

# Priests—Beloved Children of the Virgin

*On May 24, 1990, Ascension Thursday, Joey and Marilyn Lomangino and another member of the New York Center visited with Conchita Keena at her home. It was a cordial visit that lasted about four hours. In the course of the conversation, Conchita expressed concern for priests, especially for some with whom she had recently been in contact. She was able to observe firsthand their lack of belief in the power of prayer and even in the Eucharist Itself. During the apparitions of Garabandal, the Blessed Virgin impressed upon the four visionaries the great dignity of the priesthood. This feeling has stayed with them and arouses in them concern, sympathy and a desire to help those priests who they see not living up to or even believing in their own lofty calling.*

*Some time ago, Conchita was interviewed by Dr. Jeronimo Dominguez specifically about priests and Garabandal. It seems timely, in lieu of the seer's recent comments regarding the priesthood, to reprint the interview here. At the end are some of Dr. Dominguez's own thoughtful reflections.*

**Q.** *Do you remember if the Virgin spoke to you about priests at Garabandal?*

**A.** Yes, every day (Conchita answers without hesitation).

**Q.** *What did the Virgin say about them?*

**A.** In almost every apparition—I think in all the apparitions—the Virgin asked us to pray for priests.

**Q.** *Did you obey the Virgin? Did you pray for priests?*

**A.** Oh yes! (answers Conchita immediately.) We were always praying for priests; it was like an obsession with us at the time of the apparitions, and we loved them very much. Whenever there was a priest at the village, he was our hero; we stayed at his side most of the time, we listened to him and talked to him. Every priest was our most important visitor.

**Q.** *Why did you care for priests so much?*

**A.** Because priests were the beloved children of the Virgin. In every appa-

rition we noticed that the Virgin would speak with special, very dear love about priests and I guess this was contagious; since the priests were the main objects of the Virgin's love, they were also our most beloved persons.

**Q.** *Do you remember anything else the Virgin told you about priests at Garabandal?*

**A.** Yes, I remember the Virgin told us that if we ever saw a priest and an angel together, we should greet the priest first and then the angel. If the Blessed Mother gives us this example, you can imagine how much we admired and loved priests—any priest; because in the eyes of the Virgin, any priest was superior to an angel, and an angel was the greatest creature we knew after the Virgin.

**Q.** *What else about priests at Garabandal?*

**A.** Oh, I remember we asked the Virgin where the Hosts, which the angel gave us in Communion, came from; because someone told us to ask this

question of the Blessed Mother. And the Virgin told us that the Hosts came from tabernacles on earth; that they had been consecrated by priests, because the angels cannot consecrate.

**Q.** *Anything else?*

**A.** Many times the Virgin gave us private messages for particular priests, but we would give them to the priest and then forget about them.

**Q.** *Do you remember any particular message?*

**A.** No, I don't; but I remember once that there was a priest, a Dominican, dressed as a layman, and the Virgin was telling us jokingly how ugly the secular clothes were on that Dominican compared to the beautiful habit he was supposed to wear. She made us laugh, and when the apparition was over we told the priest the reason for our laughter.

*Comment by Dr. Dominguez:*

Conchita, I met this self-same priest at Garabandal five years ago, and he was still wearing layman's dress. He told me about the experience you just mentioned, and I asked him how come he did not wear the Dominican habit after the remarks made by the Virgin. In reply, he told me of a few wonderful experiences he had had in Garabandal, and that he believed in the apparitions without any doubt in his mind, but he dodged the question of the habit; he said he knew that it was wrong, but it was like people who smoke knowing it is wrong to smoke.

**Q.** *Conchita, in the last message of June, 1965, the Virgin also spoke about priests, did she not?*

**A.** Yes, she (through the intercession of St. Michael) told us: "Many cardinals, many bishops and many priests are on the road to perdition and are taking many souls with them..." And I believe this is the only time the Virgin told us something bad about anyone.

## Reflections on the Priesthood and Religious Life.

The priest is "alter Christus," (another Christ); that is why, at the consecration of the Mass, the priest does not say, "This is the body of Christ," but "This is My Body." We were told since childhood to kiss the hand of the priest because his were consecrated hands, dedicated to bring Christ to us, to pardon our sins, to bless us in baptism, in marriage, and anointing the sick.

Pope John Paul II also shared the love of the Virgin for priests when he told a group of priests on November 9, 1979, "Dear Brothers, we must love our priesthood from the bottom of our heart, as a great 'social sacrament'. We must love it as the essence of our life and of our vocation, as the basis of our Christian and human identity. None of us can be divided in himself. The sacramental priesthood, the ministerial priesthood, calls for particular faith, for particular commitment of all the forces of body and soul, for special awareness of one's vocation. Each of us must thank Christ, on his knees, for the gift of his vocation."

On occasions, a priest may feel he is not wanted, is not needed. Pope John Paul II has a very good answer for them: "If it may sometimes seem that we are not necessary, it means that we must begin to bear witness more clearly, and then we will see how much the modern world needs our priestly testimony, our service, our priesthood."

Later on, the Pope echoed the Virgin as far as the habit is concerned. These are the eloquent words of Pope John Paul II: "Let us not deceive ourselves that we are serving the Gospel if we try to 'water down' our priestly charism through exaggerated interest in the vast field of temporal problems, if we wish to 'secularize' our way of living and acting, if we cancel even the external signs of our priestly vocation. We must keep the sense of our singular vocation, and this 'singularity' must be expressed also in our exterior garb. Let us not be ashamed of it." (November 9, 1979)

It is obvious that many priests today

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do not wear a distinctive garb. And it appears as though there are no priests or nuns in the streets. Each priest's or nun's habit seen in the street shouts out a life entirely delivered unto the love of God. It is a silent, but very loud cry of a person prepared to sacrifice his life for the love of God. It is the best sermon any man or woman can deliver. People today lack the familiarity of seeing priests and nuns in everyday situations. Youth particularly lack this silent reminder of God's dedicated servants; consequently few of them would consider becoming a priest or a nun.

*Dear priest or nun:* Be proud of what you are and show the world you are proud of it! To be a priest or a nun is the greatest achievement a man or woman can attain in this life. I took my six-year-old child to a Catholic school run by secularly dressed nuns. I introduced him to the principal and my son asked her, "Why don't you dress like a nun? Are you ashamed of having people know you're a nun?" The principal turned red as a beet and didn't answer; and my son, now several years older, has almost forgotten that nuns exist. For him, there are only "teachers," as though God had kind of stopped walking about in his school.

*Dear priest or nun:* Listen to the Virgin and listen to the Pope; please, for the love of God, put on your habit once more. Every time you walk through the city, you will be shouting out your love for God, and for your neighbor, a thousand times better than with a thousand speeches or a thousand works of love; you will be a living testimony of Jesus.

*Dear layman:* Let us do what the Virgin asks; let us pray for priests; let us pray for the greatest treasure we have on earth, for their perseverance and for their faithful fulfillment of their vocation, so that they may have the grace to work full time as priests. We need their hands to bless us; to bring us the Body and Blood of Christ and to pardon our sins; we need their lips to continue to instruct; we need their bodies to continue to suffer; we need their hearts to continue to love; we need their presence to continue to save.

