

25 May

Brother Eleuterio PRADO VILLARROEL

- Brotherhood -

Birth : 20 February 1915
Baptism : 21 February 1915
First vows : 25 April 1935
Perpetual vows : ---
Death : 28 November 1936
Place of burial : Paracuellos del Jarama.

Biblical texts

Ps 133 (132)
1 Peter 4:13-16
Acts 4:32-33
Acts 5:40-42
Rom 12:4-5
Mt 5:11-12
Mt 18:19-20
Mk 4:13-14
Jn 13:14-15
Jn 13:34-35

Meditation

"If we see each other no more, farewell, brothers!" These were probably the words of farewell among the Oblate martyrs of Spain when, in prison, they were being taken away to be killed. They all hoped to meet again in eternal life, to form the Oblate community in heaven, as our Founder, St. Eugene, used to say. But the Oblate Martyrs of Spain also have the particularity of having lived their martyrdom together as a community. Thus, they are not only martyrs individually, but we can truly speak of a "martyred community", witnesses to the communion and fraternal charity that the Founder had left them as a spiritual testament.

Many concrete gestures of charity among the Oblate Martyrs confirm what the OMI Constitutions and Rules tell us: "The call and the presence of the Lord in the midst of the Oblates today unite them in charity and obedience, making them relive the unity of the Apostles with him, and the common mission of his Spirit" (C. 3), and "as our communion of spirit and heart grows, we bear witness before people that Jesus lives in our midst and holds us together to send us forth to proclaim his Kingdom" (OMI RR, C. 37).

Concerning the behaviour of the Oblate Martyrs in prison with regard to community spirit, we have the testimony of the niece of Blessed Brother Eleuterio who narrates what a fellow prisoner told her: "As for the behaviour of my uncle Eleuterio and the other Oblates, I can say that it was one of mutual help, where the virtue of charity shone out in a singular way, and where everyone encouraged one another.

There is no doubt that in our Congregation it is the Oblate Brothers who often best embody the ideal of fraternity to which we are all called. They receive the special gift of being the living icon of our vocation to charity and fraternal closeness. At the Scholasticate of Pozuelo there were 3 Oblate Brothers: Ángel Bocos (53 years old), Marcelino Sánchez (25 years old) and the youngest was Brother Eleuterio Prado (21 years old). Today all three are Blessed. During their beatification process, the witnesses said of them that they were co-operators in the formation of future priests by their example, their interest, their enthusiasm and their prayer, and that they gave the students a cheerful and simple example in their daily work.

In the Scholasticate of Pozuelo, Brother Eleuterio, was in charge of the maintenance of the house, a cabinet maker, for which he had a special skill. He distinguished himself for his cheerfulness and optimism, even when he was in prison. He was 21 years old when he was killed and still had only temporary vows. One of the Oblates who survived the persecution tells us of the moment when, while he was already under arrest, Brother Eleuterio was brought to the police station: "It was about eight o'clock when I saw a familiar face enter the cell door: it was Brother Eleuterio. He was smiling, like the young man he was, and he had not guessed the tragedy that had begun" and behind Blessed Brother Eleuterio, the other Oblates who had also been arrested entered the cell.

What was the reason for Blessed Brother Eleutherio's smile when he entered the cell and found almost the entire Oblate scholasticate gathered there? Was it only his youth that made him not realize the gravity of the moment or was there something else? No doubt the young age of almost all of them filled them with the energy of youth, but in this smile of Blessed Brother Eleuterio one can see the fraternal joy of being in community, even in the midst of the tragedy of prison and, perhaps, death.

Brother Eleuterio's smile when he met his brothers in community is the embodiment of the Oblate spirit with which they lived their communal martyr's journey. Before being imprisoned, another of the martyrs had told his sister: "We are in danger and we are afraid of being separated; together we encourage one another. But if we have to die, I am ready, certain that God will give us the strength we need to be faithful. More than persecution and death, the Oblates feared being separated, isolated from their community. That is why Brother Eleuterio is happy to be able to meet his Oblate community again and experience persecution, prison and perhaps death with them.

In fact, that smile never left his face throughout his time in prison. During the beatification process, one of the witnesses said that, in prison, Brother Eleuterio was always smiling, every day. No, Blessed Brother Eleuterio's joy was not the fruit of his youthful unconsciousness, but of something much deeper. Brother Eleuterio reminds us that even in the most difficult situations we can be "always smiling" if God gives us the grace to accept his Will with serenity and joy, especially by living our vocation in community, encouraging one another.

On the 27th of November, Blessed Brother Eleuterio met with some Augustinian religious who came from his own town and commented on the rumours that a great slaughter of religious was being prepared for that night and that it would be very easy for one of them to be killed. When they said goodbye, each one having to go to his cell, they said to each other: "If we don't see each other again, see you in heaven!" These were, no doubt, the words he would also say to his Oblate community when he wished them good night. The next day, November 28, 1936, no one found Brother Eleuterio in prison. He had been killed with his beloved Oblate brothers, saying with his brothers, and surely with a smile on his face: "Long live Christ the King!"

Prayer

Blessed Brother Eleuterio PRADO VILLARROEL,

The Lord granted you the joy of spirit

That radiated in your smile

Announcing the beatific vision of divine glory

Which we are all called to enjoy.

We ask you, together with your companions in martyrdom,

intercede so that we too may discover

the presence of the Lord in the midst of the community,

and that the beauty of our common life

attract new and numerous Oblate vocations

so that, together in community,

we may bear witness to Christ to the world.

Together with you and your martyred companions,

we ask this grace from God

through Jesus Christ our Lord

who lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen.