

NOVENA FOR VOCATIONS

"Let us pray for vocations with our saints"

MAY 21 - 29, 2023

Sisters and Brothers

of the same family, of the same charism, and of the same mission of God:

As every year, we pray for Oblate vocations in the novena from the feast of St. Eugene de Mazenod on May 21st to the feast of Blessed Joseph Gerard on May 29th.

For this year, we take the theme "Let us pray for vocations with our saints". The reflections for each day were prepared by the General House community. Many thanks to Father Diego Saez, our General Postulator, who generously prepared the texts of the Spanish Martyrs and Father Agustinus Qesa who prepared the text of Bl. Joseph Gerard. Thanks also to our young Oblates of the International Scholasticate in Rome who shared their personal views on our Dear Founder.

As we have done in the past, let us pray fervently for our vocations. "For nothing is impossible for God..." (Luke 1:37) Luke 1,37), as the angel Gabriel says to Mary, our spiritual mother. Our saints intercede for us with God; their earthly lives inspire us and attract new vocations to follow Christ, our Master, who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

21 May

Feast of St. Eugene de Mazenod



Biblical texts

Acts 4: 31-35

Mat 28: 19-20

Luke 4: 14-22a

Who is St. Eugene de Mazenod for you?

Eugene de Mazenod for me is someone who took time to reflect on his relationship with God, therefore acknowledging his weakness before God. He has a heart for the poor and consequently he respected and maintained the dignity of the poor. He therefore sacrificed his time, pleasure and richness of the world in order to respond fully to the call of God. He a leader too in the sense that he managed to bring together men who had same interest as him to form an institute. He is a determined man too who had given it all for the approbation of the congregation.

(NGHINYENGWASHA David Udeinge, Province of Namibia)

St Eugene de Mazenod is the apostle of charity.

St. Eugene de Mazenod is an example of the high priesthood of Christ.

St. Eugene de Mazenod is an example of humanity and Christian faith.

St. Eugene de Mazenod is a community builder.

St. Eugene de Mazenod is the personification of the Oblate charism which animates and revitalizes the Gospel message in the world.

(Rafael Eduardo Hernández Pardo, Colombia Mission)

For me, Saint Eugene de Mazenod is a missionary of Christ in the difficult places of the world. He is a friend and servant of the prisoners, the sick and the neglected. He is a successor of the apostles of Christ. He is always a man of the pope's obedience during the controversy with of the State of France after the French revolution. He is a model of Christ because he was rich and became poor and founder of missionaries for the poor.

(Emil Selvakumar ROCHE MARIYATHAS, Province of France)

St. Eugene inspires me because he was spiritually awake, listening to the call of the Holy Spirit; he saw the needs of God's people around him, and put his life at their service - that is oblation, in imitation of Christ who offered Himself; God has made Eugene's 'yes' fruitful for many, many people and generations; He was someone who brought people together in faith - Oblates, youth, the poor and abandoned, and others; As an Oblate, he is like a 'spiritual father' for me, whose example we must follow in our present time.

(Mateusz Garstecki, Province of the USA)

St. Eugene de Mazenod for me is
Lover of the poor and most abandoned
Lover of the Church
Lover of Evangelization and Mission
Lover of Jesus Christ and Mary Immaculate
Lover of Youth

(Babar Shahzad, Delegation of Pakistan)

For me, St. Eugene de Mazenod is a great visionary leader. I believe that if one has the right vision in life, he would be a successful personality amidst the challenges of life. This quality of our founder inspires me not to lose sight of the commitment I make. I believe that the expansion of our congregation whole throughout the world is due to his foresighted vision to make our congregation missionary and periphery-seekers. Hence, St. Eugene's courageous visions become my inspirational identity.

(N. Ajanthan, Jaffna Province, Sri Lanka)

St. Eugene de Mazenod, apart from being our founder and father, is for me a model and a perfect example to show how one should love the Holy mother, the Church and the poor.

The first sentence in the preface of the constitutions and rules is about the deplorable situation of the spouse of Christ, the church. It demonstrates that he felt the pain of the mother thus, wanted to remedy the situation. The two great basilicas that he has built, and the missionaries who are being sent to the nations are some examples until now to show that he is a passionate lover and a guardian of the Church. Because of his unconditional love for the church, he dedicated his life for the poor and the most abandoned who are also the children of the Holy mother the church.

(SAHAYATHASAN Vimalraj, Jaffna Province, Sri Lanka)

For me Saint Eugene is a father. Indeed, I find in him a great value which is that of the family. In his writings I feel the immense love he had for his confreres. He loved them as if he had fathered them himself.

(Bruno Antoine DIENE, Delegation of Senegal)

He is my father in teaching me to be closer to God's will.

He is my friend accompanying me to do my conversion.

He is my brother who shares his adventures.

(HENRIKUS Prasajo, Province of Indonesia)

Saint Eugene, the faithful witness to the love and mercy of the Crucified One.

St. Eugene, a restless, daring and persevering saint who by his life and words proclaims the Kingdom of Heaven.

St. Eugene, a man with a big heart, in whom the poor and the abandoned were paramount.

St. Eugene, a man of mission, of community and of evangelical fire who gave himself to the last consequences.

Saint Eugene, a son in love with Mary Immaculate, before whom he contemplates the tender and loving face of the best of mothers.

(Luis Enrique Rodríguez Gutiérrez, Province of Mexico)

As an Oblate scholastic of Mary Immaculate, our holy Founder, Eugene de Mazenod, is for me first and foremost a father, from whom every child wants to learn and integrate the virtues he has left us as an inheritance. And like our mother the Blessed Virgin Mary, he is a daily companion, through his great love for us, his intercession and his fatherly solicitude for all his children.

(Martial YEGA MOUDOUE, Cameron Province)

St. Eugene de Mazenod is very important for me. He is the founder of our family and example for me as an Oblate. His love for Christ and holy Church is great inspiration and if I will be oblate for all my life, I want to follow his tendency to follow Jesus and serve the poor people. I like his power of the will to be saint, as the person and as the congregation.

(Zbieranski Slawomir, Province of Poland)

St. Eugene is the founder of the congregation of which I am a part. For me personally, St. Eugene is a true friend of God, he is an example for me of how to live. I see the same problems in the world, in the Church that he saw and I want to do something to improve the situation, just as St. Eugene would do. So he walked the way of God and showed me the way in which I too am able to walk.

(Sviatoslav CHERNETSKY, Delegation of Ukraine)

Saint Eugene is a spiritual father for all Oblates in growing in our Oblate charism. He is the font of this gift of the Charism which we have all received and participate in thanks to the work of the Holy Spirit in us. He is for me also a restorer of the Church, seeing the needs that were at hand and getting to work not remaining on the level of theory. He is also for me a visionary that was able to see into the future what the needs for the evangelization. Lastly, he is a reformer for me, hearing the call to return to the missionary model of the Church and always being close to those who were in need. All in all, he is the example for me of growing in holiness and love of the Lord for the service of my brothers.

(MALIK Jonas, Province of Assumption, Canada)

St. Eugene de Mazenod is a father for me who has raised a beautiful 'Oblate Family' and made me a part of it by his powerful intercessions and accompaniment. In addition, he is a powerful intercessor whose intercessions have helped me remain faithful in my vocation. Moreover, he is and should be recognized as the patron saint of broken families since he had experienced the brokenness of his own family. He was a visionary and foresighted man who could see the future of the growing Oblate family. Lastly, he was and remains a friend of the poor (physical and spiritual) and never stops accompanying them in and through the Oblates today.

(Noman Arif, Delegation of Pakistan)

St. Eugene de Mazenod is a saint who represented the very essence of compassion especially for the poor. He allowed himself to be pierced by the love of Christ in order to love unconditionally everyone, especially those in selflessness. He was a committed man whose work continues to inspire new generations especially the oblate family.

(Ikhyohia Bonaventure, Mission of Nigeria)

Before being officially known as a Saint by the universal Church, Eugene de Mazenod was someone who lived like the rest of us; experiencing joy, sadness, anguish, disappointment, and even exile. From his childhood he showed an unconditional love for the Church, which was then expressed in the total gift of his life to serve his sisters and brothers, the poor of the Church. He was a model of a fervent, pious, courageous and daring Christian who cared for his contemporaries but also for those who would come after him. When it came to the affairs of the Church, St. Eugene was never afraid to dare, even at the risk of his life. As a citizen of heaven, personally, he has left me an example of spirituality, towards which I want to walk and in fraternal charity I am certain that I can become a saint according to God's wish and his.

(Pierre Belleau JULES, Province of Haiti)

Those are the answers of the scholastics of the International Scholasticate in Rome, and you, who is Saint Eugene de Mazenod for you?

Prayer to Saint Eugene de Mazenod

Saint Eugene, we come to pray to you to be nourished by your passion for Jesus Christ and your unconditional love for the Church.

Saint Eugene, your spiritual experience before Christ on the Cross made you discover the loving gaze of God upon you. Guide us to welcome this gaze which reveals our true face and that of God.

Saint Eugene, like us, you have known the trials of life and found your strength in God to go forward. May we redouble our trust in God, our only support.

Saint Eugene, during your exile, you experienced the suffering of your parents' divorce. We entrust to you the families in difficulty and especially the children who are victims of these conflicts.

Saint Eugene, in your mission as bishop of Marseilles, you have always been an unconditional support for the Church. Teach us to love and serve her for the sole glory of God and the salvation of men and women.

Saint Eugene, the poor and the abandoned have always been at the centre of your service as a pastor. Help us to discover the value of every human being in the eyes of God and to reveal to them their eminent dignity.

St. Eugene, in praying to our Lady, you invite us, like her, to offer our lives to God. With you, we entrust to Mary, our Good Mother, the people we love and those we do not love enough... may she intercede for them before God our Father.

Mary, model of our faith, kindle in us the fire of the unity of the Apostles with Jesus your Son, that it may impel us to build communities that bear witness to God's love for all people and are totally dedicated to the evangelisation of the poor.

Praised be Jesus Christ and Mary Immaculate!

22 May

Francisco ESTEBAN LACAL

- OBEDIENCE -



Birth : 8 February 1888 in Soria (Spain)
Baptism : unknown
First vows : 16 July 1906
Perpetual vows : 2 February 1911,
Ordination : 29 June 1912
Death : 28 November 1936
Place of burial : Paracuellos del Jarama.

Biblical texts

Prov 14, 2.
Acts 5:29-30,32-33,40-41
Ps 7:9-11 9
Ps 119 (118), 113-115
Ps 125 (124)
Mt 10:28-32 28
Mt 7:13-14,21. 13
Lk 6 29b-31
Lk 12:42-44

Meditation

In the account of the martyrs of Paracuellos (Madrid), we find the famous gesture attributed to Blessed Francisco ESTEBAN LACAL, Provincial of the Missionary Oblates, before being shot, along with 12 other Oblates and several other religious.

After giving absolution to the future martyrs, he addressed the executioners with these words: "We know that you are killing us because we are Catholics and religious, we are. Both I and my companions forgive you from our hearts".

This gesture of asking permission for the final farewell and absolution shows very well the personality of Blessed ESTEBAN, marked by his sense of duty and obedience to God to the end. During his life he had often called himself a "soldier of Christ", who sought to do what God and his superiors commanded him. He had been a soldier throughout his life, before he became a priest. As a soldier, when he was only 21 years old, he had to face death in battle, in which he behaved bravely. Now, in 1936, at the age of 48, as Provincial of the other Oblates, he considered it his last duty to step forward, to confront the atheistic and blasphemous executioners and to ask the favour of being able to absolve his companions and give them a word of encouragement, encouraging them to forgive their executioners.

Those who knew him during his lifetime described Fr. ESTEBAN with these characteristics: his uprightness, his approachable way of dealing with everyone and his deep spirit of faith: Father Provincial Francisco ESTEBAN was a person of deep faith, rigid with himself, with great personal austerity, and affectionate with others and whose trust in Divine Providence was evident to all those who knew him, to the point that his confidence in God was manifested in all the problems he had to solve in the religious province, which at that time lacked everything.

During the religious persecution, when they had to hide in different houses after having been expelled from the Oblate house, he had already given many signs of courage and a sense of duty and obedience to God in the service of his fellow Oblates. In fact, his family suggested to him that he escape the persecution by going to take refuge with them, when they had not yet begun to kill hundreds and thousands of Catholics. But he said that his duty was to be with the Oblates, of whom he was the Provincial in Spain, for he was not indebted to himself but to others.

With his brother Oblates in the diaspora, he suffered the anguish of religious persecution in Madrid and experienced it directly when, on August 9, 1936, he was expelled from his community at the Oblate Provincial house, where several Oblates from the Scholasticate of Pozuelo, who had already been expelled from their house in Pozuelo, had also taken refuge. With them, he went to take refuge in a boarding house in the centre of Madrid.

In that unsettled and dangerous Madrid, he did not slip away and remained in hiding. There he encouraged his confreres and sought by all means, which were scarce and at great risk, to encourage materially and spiritually the other Oblates expelled from the house of Pozuelo and refugees in various places in Madrid, as well as other religious, especially those of the Holy Family of Bordeaux. He brings them some food and Holy Communion.

When he was warned that he could not risk so much by making these visits, he simply replied that he had an obligation to save something more precious than his life.

On one of these outings, he was arrested and Fr. Francisco Esteban declared without seeking any subterfuge that he was a priest and a religious. Such sincerity prompted one of the officials to tell him: "But man of God, say that you are a teacher or something else, but not a priest". He was even released. However, after a few weeks, he was caught again, along with the other Oblates.

In prison, he tried to pray the rosary clandestinely when they were walking in the yard or in the cells. And he continued to take care of the Oblates. One person brought him a coat to the prison because of the cold temperatures in the Madrid winter. Father Francisco, seeing that an Oblate was cold, immediately gave him the coat.

On 15 November, he was transferred to the Cárcel de San Antón, a Piarist school that had been converted into a prison. He was taken from there on November 28, 1936, to be martyred with 12 other Oblates at Paracuellos del Jarama.

When the group of Oblates was arrested, Father Francisco courageously said, obediently confessing his faith in the Lord: "I answer for all these. They are Oblates of Mary Immaculate and they are with me. I am their superior, a Catholic priest. We are here because we have been expelled from our convent." On November 28, 1936, before the guns and the open grave, he said again in the name of all: "We know that you kill us because we are Catholics and religious; we are. I and my companions forgive you with all our hearts, long live Christ the King!"

Prayer

Blessed Francisco ESTEBAN LACAL,
Faithful soldier of Christ committed to your duty
to God and to your brothers,
you sought God's will
in all the events of your life,
and you always fulfilled it
with admirable fortitude of spirit,
You show us that obedience nourished you,
making you capable of serving all,
thus maintaining the bonds of love
with your brother Oblates and with all people.
Together with your companions in martyrdom,
intercede so that new young people
may discover and embrace the evangelical freedom
which the vow of obedience gives us,
and become Oblates of Mary Immaculate
giving themselves unreservedly to the fulfilment
of the divine plan of salvation.

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

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.

24 May

CÁNDIDO CASTÁN

- COMMITMENT -



Birth : 5 August 1894

Baptism : unknown

Marriage : 4 June 1919

Death : 24 July 1936

Buried in : unknown

Biblical texts:

1 Cor 7:29 -31

Eph 5:25-29

Rom 1:11-16

Mt 7:13-14,21.

Meditation

Cándido Castán San José is the layman who died with the Oblates. He was 41 years old when he was killed and was married with a son and a daughter. He did not have a close relationship with the Oblate Congregation, but he knew them well because his daughter attended the school where the Oblates were chaplains and he also went to the parish where the Oblates used to collaborate. Above all, it was the fact of having shared martyrdom with the Oblates that definitively united this layman with the Sons of St. Eugene.

His life can surely be a source of inspiration for so many lay people who struggle to live and witness to Gospel values in the midst of civil society. His social and political

commitment was very generous and admirably courageous throughout his life. It is worth getting to know him better.

At the age of 14 he met his future wife, Francisca, with whom he immediately fell in love. As they were so young, they began a courtship that lasted 11 years, because due to Cándido's father's work, which forced the family to move, he could only see "Paquita", as they called his girlfriend, during the holidays. Despite the distance, the relationship remained faithful, and despite their great desire to be together, their relationship was always chaste, as those who knew them remember.

The atmosphere of the family was extraordinary, because they educated their children in a climate of love and in a climate of religiosity, where in the family, they were taught to pray and to love God above all things and to do works of charity.

Candido was a railway worker. He never missed a single day of work, despite the many commitments to which his passion for bringing the Gospel ideal to the world of the workers led him. A consistent Christian, militant Catholic, he was President of the National Confederation of Catholic Workers, an organisation that had more than 60,000 workers, and which sought to improve the living conditions and development of the country based on Catholic doctrine. This passion for living the Gospel in the world of work led him to a long list of activities:

- Railwayman with the Compañía de Ferrocarriles del Norte de España.
- Member of the Sindicato Católico Ferroviario.
- President of the Madrid-Section of the Sindicato Ferroviario.
- Vice-President and later President of the National Confederation of Catholic Trade Unions.
- Member of Madrid City Council.
- Member of the Spanish Parliament.

His struggles and efforts over the years to apply the Gospel in the world of work led him to literally risk his life on many occasions. For this reason, the press of the time came to call him the "champion of social Catholicism". Even then, almost twenty years before his martyrdom, Cándido was aware that his publicly manifested Christian commitment had its risks in that atmosphere of violence. And all this without ever leaving his job as a humble railway worker and without ever neglecting his family obligations.

Where did Cándido get the strength to do all this? Being a worker and a family man, where did he find the time and, above all, the strength to be involved in so many areas?

"It is clear that Candide was a dynamic man, a fighter, who did not give up easily, and with great energy. However, his "secret" was his deep inner life, nourished by the Eucharist, his devotions and in particular his prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. Proof of this was his membership and active participation in the Association of Nocturnal Adoration. Every evening he visited the Blessed Sacrament in a church, prayed the rosary every day and was very devoted to the Virgin Mary, the Sacred Heart and the Archangel Raphael.

On 23 July, around midday, the militiamen went to Cándido's house to arrest him and take him away. Only he and his daughter were at home. Cándido gave her his wedding ring and the keys to the house, telling his daughter to give them to her mother. During the journey, a little over a kilometre long, escorted by the militiamen, like a criminal, Cándido met Francisca, his wife. She asked him where they were taking him and they replied that they were taking him to the Oblates. God had given them the opportunity to say goodbye to each other for the last time. The militiamen forced him to continue walking, while Francisca looks at them as if paralysed. The gazes of the two spouses meet intensely. It is a brief, intense greeting, full of anguish, which brings back memories of their constant meetings and farewells when they were sweethearts, separated by Cándido's father's changes of destination. Forced by the militiamen, Cándido is forced to continue his march. Once he has recovered, Cándido continues to walk upright, with a composed step, like the gentleman he always was.

Cándido knew some of the fathers well, especially Fr José Vega, who worked with the Catholics on the Pozuelo railway. Together with 7 Oblates, he was executed for his faith in the early hours of 24 July 1936 in a forest between Madrid and Pozuelo de Alarcón.

Prayer

Blessed Cándido CASTÁN SAN JOSÉ,
you were never silent or indifferent in the face of injustice,
Your evangelising zeal led you to try to attract many people
to Catholic circles,
in which you identified the best way to serve society.
Your honesty and your trust in the human being
led you to dialogue with everyone,
regardless of political opinions,
in order to fight for the common good.
Your convictions made you always state
what you considered to be the truth,
with respect but without fear,
and following the indications
of the ecclesiastical hierarchy of your time.
Your love for your family led you to always seek the best
for your dear wife and children.

Your fidelity and spousal love
were rewarded by the Lord
with a sweet moment of farewell to your wife and your children
in your personal Way of the Cross.

The Lord crowned your whole life with the glory of martyrdom,
lived in adoration of Christ in the Eucharist, family and work.

Together with your martyr companions,
grant us abundant vocations to Oblate life,
as consecrated and lay Oblates.

May our families be a seedbed
of people committed like you
in living the Gospel with passion and love,
so that everywhere

Christ may reign in hearts and in the world.

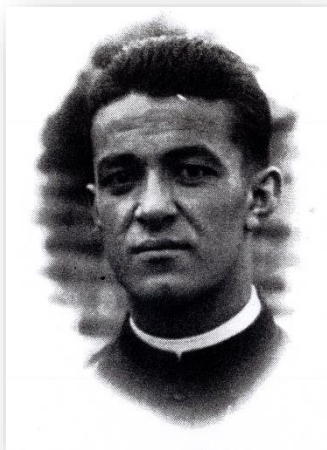
Together with you and with all the Oblate martyrs of Spain
we ask this grace from God
through Jesus Christ our Lord
who lives and reigns for ever and ever.

Amen.

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

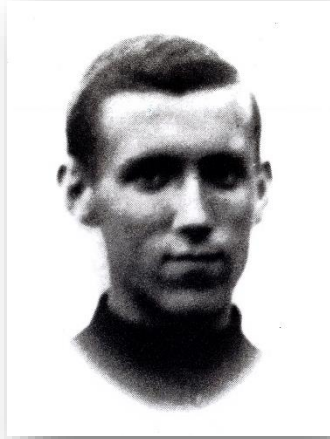
Blessed Brother Eleuterio PRADO VILLARROEL,
The Lord granted you the joy of spirit
That radiated in your smile
Announcing the beatific vision of divine glory
Which we are all called to enjoy.
We ask you, together with your companions in martyrdom,
intercede so that we too may discover
the presence of 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.

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.

27 May

Publio RODRIQUEZ MOSLARES

- PERSEVERANCE IN VOCATION -



Birth : 12 November 1912 (Tiedra, province and diocese of Valladolid)
Baptism : 20 November 1912
First vows : 28 August 1932 (Las Arenas, Vizcaya)
Perpetual vows : 28 August 1935 (Pozuelo de Alarcón)
Ordination : ---
Death : 28 November 1936
Place of burial : Paracuellos del Jarama

Biblical texts

Lc 2, 48-49

Mt 10, 37-39

Mt 19, 27-29

Ef 6, 1-4

Meditation

"Whatever happens, I will be an Oblate of my Mother, Mary Immaculate". This is what one of the Oblate martyrs of Spain wrote to his mother. His life was cut short by his executioners when he was only 24 years old. His 24 years were years of perseverance in his vocation in spite of the difficulties he encountered, especially from his own mother.

Perhaps it was this perseverance in his vocational journey that strengthened him to persevere until death during the persecution. And so, his dream was fulfilled: "Come what may, I will be an Oblate of my Mother Mary Immaculate".

His name was Publio RODRÍGUEZ MOSLARES. He was born in the province and diocese of Valladolid on 12 November 1912. As the youngest of his siblings, he grew up a little spoiled. He and his mother were very close. That is why it was difficult for him to tell his mother about his decision to enter the Oblates.

His mother herself recounts: "One day when I was reprimanding him for the reluctance with which he was studying", he said to me. "I'm reluctant to study because it won't do me any good and I'm wasting my time". So, I said to him: "Well, tell me what you want [...]", but he kept quiet, became sad and sometimes cried, but didn't decide on anything. I said to him: "Well, tell me what you want [...]", but he kept silent, became sad and sometimes cried, but he did not decide on anything, that is to say, he did not dare to tell me [...] At home we used to read [the Oblate magazine] "La Purísima" and many times he had heard me say: "How sad it would be to have a child in those Missions that the Oblates have... Poor mothers! Poor mothers, how are they going to live, knowing that their children are dragging such great dangers out there among the ice or the hot lands, exposed to die as so many poor children have died or killed by the savages? That is why he did not dare to say anything to me, thinking that I would not let him be an Oblate. [...] I was very sorry to think that when he sang Mass, they might send him to some mission and I would never see him again. So, before I took him myself, I tried to convince him to become a [diocesan] priest. But no matter how hard I tried, I couldn't get him to do it. I even tried to appeal to his good feelings, saying to him: "As much as you love me, don't you think that one day your brothers will get married and I will be left alone? And he replied: "My brothers are better than me, they love you very much and they will never leave you alone. It's God who wants it, mum, don't suffer or make me suffer. I have struggled enough for more than a year. Be generous and give God gladly what is His before it is yours". At last, I took him to Urnieta [Oblate minor seminary] and, when I said goodbye to him at the station (although I tried to be cheerful while I was there). When I parted from him, I could no longer stand it and tears came to my eyes. He made me laugh with his witticism: "You will see how happy you will be when you see your missionary bishop son with such a beard" (and he pointed to his waist).

His companions say that "Publio was the minstrel of the Scholasticate: he sang, laughed, made verses and told anecdotes sprinkled with proverbs and popular sayings". One of his teachers, Fr. Mariano Martín, writes: "He had a friendly, open, fighting, proselytising, frank, good character". And he adds: "He truly had a missionary spirit and longed for the Missions, a spirit which he knew how to instil in his house, especially in his sister, the national teacher".

On August 28, 1935, Publio made his perpetual profession. He had achieved his desire to be a missionary Oblate for life. He happily wrote to his mother. His mother recounts: "With what joy he wrote when he made his perpetual vows! And the first time I went to see him, he said to me: "Are you happy, Mother, aren't you very happy to have a son devoted to winning souls for God? And I was happy too, especially to see him so happy.

He said to me: "Now I am sure that I have achieved my desire, whatever happens, I will be an Oblate of my Mother Mary Immaculate".

He tried to encourage the rest of the community even in prison. Confined in the same cell with one of the formators and three other scholastics, in order to entertain the time and make prison more bearable, he began to write a comedy in verse with the help of the Oblate priest.

He finally died with his companions on 28 November 1936 in Paracuellos del Jarama. He had just turned 24 years old.

María de los Ángeles Primo, in whose house Publio was a refugee, has left us a moving testimony: "When the war ended, when I was twelve years old, Publio's mother, Catalina, came to Madrid. She had heard that her son Publio had been in the Model Prison and wanted to go there. My father tried to dissuade her because in the last days of the war the prison had been right on the front line between the crossfire of Franco's troops and those of the Republicans. However, as she was determined to go, my father wanted my sister Isabel and me to accompany her. Among those ruins, she searched among the various cells and corridors. Suddenly, she began to shout: "Here, here" and she entered a cell, which was a small room. We went in with her and we saw a whole wall of writing, and I could see that in one corner there were some words that stood out more than the others because they were written in red, and they said: "Mother, they are taking me to kill me, I die for God". There was a farewell that at the moment I can't tell if it was "Don't cry, I'm going with God" or if it was "Long live Christ the King". And it was signed by Publio. To my mind it is very strange that there was another Publio, an uncommon name, and that the mother went so directly to the cell where these writings were. She knelt down, kissed the wall and, with a kind of razor, cut a piece of the wall where the inscription was" (PD, p. 200).

Prayer

Blessed Publio RODRIGUEZ MOSLARES,
you listened very early to the vocation
that God wanted for you,
and you strove interiorly and exteriorly
to be able to follow it.

God alone knows how many prayers you said
so that your mother could accept your vocation,
and you strove to infect her and everyone else
with the joy that was born from your heart
offered unconditionally to the Lord.

It was God who wanted you to be an Oblate
and it was also God who wanted to crown your young life
With the glory of martyrdom.

