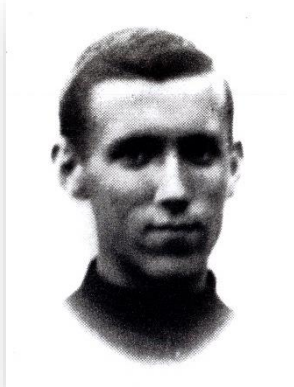


26 May

Gregorio ESCOBAR GARCÍA

- PRIESTHOOD-



Birth : 9 May 1912 (Estella, Navarra)
Baptism : 10 May 1912 (Estella, Navarre)
First vows : 15 August 1930 (Las Arenas, Vizcaya)
Perpetual vows : 26 November 1935 (Pozuelo de Alarcón)
Ordination : 6 June 1936 (Madrid).
Death : 28 November 1936
Buried in : Paracuellos del Jarama

Biblical texts

Sal 116 (114-115), 10-17

Rom 12, 1-10

Hb 7,

Hb 7, 17,26-27

Hb 9, 11a-14 11

Mc 10, 37b-39

Meditation

Faced with the situation of religious persecution that was taking place in Spain, nine months before his martyrdom, one of the martyrs, Gregorio ESCOBAR GARCÍA wrote a

letter in which he let slip a very important confidence, which will become one of the emblematic texts of the Oblate martyrs of Pozuelo: "I have always been deeply moved by the stories of martyrdom that have always existed in the Church, and always when I read them, a secret desire assails me to suffer the same fate as they have. That would be the best priesthood to which all Christians could aspire, to offer to God our own body and blood as a holocaust for the faith. What a joy it would be to die a martyr's death!"

In this brief text, Gregorio links three concepts: priesthood, oblation and martyrdom. Similar intuitions, much more developed, are found in other individual Oblates. The desire for martyrdom, particularly the "martyrdom of charity", also appears in St. Eugene, as well as in other Oblates. More and more we understand that oblation and martyrdom, as sides of the same coin, are part of the Oblate heritage.

It was not the first time that Gregory had spoken of martyrdom. The subject often came up in conversations, for he would have liked to die a martyr's death in the missions: His conversations with his relatives were about going to the missions to seek martyrdom, for God and for souls. He said: "I would like to be left in Spain while my father lives, but above all martyrdom; I will not deny the faith for anyone in this world".

However, his martyrdom came not in the mission countries, where he dreamed of going, but in his own country; Gregorio was martyred for his priesthood, as one of the Oblates who was his companion in prison wrote to his family to tell them what had become of Gregorio: "I can give you nothing but sad news for your father's heart. [Your son Gregorio, on November 28, 36, was taken from prison and [...] was cowardly assassinated by the Red-Militiamen on the outskirts of Madrid. [The motive for his death, at least in Gregorio's case, was hatred of the Church and its ministers. I have no doubt that his son was killed by the Reds because he was a priest and a religious, and this is a glory for him and I am sure that, from heaven, he is watching over those of us who here on earth were his friends in sorrows and joys".

Gregorio was 24 years old and the last time he had seen his family was on the day of his ordination to the priesthood, a few months before he died. Gregorio had dreamed of the priesthood since he was a child. It is said that when his grandfather asked him "What would you like to be when you grow up?", he always gave the same answer: "Bishop", which made everyone laugh. At that time, whenever a poor person came to ask for help at Gregorio's house, he would always cheerfully go ahead and bring him the alms. One day, when Gregorio was five years old, a poor old man knocked at the door; as he handed him the alms, the old man said to him: "You will be a saint". When Gregorio heard this, he ran to tell his grandfather, jumping with joy. It seems that God had given that poor man the gift of prophecy at that moment. At the age of 8 he already knew how to help at Mass as an acolyte in his church and never missed a single day of Mass, despite the abundant snow and rain during the winter in his village, and he instilled devotion by the care with which he knelt and the respect with which he helped at the Holy Sacrifice. At the age of 11 he was one of the sacristy attendants and the women of the village told him that he was going to become a "priest".

Gregorio advanced so enthusiastically towards the priesthood that God wanted to reward him with a special gift. The superiors decided to bring forward Gregorio's ordination to

the priesthood by a few months during the summer of 1936, perhaps because of the many pastoral commitments of the Oblates in Pozuelo, in the midst of the context of religious persecution. This meant that Gregorio was able to die as a priest, as he had always dreamed: priest, Oblate, martyr.

As soon as he was ordained a priest, he experienced a prelude to what was to become his death. In fact, once the ordination ceremony was over, on his way home with his family, the car in which they were travelling had to stop. Seeing him dressed in his cassock, with the Oblate cross, one of the anti-religious of Madrid approached the car and shouted through the window: "They would burn so well with a bottle of gasoline".

As soon as he was ordained a priest, Gregorio experienced the contempt of the people, precisely because he was a priest. Providence wanted him to understand from the beginning that to be a priest was to identify oneself with Christ, even with the despised, insulted and crucified Christ. And that same afternoon and in the following days, his family was able to witness the insults that the people who passed by on the street in front of the Scholasticate house in Pozuelo addressed to the Oblates every day. The last time that Gregorio was able to see his family was precisely on the occasion of his ordination to the priesthood.

Gregorio was prepared by God from within, in the interior life, in prayer, in the depths of his heart. Sometimes God gives us intuitions, movements, premonitions. At first we do not understand them well, they are somewhat obscure; later, sometimes a long time later, at the right moment, we understand them, they become luminous and clear. Such was the case with Gregorio. In his heart he had these three passions: priesthood, foreign missions and martyrdom. He thought they were united as was reasonable for a missionary Oblate.

Barely a month and a half after his ordination to the priesthood, he began his ordeal with the rest of the Oblate community. He did not even have time to celebrate his first Mass in his home town, as was his and his family's dream. God arranged that the first solemn Mass he was to celebrate should be the sacrifice of his own life, shedding his blood along with that of Christ, in the act of oblation shared with his Oblate brothers on November 28, 1936.

He was hardly able to exercise his priestly ministry, he could not go on his longed-for missions; and yet his example inspires and evangelises us, like a tender seed that bears abundant fruit when it dies on earth.

Prayer

Blessed Gregorio ESCOBAR GARCÍA,
you knew how to unite your ministerial priesthood
to the ideal of the Mission Ad Gentes and to martyrdom
in the passionate living of your Oblate vocation.
God granted you the gift of making the sacrifice of your own life,

uniting your own blood to the chalice of Christ.
We ask you, together with your companions in martyrdom,
to intercede that new young people may discover
the beauty of offering themselves
to be configured to Christ the priest
in the footsteps of the Apostles
in our Oblate Family.

United with you and your martyr companions,
we ask this grace from God,
through Jesus Christ our Lord
who lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen.