



VATICAN RADIO QUASHES RUMORS ABOUT 'SECRET'

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VATICAN CITY (NC)--Quashing rumors to the contrary, Vatican Radio denied that Sister Lucia, the only surviving seer of the Fatima apparitions, confided the so-called "secret message" to Pope Paul VI during their brief encounter at the shrine in Portugal.

It noted, however, that the Carmelite nun had expressed a desire "to say something to the Pope alone." The Pontiff told her that it was "not the moment," and said that she should rather convey any message to him through her own bishop.

The French-language broadcast (May 16) was in the form of an interview with Father Paolo Almeida, S.J., the head of Vatican Radio's Brazilian section and a temporary official of the Vatican Secretariat of State, who acted as the Pope's interpreter when he went to Fatima (May 13) to mark the 50th anniversary of the apparitions there.

"I was present at all conversations of the Holy Father," he said "except the one he had with Premier Antonio de Oliveira Salazar of Portugal when they were alone and spoke in French. Sister Lucia met the Pope only at the platform next to the papal throne and near the altar where he celebrated Mass. The Pope was sitting and Sister Lucia knelt before him."

The interviewer asked: "Can you tell us all the Pope said?"

Father Almeida answered: "Certainly. There was no secret."

Question: "What about talk of a letter said to have been given the Pope by Sister Lucia?"

Answer: "No, there was no letter. This is what happened: Sister Lucia handed the Pope a kind of leather container, a flat square box. As she could not open it she took a penknife out of her pocket and tried that way, but it was no use since she was too excited. I opened it myself and Sister Lucia presented it opened to the Pope, who was smiling all the time....In the container was a pall--that is to say, a square piece of linen which is placed over the chalice during Mass to protect the contents. Sister Lucia had embroidered it. She also carried a parchment which was what we call a 'spiritual treasure' listing so many Communions, rosaries and sacrifices offered for the Supreme Pontiff's intentions. It is a customary gift in Religious houses where there can be only spiritual 'treasures.'"

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