We ask you, together with your companions in martyrdom,

to intercede that the young people of today
may strive to persevere
in discerning and living their Oblate vocation.

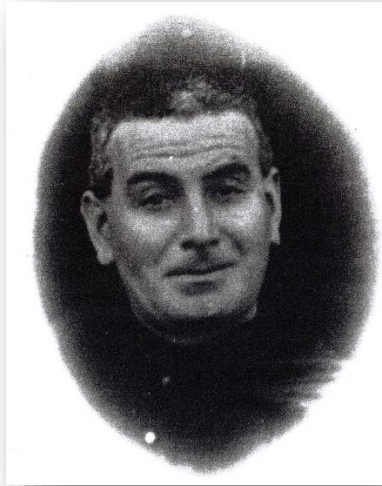
And may the people around them,
fathers and mothers, educators, Oblates, family members, friends,
may they know how to respect and accompany God's will for them.

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.

28 May

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.

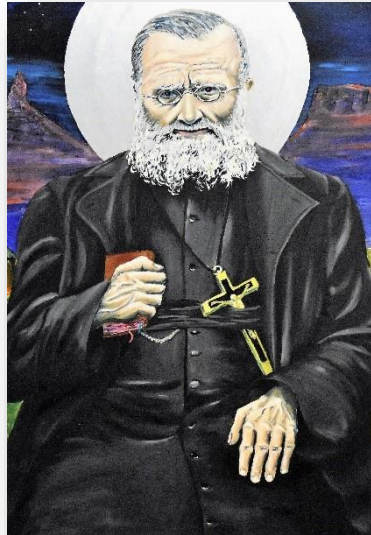
You are an example that God
does not always choose the most able,
but always enables those whom he chooses,
with Christ as their only richness.

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.

29 May
Joseph Gerard

- A FATHER OF ALL -



Birth: 12th March 1831

Baptism: 13th March 1831

First communion: 2nd February 18

Confirmation: 24th March 1844

Novitiate: 9th May 1851

Perpetual vows: 10th May 1852

Diaconate: 3rd April 1853

Ordination: 18th February 1854

Death: 29th May 1914

Place of burial: Roma Ha 'Ma-Jesu

Biblical Texts

Is 52: 7-10

Ps 15

I Cor 5: 14-20

Mt 29: 16-20

Mk 16: 15-20

Meditation

Blessed Joseph Gerard was born in the regional capital of Lorraine in France, a few kilometers northeast of Nancy in a village called Bouxières-aux-Chênes. He was born into a Christian family. His father Jean Gerard was a hard-working countryman, and very supportive of his parish priest for the parish's charities. This influenced Joseph to be a hard-working man as well. His mother Ursule Gerard, on the other hand, implanted in him a diligent and delicate piety which became the predominant characteristic of his life. She played a very important role in the saintly life of her son, Joseph. In most cases, what we learn from our parents greatly influences who we are today. The same thing happened to Father Gerard, thanks to his parents who made sure that he became a good man.

Young Joseph used to look after his father's horses, oxen and sheep. As a shepherd, Joseph began to learn responsibility and gained some strength because he used to spend the whole day alone looking after animals. He was not used to being in the company of his age mates. He enjoyed being on his own so that he could make time to pray. At home, they used to pray together as a family and more often he was the one leading prayers as an elder son. Since his childhood prayer became part of his life.

Joseph went to school just like any other child of his age. We are told that he was entrusted to a nun called sister Odile who taught him catechism. Joseph was so devoted to the Sacred Heart, to the Holy Eucharist and to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Sister Odile journeyed with the young Joseph in preparation for his first communion. Sister Odile's work became so fruitful in such a way that even at the age of 82, Father Gerard could not forget that beautiful day of his first communion. That is where Father Gerard deepened his love for Mother Mary and the Holy Eucharist. At the age of eight, Joseph heard a call to the priesthood. All that he learned from his parents and sister Odile influenced him to desire to offer his life for the salvation of souls.

In 1839 Joseph Gerard went to the Minor Seminary, Pont-A-Mousson and later on to the Major Seminary for his Theological Studies. While he was at the Major Seminary, two Oblate Priests visited them, Father Jean-Nicolas Laverlochère and Father Leonard Baveux. These two Oblates were sharing their missionary experience in Canada and the great need to preach the good news to the poor. He learned about their congregation and he decided to join them regardless of their difficult experiences. The reasons why he decided to join the Oblates were that the congregation was named after the Blessed Virgin Mary and that it was a missionary congregation. With his deep love for Mother Mary, he was already willing to become a missionary without no hesitation. When his parents had blessed his desire to join the Oblates, he made his vow before the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Church called Notre Dame de Sion. To be a missionary is a great challenge that can only be overcome by deep faith and profound love of the Church, especially in those days when it was not easy even to get basic needs met.

While in the formation house, his formators saw him as a saintly man. His Novice Master wrote to Bishop De Mazenod about him saying: "I believe that Our Lady wants to make a little saint of him". It was clear that Brother Joseph wanted to become a saint from a young age. The fact that he used to enjoy being on his own in prayer while looking at his father's

animals, shows that he was already responding to God's call for holiness. He was so happy on the day of his perpetual vows on May 10, 1852.

Brother Joseph Gerard was ordained a deacon by the Bishop of Marseilles, Bishop Eugene De Mazenod on April 3, 1853. Burning with the zeal for the salvation of souls and the love of the congregation, Brother Joseph and his confreres together with Bishop De Mazenod were so touched that they shed tears that day. No doubt they cried because they were realizing the seriousness of their decision; the ardent need for the salvation of souls and their total surrender to God.

Deacon Joseph Gerard left everything behind and went to a place where he had never been before, South Africa. A 22-year-old young man leaving his parents, siblings, relatives and friends forever in the name of the gospel. What was on his mind that day when he was saying 'goodbye' to his loved ones? Perhaps it was through his strong faith that all these things happened. With strong faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Apostle Paul said, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13). These words express the desire of Joseph Gerard too. Otherwise, he wouldn't be so strong and enthusiastic in his apostolic work.

From the day of his departure from France up to the day of his last breath, we see a man who was depending on God for his mission. Through the Power of God, he became a father, a healer and a saint.

Brother Joseph's voyage to South Africa was not easy at all. We learned that the wind drove their ship off-course to Mauritius where they spent some months before they reached their destination.

On January 25th 1854, Brother Joseph Gerard and his confreres arrived in the port of Durban. After his ordination on February 18th, 1854, Father Gerard full of energy began his work of evangelization. His missionary work among the AmaZulu was not easy at all. For ten full years, he did not get even a single convert. He suffered a lot to see the people who hardened their hearts because of their prejudices against the missionaries. His work seemed to be a total failure among the AmaZulu, but the fruits came later. Even in those dark moments at the beginning of his missionary experience, Father Gerard never lost hope.

In those difficult times, Father Gerard did not think of returning to Europe but through the advice of the Founder, they decided to go even further. To those who put their trust in the Lord, God will always be on their side. When they arrived at the place of Chief Moshoeshe, the light of hope shone with the warm welcome of the Chief and his people. The Basotho opened their heart to welcome the good news. In a very short time in October 1865, seven adults were baptized.

Father Joseph Gerard, the Apostle of the poor and the sick. The increasing number of Christians made Father Gerard to be even stronger in his missionary work. He was a well-informed priest in terms of the teaching of the Church and his fervent love for the sick and the poor. In 1865, the first Catechism was published in the Sesotho language. He would make sure that people knew all that is contained in the teaching of the Church and

that they knew how to pray. Father Gerard would celebrate mass so devotedly that people felt they were in the spirit of prayer even though they could not understand Latin.

Another thing that Father Gerard was well-known about was visiting the sick and the poor. He used to ride his horse Artaban and go everywhere to look for the lost sheep. His people were always in his heart. He even used to enter the huts that some people would not enter. He was the counsellor of the dying; he would listen to your confession and give them the anointing of the sick before they die. Even in his old age when he could not climb on his horse, he would be assisted by men to ride, and again when he needed to get down from the horse. He would not allow his physical deterioration to stop him from doing God's work.

When his body couldn't allow him anymore, he retired from his apostolic work and remained a devoted man of prayer and a Spiritual Director of the Christians. Because of the heavy challenges and sickness that he went through, Father Gerard looked older than his age.

When the time came, the Apostle of Basotho died happy because he had done all that he could for the salvation of souls. He was well-prepared and ready to go to heaven. He offered his last mass on Sunday, May 24, 1914. That same day Bishop Jules Cenez, OMI offered him the last rites which he accepted with great joy. He also renewed his religious vows. On Friday 29, 1914 in the evening, our beloved father Gerard was surrounded by his superior Father Justin Pannerath, OMI and three nuns when he threw his last breath. Father Justin wrote to Father's niece in France sister Anne Magdalene saying, "His death was sweet and calm because his life was marked by holiness".

Prayer

O Blessed Joseph Gerard,
in the difficulties of life,
we remember your goodness
for people who suffer
and who need the Lord's love.
Intercede for us peace, unity and health,
and give us the grace of faith, love and hope.
May we, like you,
become an acceptable offering to the
Immaculate Heart of Mary
and the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus,
who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Amen.