



# Saint Josemaria Escriva

Founder of Opus Dei

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## Fatima

On May 13, 1917, three children, Lucia de Jesus, 10, and her cousins Francisco and Jacinta Marto, 9 and 7, were looking after a little flock of sheep at Cova da Iria, in the parish of Fatima, part of the municipality of Vila Nova de Ourem, today in the Diocese of Leiria-Fatima, Portugal.

At around midday, after praying the Rosary as usual, they were playing at building a little house out of stones on the spot where the basilica stands today. Suddenly, they saw a flash of light. Thinking that it was lightning, they decided to go home, but a little lower down the slope another flash of light shone out on the space of land, and they saw, on a holm-oak tree at the place where the Chapel (or *Capelinha*) of the Apparitions stands today, a “Woman brighter than the sun”, with a white rosary hanging from her hands.

The Lady told the three shepherd children that it was necessary to pray very much. She invited them to come back to Cova da Iria on the thirteenth of every month for the next five months, at the same time. The children did so, and on the thirteenth of June, July, September and October, the Lady appeared to them again at Cova da Iria.

On August 19 the apparition took place at the pasturage at Valinhos, close to Aljustrel, the hamlet where the children lived. This was because on August 13 the children had been temporarily abducted by the Administrator of Vila Nova de Ourem.

At her last apparition, on October 13, before 70,000 people, the Lady told them that she was the “Lady of the Rosary” and that they should have a chapel built there in her honour. After the apparition, everyone present saw the miracle that she had promised to the children in July and September. The sun, looking like a silver disc, could be looked at directly without difficulty. Then it started to spin like a catherine-wheel, and finally plunged down towards the earth.

From then on the three children followed our Lady’s instructions intently. Jacinta and Francisco fell ill, and died shortly afterwards, offering up all their sufferings for

the conversion of sinners and to console Jesus. Lucia later entered a convent of Dorothean sisters, and afterwards entered the Carmelite order and lived at Coimbra. She died, with a reputation for holiness, on February 13, 2005.

Jacinta and Francisco were beatified by Pope John Paul II at Fatima on May 13, 2000.

### **Saint Josemaria at Fatima, May 1967**

St Josemaria first went to Fatima on February 6, 1945. He said that it had been the Blessed Virgin who opened the gates of Portugal to him.(1) This was because he went at the request of Sor Lucia, then living in Tui, Spain. He traveled to Portugal in February and visited Fatima although it had not been in his plan to do so. He went back to Fatima on several occasions afterwards, impelled by his great love for our Lady.

May 9, 1967 was his eighth visit. That year, on May 13, the fiftieth anniversary celebration of the apparitions was being presided over by Pope Paul VI. The Church was going through a difficult period, and St Josemaria was praying unceasingly for a solution to the problems, with special recourse to our Lady's intercession. He set off from Rome on a journey of penance and prayer. He arrived at the shrine of Our Lady of Lourdes on April 22. There he invoked the help and protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary. On his way to Fatima he traveled through Spain and met people of Opus Dei, Co-operators, and many other people in family gatherings in various cities.

He arrived in Lisbon on May 8. The next day, early in the morning, he went on to Coimbra, where he visited Sor Lucia, now living in the Carmelite convent there. He went to Fatima that same day. He was accompanied by Don Alvaro del Portillo (who was to succeed him at the head of Opus Dei) and Don Javier Echevarría (the present Prelate of Opus Dei), as well as a small group of other priests and laymen.(2) It was sometimes difficult for the car to move as the road was thronged with pilgrims walking to Fatima – this was before there was a motorway. Rosary in hand, under a steady drizzle of rain, all of those people were going in a spirit of true penance and prayer, as our Lady had asked fifty years before. St Josemaria was moved by their faith, and said: "God bless you for the love you have for his Mother." As soon as he reached Fatima he went straight to the *Capelinha* and knelt down at the feet of the statue of our Lady there. Recollected in prayer, impervious to distractions, with the loving conversation of a son with his mother evident in his whole attitude, he prayed for the intentions of the Church. After some minutes he went to the basilica to pay a visit to the Blessed Sacrament. Then he wrote some postcards – one to the Pope, and others to his children in

Opus Dei in different parts of the world.

This was how he prepared for the arrival of the Pope – the “sweet Christ on earth”, as he loved to call the Holy Father in the words of St Catherine of Siena. He left Portugal on May 12 so that his children and friends would unite around Pope Paul VI in the celebrations of the fiftieth anniversary of the Fatima apparitions. In the homily of the Holy Mass celebrated in Fatima, Pope Paul said: “Our first intention is the Church: One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic. (...) The Council awakened many new energies in the heart of the Church; it opened up more perspectives in her teaching, and called all her children to clearer awareness, closer cooperation, and more active apostolate. It is our deep desire that these great benefits and this profound renewal should be preserved and developed. What damage would be done if an arbitrary interpretation, not authorized by the Magisterium of the Church, diverted that awakening to concerns divorced from her traditional and constitutional form, and replaced the theology of the great teachers of the truth with private, passing ideologies, that aimed to remove from the norm of faith everything that certain present-day mentalities, often devoid of the true light of reason, cannot understand or do not accept.”(3)

St Josemaria returned to Fatima for the last time in 1972 to beg for our Lady’s intercession.

### Notes

(1) Hugo de Azevedo, *Uma luz no mundo*, Lisbon: Prumo, 1988.

(2) Manuel Martinez, *Josemaría Escrivá, Fundador do Opus Dei: peregrino de Fátima*, Lisbon: Diel, 2002.

(3) Pope Paul VI, Homily at Fatima, May 13, 1967.