

23 May

SERVILIANO RIAÑO HERRERO

- CHASTITY-

Birth : 22nd April 1916 (Prioro, León)
Baptism : 23rd April 1916 (Prioro, León)
First vows : 15 August 1933 (Las Arenas, Vizcaya)
Perpetual vows : ---
Ordination : ---
Death : 7 November 1936
Place of burial : Soto de Aldovea (Torrejón de Ardoz)
and, from 1940, in Paracuellos del Jarama.

Biblical texts

Is 54:4b-5.10

Ct 8:6

Ps 45 (44), 2-3. 11-12

Ps 73 (72):23-26

Ps 126 (125)

Ps 139 (138), 12-17

1Co 7, 32. 34

Mt 5, 8

Jn 19:33-34

Meditation

The particularity of Serviliano RIAÑO HERRERO's martyrdom refers not only to the fact that we have several accounts from witnesses who saw him leave prison, but also to two other significant facts: -he was the only corpse identified and -we know that he suffered terrible tortures before his death.

Both in his home town and during his education he was always characterised by honourable habits and exquisite relationships with friends and acquaintances. The Lord

crowned his desire to consecrate not only his soul, but also his heart and even his whole body to Him with the martyrdom of that which he always wished to preserve virginal for God: we know that shortly before he was killed, he was brutally castrated by his executioners.

With the tortures and humiliations against the virtuous chastity of this young seminarian and religious of 20 years of age, perhaps the devil wanted to take revenge for all the times that Serviliano had defeated him during his life in moments of temptation, because some 20 years after his death, his formator, Fr. Mariano Martín used to repeat to the sister of Blessed Serviliano: "Your brother Serviliano is not only a martyr. He was already an angel of purity".

Serviliano RIAÑO HERRERO was from a small village in the province and diocese of León, in a mountainous area of northern Spain, with a population of about a thousand inhabitants. His parents were simple farmers and stockbreeders whom Serviliano helped with the work in the fields along with his brothers, keeping the lambs and sometimes even the cows from a very young age. Serviliano was the sixth of seven siblings: three sisters and three brothers.

Witnesses say that it was a deeply Christian family, where the rosary was prayed daily in church or at home. The family custom was that the youngest child led the rosary, so Serviliano was often called upon to do so.

His sister describes him as a playful, cheerful and alert child. A neighbour in the village says that he was a very cheerful person.

At the age of 11, in September 1927, his father allowed him to enter the Juniorate (Minor Seminary) of the Oblates, because, he told his family, what he really wanted was to serve Jesus Christ and to be a missionary, a desire he had had since he was a child.

He was a sociable and jovial young man, brilliant in his studies, fond of history and writing poetry. The formators had written that he was "a promise for the province". He had finished his second year of philosophy.

After his novitiate and a year in the scholasticate, Serviliano renewed his vows on August 15, 1934 and again a year later. During the persecution of 1936, he was unable to renew his vows publicly because he was in hiding, like the whole community of the Oblate scholasticate, scattered in various places. We have no doubt that he renewed his vows in his heart.

Indeed, on 22 July 1936, he had been arrested with all his brothers in the community of Pozuelo. The convent was converted into a prison. Serviliano was taken from there with his fellow prisoners to the General Directorate of Security in the centre of Madrid. Released on 25 July, he had to begin a life in hiding with some of his companions, until he was arrested and imprisoned again on 15 October.

In the early morning of 7 November 1936, he hears his name among those called to be "released". Aware that this really meant that he was being taken to be killed and ready to accept the sacrifice of the bloody oblation to which God was calling him, when he was being led through the corridors of the prison, he had the courage to run to one of the cells

where he knew there was an Oblate priest. He asked for and received absolution through the peephole of the cell. Now with his heart purified by the Lord through sacramental grace, he climbs up with a determined spirit onto the bus that will take him to the place where he was martyred. He was 20 years old.

Knowing that the danger of death was imminent, a few days before his execution he had asked another of the Oblate scholastics, a fellow prisoner: "If you get out of here alive, go to my father and mother and tell them not to worry about me, that I die happy...".

And contentedly he died bearing witness that he loved Christ with his mind, his heart and his body. When he reached the place of martyrdom, they held him by the arm with another prisoner, tied his hands behind his back, cut off his parts [his genitals], shot him through the skull and he fell into the ditch with everyone else.

When his father was able to recognise his corpse, he wept as he recounted these things, but at the same time he proudly expressed his great conviction that his son was a martyr for Christ.

Prayer

Blessed Serviliano RIAÑO HERRERO,
you responded very quickly to the call of God
to consecrate yourself to serve Jesus Christ and the missions.
Your chaste and loving heart
radiated joy and enthusiasm
that were contagious to all who knew you.
Your pure love was like crystal clear water
that gives life all around it
and therefore, you were called an angel of purity.
Your burning heart of pure love for God
moved you to say that you were content to die.
And so you remained faithful to the end
in the consecration of your soul, mind and even your body to your beloved Jesus,
in the midst of mockery and torture for your chastity.
Intercede together with your companions in martyrdom

that many young people may also feel today
the desire to consecrate themselves totally to God,
serving him unconditionally as Oblates,
and that they may give to the world the witness
of joy in chastity
lived out of love for the Lord.

Together with you and your fellow martyrs
we ask this grace from God
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen.