



May 20 was the Feast of Sts. Francisco and Jacinta Marto, pictured here with their cousin Lucia dos Santos. These three children, as you may know, were blessed to see Our Lady while tending their sheep near Fátima, Portugal. At ages 9, 8, 6 few people believed their story of a woman, surrounded by light, appearing to them exhorting them to pray the rosary. They were kidnapped by local authorities and questioned unmercifully by Church officials. Our Lady stayed true to her promise of returning six times. Today, the shrine of Our Lady of the Rosary in Fátima is one of the most visited Catholic shrines in the world.

While teaching I would travel to Europe with students every other Easter break. (I traveled free with five students, yeah!) For what I knew would be my last trip, I scheduled a tour that included Fátima. One of the boys attending, Ryan, was upset because he did not believe in these 'made up stories.' He was told he had to get off the bus with us at Fátima but he was free stay in the plaza outside the shrine. To challenge this 'religious stupidity of apparitions' he decided to come into the shrine to walk around. I found him several hours later sitting in the open air chapel where Our Lady appeared. Ryan was just sitting there crying. He explained that he had never felt the presence of Jesus or Mary so close, close enough to touch.

One of the reasons Our Lady of Fátima is important to me is the depth of courage and devotion these children showed. They did not need the miracle of a falling sun to convince them that this Lady, dressed in the style of Portugal, was truly Our Lady, the Mother Jesus. As Our Lady told them, Jacinta and Francisco died shortly after Our Lady's last appearance. (They died during the influenza pandemic of 1918-1919.) They are the youngest non-martyred children to be canonized. Lucia lived to be 97.

Let us continue to pray the rosary for world peace.