

Recollections of Chon de Luis

As told to Fr. François Turner

Translated from Spanish by Maria Frohreich

Ascension (Chon) de Luis Sagredo is best known in connection with the Garabandal events through her involvement with Muriel-Catherine, the girl of Jewish ancestry from Paris who went as a student to Burgos in order to learn Spanish and stayed with Chon. After a remarkable incident at Garabandal involving a bottle of holy water, Catherine eventually was baptized. Chon was an integral part of this well-publicized episode, but she had other fascinating experiences resulting from her being a witness to the Garabandal events. Last October, she was asked what she felt were some of the most outstanding.*

A Doubting Thomas

The time would come, Fr. Rodrigo** warned me, when there would be many false apparitions because when there is something from God there will also be something from the devil. I often think of Fr. Rodrigo and how he would tell me that if something involved children it was easier to believe because they don't have much imagination, but if it involved adults to be very careful. He added that nowadays there is also a good deal of anti-Catholicism and the nonbelievers will use these things [reports of apparitions] against Garabandal, Fatima, St. Teresa and Lourdes saying that all of them are false.

He also spoke to me about Palmar de Troya [site of false apparitions] and told me that Clemente [Dominguez] was completely mad. Father said that he was warning us not to follow just anybody.

I am somewhat of a "doubting Thomas," in fact, very much of a Thomas and am very careful about these things. I have seen the movie with Aurora Bautista playing the part

of St. Teresa and Aurora is a great actress, but when I went to Garabandal, I realized that the ones who really gave the impression of something divine and extraordinarily so, were the children of Garabandal who knew nothing about acting and *nada de nada*—nothing of anything.

I cannot understand people who lived through Garabandal and now compare it to other cases of reported apparitions; I can't understand them. The girls from Garabandal—I especially remember Loli—would undergo such an extraordinary change that there isn't a human being who could perform like those children. They would be completely normal but when they went into ecstasy, they would turn white, very pale, transparent-like, and would take on such a beautiful attitude of prayer and devotion.

I remember one incident involving Jacinta. She had either been in bed with the flu or had just gotten up a day or two before when she fell into ecstasy and left the house. Her mother said to me, "Oh, my daughter has left the house in ecstasy and is in the streets. She just got over the flu and is going to get a chill!" She gave me Jacinta's coat so that I could put it on her if I could locate her in the village.

Since people were always crowding around the girls, I found her easily enough. I came close to her but was unable to do it [put the coat on her] because she was hard and stiff like a wall. I couldn't even hold her hand or move her. That impressed me. Then I said to Mari Loli who was by Jacinta's side but in the normal state, "Jacinta's mother gave me this coat for her because she has just gotten over the flu and she's afraid she will get a chill." Mari Loli took the coat and said to Jacinta, "Tell the Virgin that I'm going to put your coat on." Loli then took Jacinta, handling her like a small child, and put the coat on her with the greatest of ease even though I hadn't been able to move her because she was like a statue.

Six Rings

There was something else that had to do with Loli which impressed me very much. One day two married couples and a widow arrived in Garabandal. One of the men was the Military Governor of Seville who said to me, "We were told that she [the Virgin] kisses wedding rings. Since you know the girls, could you give them ours?" They gave me six, two from each couple and two from the widow. I didn't tell Loli whose rings they were but just put them on one of her fingers and said, "Here, these rings are for the Virgin to kiss."

When the girls were in ecstasy, I noticed that Mari Loli took each ring one at a time (she sort of turned them around when she gave them to the Virgin). First she gave one, then another and then she gave two at a time. I asked myself, "Why does she take one, then one again, then two and then one again?" Lying in bed that night I thought, "Why it's because the two belonged to the widow!"

*See GARABANDAL, January-March 1985, p. 12.

**Fr. Lucio Rodrigo Llanes, S.J., was famous throughout Spain. He had been spiritual advisor to Franco and the Spanish Bishops. He also believed in Garabandal and had been Conchita's confessor.

"I can't understand how an intelligent girl like you could go to that village."

Next day, I said to Loli, "Yesterday, when you were presenting rings to the Virgin to kiss, one could see that you were getting tired because as you were giving them to her one at a time, suddenly you gave her two. Why did you do that?" Loli answered, "The Virgin told me, 'Give me one, give me another, now give me two.'" That impressed me because the child didn't know if they belonged to a widow or not.

Also, I recall an incident that had to do with my own mother's wedding ring which she had given me shortly before she died. Since I was young at the time, only 18, I had a small pearl put on the ring so I could wear it.

The Virgin would never kiss ornamental rings, only wedding rings, but as mine was actually a wedding ring I placed it on the table [in the kitchen of one of the visionary's homes] with the other objects to be presented. Fr. Ramon Andreu's sister-in-law, Pilar, was there and when she saw the ring was upset and said, "Who would ever think of offering an ornamental ring to be kissed?" I responded, "Be quiet; it's mine." Pilar understood that I had my reasons.

Sure enough, when the visionary went into ecstasy, the ring was held up and kissed by the Virgin even though it looked like an ornamental ring.

Don Julio

I know of another case, a very touching one. I knew this family from Santander whom I loved dearly. The husband [Don Julio] was a very good person but he was a communist. During the war he was the president of the Red Cross in Santander. Sometimes, on my visits to Garabandal, I

While in ecstasy, the girls would look perfectly natural but Chon found Jacinta "stiff as a wall."



Recollections of Chon de Luis

stayed at their house. The man was an atheist but was very fond of me.

I remember he would say, "I can't understand how an intelligent girl like you could go to that village. All that's for crazy people." He had gone there one day and told me about it in his own way and according to his interpretation and mental outlook.

On one of these trips to Garabandal, his wife gave me some medals. She had had a sister who was a nun, either a Carmelite or Clarisa, I can't remember. She gave me the medals and said, "Here is one for my husband, too."

When I arrived back in Santander, he asked, "Chonin! (that's what they used to call me) Have you been with the crazy people again?" I answered, "Yes, yes, I've been with the crazy people again. One is

better off among *these* crazy people."

"Well tell me about it."

"You can't imagine what I've brought you! A medal kissed by the Virgin for you."

"For me?"

"Yes, for you. It's not that the Virgin gave it to me but rather that I took it so that she would kiss it for you."

"Look, being that it's from you and seeing the love with which you have done this and because I don't want to hurt your feelings, I'll keep it. But not because I have any faith whatsoever."

"Fine, go ahead and keep it."

The Fragrance of Roses

About two years went by and then one day I noticed that my rosary that had been kissed by the Virgin had a

very strong, very intense fragrance of roses. A few days later—I said I was very much a "doubting Thomas"—I washed my hands with water and plain soap without any fragrance. I wanted to be sure it was the rosary and not my imagination; to prove that there was no reason for the fragrance. Besides, I had made a promise not to use perfume.

I remember at the time I had done some work for the Department of Commerce where I am presently employed. I had been very attentive to the events of Garabandal, very involved, and hadn't had time to study. Conchita was then staying with me for a few days before she went to school and for me this was more important; the Virgin was more important than all my exams, more important than my future.

So, I went to take the tests and remember saying to myself when I came out, "Now I can start with my apostolate since I don't have to worry about the tests anymore." All during the examination I had had the rosary in my hand and when I came out and went to kiss it, I smelled this extraordinary fragrance of roses. I thought, "What can this be? It can't be because of me." Because I had had Conchita with me and because I was so involved with the things of Garabandal and Catherine, I had had no time for myself, especially to put on perfume. But, I still wanted to be quite sure. The rosary had a very strong fragrance.

By coincidence, the man I have been speaking about, Don Julio, arrived in Burgos. He and his wife called me from their hotel and said, "Chonin, come to the hotel; we



Chon prays at the pines with Mari Loli, left, and Conchita whom she befriended during her many visits to Garabandal.

"Oh my goodness! What a fragrance of roses, fresh roses."

would like to speak with you." Catherine was here at the time and both of us went. When we arrived at the hotel, Don Julio greeted me as usual, "How are you doing with those crazy people from Garabandal?" I answered, "Very well, Don Julio, very well." I had asked the Virgin if this man could smell the rosary because that would really be a good proof. Besides, I had great hope for him because he was a good person. Furthermore, I remembered I had given him a medal.

