

Commentary on the Gospel for Wed, Aug 13th 2014

Blessed Claretian Martyrs of Barbastro

Every year 13th August, we celebrate the feast of the martyrs of Barbastro.

This year 2014 we celebrate the 78th Anniversary of the Blessed Claretian Martyrs of Barbastro.

Many innocent people died during the Spanish Civil War. Many Catholics, Bishops, Priests and Religious and Lay people were executed for their faith. Most of them (especially our Claretians) from 20 to 24 years old - were killed in groups of twenty along the road that runs from Barbastro to Berbegal and Sarinena.

The story of these young men has gone round the world. Our Congregation has taken care of their memory like a treasure. Let us salute our young brave hearts.

The Claretian seminary

Barbastro is a noble city, situated in upper Aragón (Spain), near the highlands of the Pyrenees.

The event connected with their martyrdom occurred in 1936 in the city of Barbastro, Spain.

The Claretians had a house at Barbastro, a small town in northeastern Spain.

Sixty members of this order were stationed there in 1876, most of them novices and seminarians, two of whom were of Argentinian nationality.

There were 60 religious, of whom 39 (including two Argentineans) were finishing their theological studies, 9 were priests and 12 were brothers. The life of study and prayer went on peacefully all those years.

Then on July 20, 1936, at 5:30 pm the peace was shattered, as a group of some sixty armed communists invaded the seminary and captured all the Claretians.

The anti-clerical mob shouted, "Death to the priests and destruction to religion! We have to finish with all of them!"

The whole community gathered at the sound of the bell and met the crowd in the inner courtyard.

The mob was shouting at the missionaries, looking for their hidden "weapons." The priests replied, "There are no politics here, we are religious."

When the communists asked where the weapons of the community were hidden, Father Secundino Ortega took out his rosary and said: "The rosary is the only weapon we have."

The three priests in charge of the seminary - Fr. Felipe de Jesús Muñarriz (61). Fr. Juan Diaz (56), and

Fr. Leoncio Perez (61)- were taken to the main jail and thrown in a cell fifteen feet by fifteen, crowded with eighteen other priests and Catholic laymen. They were executed by a firing squad on August 2, 1936, with other priests and Catholics in Barbastro's cemetery.

Later, others were imprisoned in the auditorium of a former seminary of the Piarist Fathers.

The summer heat was oppressive, especially since the young Claretians did not want to take off their cassocks which were a symbol of their religious life.

Having been separated from their superiors, they remained firm until the end. They must have thought that it would be very easy make the young fall.

Type of Martyrdom : Trails and struggles

1) The soldiers offered freedom to one or other of the martyrs, after having contacted their families or simply through compassion. As a group they were asked to join the army No one accepted such offers; the first through solidarity with their companions. They all knew that to accept would be in contradiction with their profession and against their faith and vocation.

2) In the middle of summer, they were given a limited amount of water; very little to drink and none for their personal cleanliness.

3) On various occasions they were subjected to mock executions. Placed in front of a firing squad, they heard the order to fire. Behind the walls that gave on the street, the people vilified, insulted and threatened them.

4) To tempt them, they introduced prostitutes into the room where they were held. The soldiers threatened them with immediate shooting if they refused them. But they prayed to be able to deal with the situation. With prudence, with personal and community discipline, and if they were really pressed, with the decision to cry out Long live Christ the King, which greatly exasperated their guards.

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