deep down inside that doesn't leave me at peace."

In a long series of petitions, there were these two:

Sister Maria Nieves: We petition you, Lord for the Pope.

Conchita: And for all those who surround him.

Sister: We petition you, Lord, for priests.

Conchita: So that they may be holy and may not, out of presumption, stop wearing the cloth. I don't like to see a priest as a layman. Not at all.

Sister Maria Nieves's diary continues:

The unplanned vigil ended near the altar like two children in front of the Mother of Heaven and God the Father, something I couldn't forget for the simplicity, the peace, the interior joy. It was one o'clock in the morning when we retired and it had seemed a very short time to us. On getting up from the floor, Conchita said to me,

"I would like to stay all night." □

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