

28 May

Vicente BLANCO GUADILLA

- Poverty -

Birth	: 5th April 1882 (Frómista, Palencia)
Baptism	: 8th April 1882 (Frómista, Palencia)
First vows	: 15 August 1901 (Notre Dame de l'Osier, France)
Perpetual vows	: 8 December 1902 (Rome, Italy)
Ordination	: 14 April 1906 (Rome, Italy)
Death	: 28 November 1936
Buried in	: Paracuellos del Jarama

Biblical texts

Ps 73 (72), 23-26

1 Cor 13, 1-3

2 Cor 12, 7b-10

Fil 3, 7-8

Mt 5, 1-3

Mt 8, 19-20

Mt 19, 16-23

Lc 4, 17-19

Meditation

Father Vincent was the eldest of the whole group of Oblate martyrs of Spain. He was 54 years old when he died.

Having been for many years Superior of the Minor Seminary, then Master of Novices and finally Superior of the Scholasticate at Pozuelo, several of the martyrs had had him as their formator. One who knew him said of him:

"Eight generations of novices passed through his school of religious formation. I dare to think that there is not one who did not profess veneration, respect and esteem for him, for he was not an ordinary religious, but a man of great virtue, especially of great

prudence, solid piety, zealous and devoted to the interests of the Congregation, a lover of the Church, austere and, at the same time, a man of great heart; he was also profoundly humble, rigid with himself, but understanding and indulgent with others". "He was distinguished by his religious observance, which was an encouragement to the whole community" and he was called "the Holy Father BLANCO".

In the story of the martyrdom of the Blesseds of Spain, Blessed Vicente BLANCO GUADILLA is known for being the protagonist of a tragic moment. After the Scholasticate of Pozueño was assaulted in the morning of 23 July 1936, the formators decided not to celebrate the Eucharist in the presence of those armed and unscrupulous men, for fear of profanation or any barbarity. Instead, they consumed all the hosts in the tabernacle, also to avoid the risk of profanation. While distributing communion, everyone sees that Father Vicente is very moved. When he had finished and returned to the sacristy, he began to cry and exclaimed: "What will become of this house now that we do not have the Lord with us!"

How to interpret this fact: did he collapse under stress and responsibility? Is it a weakness at a time when the superior should have shown strength? Is it a sign of his sensitive character? Is it the fruit of his great faith and devotion to the Eucharist? Without knowing the person, it is difficult to answer. We can understand this moment in Blessed Vincent's martyrdom also from his own personal experience. God had been moulding in Blessed Vincent a sensitive and tender heart so that he would bring to the group of Oblate Martyrs inspiration by his tenderness, his closeness and his great heart, but above all, by his abandonment to Providence in the midst of hardship, poverty, difficulties and also the danger of death.

In fact, God had been preparing him for years to count on nothing but the presence of God. For 20 years, he had had to feed the mouths of dozens of young boys every day, with almost no financial means. Each month the bills arrived and the bread bill alone was equivalent to the entire monthly salary of a worker, and he had no financial means. The presence of the Oblates in Spain was still very precarious and they did not have sufficient financial support to meet their needs. It is said that when a young man had to leave the seminary because he was seriously ill, they saw Father Vicente weeping.

In addition to all this, there were the problems of building the formation house little by little while they were already giving classes there, because they had nowhere else to go, and so on, year after year. Always without means, always without space, always with building work, with problems, with bills, with worries... First in the minor seminary, then in the novitiate, and also in the scholasticate. Always the same human poverty.

And there were still the most serious problems, the lack of good formators, with an ever-scarce and ever-changing staff in these houses of formation. The best formators did not always arrive, and when there was a good formation team, often within a few months one of the formators had to leave for another mission. In fact, there were very few Oblates in Spain and, besides the pastoral work in Spain, they were in charge of missions in Texas and Uruguay... So, poor Father Vicente had to live constantly in poverty embraced for love of the Lord.

He himself, sensitive and impressionable, not only cries, but often has trouble sleeping and suffers from nightmares for months on end. He had to live through periods of a truly purifying dark night, which he overcame with his trust in God and the Virgin Mary.

Blessed Vicente had surely discovered that his only richness and his only strength was the presence of Christ in the Eucharist who accompanied him at every moment. In front of the Tabernacle, Blessed Vicente would find rest in his heart in the midst of difficulty. For this reason, now when they see that the community is left without the physical presence of Christ, Blessed Vicente sees that his poverty has become absolute, because he sees that they want to take away the only thing that really had value in his life: Christ.

He bore the cross with enormous trust in God and with a deep spirituality. His character was his way of purifying himself, of preparing for his martyrdom. What some might see as weakness, he knew how to transform into strength. If Fr. Vicente earned the nickname of the "holy Father Blanco", by which everyone called him, it was not by chance. He knew how to make faith his point of strength, his support. What his temperament did not give him, his deep faith gave him.

Fr Vicente was not the daring man like Blessed Father Francisco Esteban, who went to visit the Oblate scholastics and other religious with determination, knowing that it was enough to be a priest or a religious to be killed in the street. Nor was Blessed Vicente the born leader who spoke in the name of all the executioners in the graves of Paracuellos to say goodbye and give absolution. However, during the months of persecution he was an example of deep and constant prayer, in particular the recitation of the rosary. In fact, the next day they were all expelled from the scholasticate and he took refuge in several private homes of known families. Several witnesses affirm that, during the months in hiding, "his way of praying was impressive" and that "he always had the Rosary in his hand".

The group also needed such a man. It was not only Father Esteban's human strength that was needed, but also the deep faith of the "holy Father Blanco" that moved him to embrace poverty, trusting in Providence. If Father Esteban was the "father" who gave security, Father Vicente was, in a certain way, the "mother", impregnated by that spirituality of Marian tenderness which always characterised him. Without him, the martyrs of Pozuelo could be seen as "superheroes", as if martyrdom were only the fruit of their human strength and not a gift of God. In Father Vicente we see those human limitations, the frailties that we all have, are not an impediment to our vocational journey towards holiness. As Blessed Vicente himself wrote, in the midst of his problems and hardships: "Fiat voluntas Dei". May it be for the greater glory of God, for the good of my soul and of the whole house of formation".

Prayer

Blessed Vicente BLANCO,
in you the strength of Christ
was manifested in your weakness.

The Lord moulded your sensitive heart
so that it would have Christ as its only strength.

You are an example that God
does not always choose the most able,
but always enables those whom he chooses,
with Christ as their only richness.

We ask you to intercede with your companions in martyrdom,
so that new young people may come
to consider everything in this life a waste,
so that they may have Christ and Christ alone
in our Oblate religious family.

Together 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.