

# I Was a New Man

*The Conversion of Ramon Pérez*

*Translated and presented by Fr. François Turner, O.P.*

*Less than one year before he began preparing his book, "Garabandal—The Village Speaks," Ramon Pérez was a man estranged from God. But then, through a sudden and remarkable outpouring of Divine Grace, he was converted. Was Our Lady the ultimate cause of this transformation so that Ramon would place his talents at her disposal? That could almost safely be assumed. But, be that as it may, the case of this individual's complete 'renewal' serves as yet another example of the tremendous impact that Garabandal can have on the lives of those who are open to it. The following account is taken from the text of an interview with Ramon conducted by Pierre Menoret on October 10, 1977, over station Radio Armorique in Brittany, France.*

**Pierre** Who are you?

**Ramon** I was born at Bilbao (Spain) on September 25, 1930. I am married and have four children. I remember very well the Spanish civil war. Both my parents were militant communists. My sister and I were put aboard a ship at Bilbao with 3,000 other children. I was seven years old. We were to be received in French or Russian families. We both wanted to be sent to Russia and not to France which, to our dismay, was not communist and where people drank milk! Both of us were received in a socialist family at Amiens.

**Pierre** And then?

**Ramon** The Republicans\* were defeated and my father had lost a leg in a battle. I joined him and another sister at Perpignan. Thanks to the Red Cross, the whole family was finally reunited in the north of France. My father and mother both found jobs as day laborers on a farm. For various reasons, I spent

only three years in school. At the age of eleven, while sick and in a hospital, a nun had me receive my First Communion, my first meeting with God. But it was not a conversion. My family was "against religion."

**Pierre** What about your marriage?

**Ramon** I married a girl born at Rennes in Brittany, but immersed in various activities—movie club, library—I lived in a constant state of anxiety, even anguish. I kept wondering about the meaning of life, about society. I was in a mental fog. There was no answer and I often thought of suicide. My wife realized it and suffered a great deal. Everything seemed absurd to me, that is up until 1970.

**Pierre** What was your job at that time?

**Ramon** I was, and still am an employee in a large national society of chemical fertilizers. As such, I met Gustave Leparc who said to me, "Being of Spanish stock, you must know about Garabandal." I replied, "I've never heard of it." So he gave me Sanchez Ventura's book (*The Apparitions of Garabandal*). I read it and was stunned.

**Pierre** You were very far from such things.

**Ramon** Yes. I believed in God, but the Real Presence, the need to go to confession before receiving Communion. . . . In other words, my religion was not at all Catholic. I had many deep doubts (about the faith) but felt an urge to know more (about Garabandal).

**Pierre** And you went to Spain?

**Ramon** Yes. I had to drive my children down there, and I thought, "Why not make a little detour on the way back." I had an afternoon to spare and so arrived on Thursday, July 9, 1970, with the book (*The Apparitions of Garabandal*).

**Pierre** Was it difficult getting there?

**Ramon** Very difficult. It's out of this world and, at that time, risky for a car to get there. I began questioning the inhabitants of the village but they were very much on the reserve because of the negative stand of the bishops. They told me, "The Bishop says that what happened here does not come from God." One can imagine the weight of such a pronouncement on these people. But they added with a mountain peasant's wit, "But, what we have seen we have seen, and so, what is it?" They seemed prisoners of a dilemma. But, as I kept on questioning them, I could fully understand that, in any case, whatever its origin, *something had happened*.

**Pierre** Did you meet the visionaries?

**Ramon** Two of them, Mari Loli and Jacinta. I told them separately, "Now listen, I don't know if you have seen the Virgin or not. I presume that if you did see her, she

\*The troops of the government regime whose power, for the most part had fallen into the hands of the anarchists and communists. Because of persecutions against the Church and rampant anarchy, the army revolted. Franco eventually assumed leadership of this force.

*"Pray for me because I really need it and if you don't, we'll settle the matter in the other world."*

listens to you." And, half seriously, half jokingly I added, "Pray for me because I really need it and if you don't, we'll settle the matter in the other world." And, looking at me earnestly, straight into my eyes, each one said, "All right, I'll pray for you."

**Pierre** Did something happen?

**Ramon** Yes, something happened but it is very difficult to express. We lack words. We know for sure that they are improper. I left Garabandal on Friday at 5 a.m. and all the way back to France, I felt a joy which was extremely pure, crystal-like. I felt light, so very light, so buoyed up. With this joy, my mind kept coming back, again and again, to the Blessed Virgin. Please take good note that such thoughts were not at all mine at the time. But, curiously, I also felt an alarming presence (later on, I thought that it might have been an evil spirit, the devil, if you like). The very thought of the devil, at that time, made me laugh. This joy found a home in me the whole day. It was marvelous, a Mozart-like music. When my wife saw me coming in she said, "But you look so joyful!"

**Pierre** Did it stay with you?

**Ramon** I went to bed at nine. The next day was a Saturday, July 11, and I had to go to a village called Langonnet for the marriage of a daughter of some good friends of mine. I had promised to offer them a little film of the marriage as a souvenir.

**Pierre** So you went to Langonnet. Did something happen?

**Ramon** Yes.

**Pierre** And it is difficult to explain.

**Ramon** Yes. It was something mar-



velous but very, very difficult to explain. It was an elegant marriage but nothing especially mystical. (At Communion time) people began walking up to the altar rail and I followed them, the last one in line although I was in a situation which warranted a complete, long and deep confession.\* Well, here I was, the last of the Communicants, moving up toward the priest. But I stopped. I felt a presence, light, but very clear, between the priest and myself. It became more and more solid and then emanating from it, something majestic, but not crushing, not terrifying. And this feeling of the majesty of this presence kept

*Ramon and his wife, Genevieve, pose for a picture with son, Luke (13) and daughter, Isabel (17) at their home outside of Rennes. Two other sons complete the family, Bruno (23) who is married and Ramon (25) a third year seminary student.*

\*In answer to Fr. Turner's question about receiving Communion without confession first, Ramon responded, "I had no intention of making a sacrilegious Communion. It didn't even enter my mind that I was not properly prepared. My thoughts had been set on what I had been living the day before and on the camera I had been using. It was after receiving Jesus Christ in the Eucharist that He sent me, so to speak, to His priests, the priests of His church, telling me if I can say so, that I should go and confess to them. He was telling this to me gently and peacefully. Before that day, I respected the priests, but then He made me understand how sacred they are, especially when they forgive sins in His name."

# I Was a New Man

developing, not seen but felt, not painful but strong, so strong that I had to use my left hand to uphold my right one to receive the Host.

After receiving Communion, I went back to my place. Then I felt this majestic presence no longer *by* me but *in* me and to such a degree, with such volume, such solidity that I lost complete consciousness of everything that surrounded me. And this experience of majesty was followed—how can I say it?—by a vibration of the soul. But can one say that? It was not physical and it was not emotional. It was far deeper. Moreover, these vibrations kept increasing in tempo, in strength and in extent. I came to a point where I was oblivious of everything else. And then it seemed as if a heavy, weighty, enormous envelope was falling off my body and down to my feet, something like a huge hide which slipped down. The angle of the vibrations (of my soul) became so wide that I cried, although I don't think that anyone heard me, "LORD! HAVE MERCY!"

As soon as I had said that, the shaking stopped immediately. It isn't that I was frightened, but if I had not said that, I wonder what would have happened to me. At the very same moment, I was invaded by a joy, an incredible joy, a delirious joy accompanied by light and peace, to a point where I wept, more than ever in my life. These tears came not from my eyes but from the innermost depths of my being. What a joy! What a peace! What a light!

**Pierre** And then Ramon, you decided to write this book [*Garabandal—The Village Speaks*].

**Ramon** Yes. Well, I would like to underline that. Having become very lucid, I suddenly saw the people, the ones that were there in the church. Except for the parents of the bride, I did not know these people. But, for the first time in my life, Pierre, I did see *the others*. I saw them with an incredible tenderness and respect. Later, when I tried to reason all this out, I thought, "This is certainly how Christ sees us

all, yes, surely."

**Pierre** And you had never felt that before.

**Ramon** No, never. I tried to analyze all this (I don't let myself be taken in too easily). I have never felt it before or afterwards.

**Pierre** May one speak of a complete conversion?

**Ramon** Oh yes! It was a great upheaval. I was turned completely inside out, like a pocket. Truly. In the evening when I tried to consider all these extraordinary events, it occurred to me immediately that three, no, four facts were certain:

- 1) God exists and I met Him.
- 2) He is marvelous and oh how marvelous!
- 3) He lives in the Eucharist.
- 4) It came back to my mind what I had asked the young visionaries, "Pray for me." It then dawned upon me as something obvious, *Garabandal is true*. And then I had to revise my life, all my attitudes, my whole life. I was a new man. □

## A Sign in the Heavens

Ramon Pérez and his family live near Rennes in Brittany on an old farmstead with three separate stone buildings closely grouped together. One of the buildings has been completely renovated and serves as the main family dwelling. From the front of this building, perhaps thirty feet away, is the entrance to another building, the upper floor of which, Ramon has converted into an office where he does his writing and research. One very clear night, at least four years before his book was published, he stepped out of the main house carrying in his arms, his heavy manuscript including all his documents and the interviews he conducted with the villagers of Garabandal. He intended to, once again, go over to his office and burn the midnight oil as he had done so

many times before.

But by now he had become somewhat discouraged. The project was proving to be a monumental task especially for someone who had had only three years of formal education and by his own admission, was poor at grammar, couldn't spell words correctly and knew next to nothing about theology. He felt as though it were beyond his capabilities to author the proposed book. With these thoughts in mind as he stood on the stone slab outside the front door, he suddenly decided to ask for a sign that would tell him if he was to go on with the work and complete it. He asked that one of the stars in the sky move. Hardly had he made this petition, however, that he felt remorse for being so bold. How dare

he—so he thought—make such a request. Then, with lowered head and closed eyes, he humbly asked God to forgive him. After a moment or two he raised his head and opened his eyes again. Thereupon he saw to his amazement, an enormous, brilliant star emerge from one horizon and move with great speed across the sky to the opposite end. He reflected: it couldn't have been a shooting star for it was far too large nor could it possibly have been a satellite. At the same time he felt as though it were impelling him, giving him a signal so to speak, that he must do the work. Imperative was the word he used. Later on, while looking at a map, he realized that the star had travelled in the direction of Spain.

Afterwards, rather than go over to his office, he went back inside the house and told his wife what had just happened. □

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