Without anyone noticing, I took out the rosary and smelled it. It had a strong fragrance. I was thrilled and asked myself, "Is it possible that the Virgin is about to perform a miracle with this man?" The fragrance was so overwhelming that I had no choice but to say to him, "Smell this rosary, Don Julio, and tell me what you think it smells like." He took the rosary and said, "What do you want it to smell like, incense? It doesn't smell like incense; it smells like a rosary that has been kept in a young lady's handbag." I responded, "So, it smells to you like perfume" (I knew I hadn't worn perfume since I made a vow).

That it smelled like perfume to him was enough proof that the miracle had been performed. I said to him, "You know me very well, Don Julio, in matters concerning God I am very careful and don't lie. I don't wear perfume and if it smells like roses to you then you've had the same experience that I've had."

Shortly thereafter, there was a pervasive fragrance of fresh roses, that we all perceived. I didn't say a word

but his wife remarked, "Oh Julio, what a fragrance has just passed!" (He had been holding the rosary.) Catherine and I both said it was true and he probably smelled it too but didn't want to admit it. Then he returned the rosary nervously, saying, "All right, here, here! I'm here on business and need you to..." And we went on talking about his business.

When the rosary gives off a fragrance, it remains on the hand but ceases to come from the rosary. And for a long time, the fragrance grows progressively stronger.

I noticed him smelling his hand and asked, "Don Julio, may I have your hand?" And as he moved it away, I said, "Please. Oh, my goodness! What a fragrance of roses, fresh roses!" He tried to ignore it. I asked the others to smell Don Julio's hand.

Then we all walked home together as far as the Santa Maria Bridge. I remember it was a very cold night and when we said good-bye, I took his hand and smelled it and it still had the fragrance. I promised to visit them the next day.

When I arrived, his wife met me, weeping, and said, "Oh, Chonin, what a night we've had. Julio is still in bed because he wasn't able to sleep all night. I've been to the cathedral all this time, praying. When we went to have dinner in the hotel, he went to wash his hands and the fragrance would not go away. We went to bed and the fragrance was still there. He washed and rubbed his hand trying to get rid of it but it would not leave. He was affected and told me—he was a chain smoker



Ascension (Chon) de Luis Sagredo of Burgos (about 75 miles south of Garabandal), was most cooperative during our October, 1985, visit.

Recollections

(continued from page 11)

whose hands were stained by tobacco and always gave off a strong tobacco odor—what has impressed him the most, even more than the smell of fresh roses, is that even though everything he always touched became impregnated with the smell of tobacco, now the smell of tobacco has disappeared and only the fragrance of roses remains.”

This is how they spent the night, with him trying to figure out how his hand no longer smelled of tobacco but of roses. He continued smoking because he was a chain smoker and his hand continued smelling like roses. This went on all night without him closing his eyes.

We met the next morning and both said nothing. Finally, he couldn't keep silent any longer and asked, “Did you bring the rosary?” “Yes,” I responded, and gave it to him. He said, “It doesn't smell today.”

“It doesn't always smell,” I said. “If it did it would be a miracle.”

He held it tight in his hands and said, “It hasn't left a fragrance on me today.”

“That's right. These things happen when you least expect them and when the Virgin chooses.”

“Chonin, why has this thing happened to me? You know that I'm a man without faith, a non-believer.”

“Because you are a good person and because you are one of the Virgin's children who was distant and because the Virgin never forgets her lost children. She looks for them and she has looked for you and found you.”

Then he began to weep.

Died a Christian

They left for Santander where they

were well known, him especially because of his ideas and for being like all those who do not believe—very intelligent and somewhat proud. It seems that one day while he was drinking coffee in a cafe, the subject of Garabandal came up. He chimed in, “I'll tell you, all that happened in Garabandal is true and I have had proof.” One of his friends res-

ponded, “My goodness, Julio, you of all people?” “Yes, I have had proof and it's been an impressive proof for me.” They all marveled at his words. He must have been about 67 years old at the time.

He died four years later and he died very well, receiving with devotion all the sacraments of the Church. □

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