

October 20, 2017

NEWS 2017 - On Saturday, October 21, 109 Claretian martyrs will be beatified in the basilica of the Sagrada Familia in Barcelona. The unfinished work of Antoni Gaudí will host for the first time in its history a celebration of this type, with the presence of about 3,500 faithful. The ceremony will be presided over by Cardinal Angelo Amato, Prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints. He will be accompanied by the Archbishop of Barcelona, ??Cardinal Juan José Omella, the nuncio of His Holiness, Monsignor Renzo Fratini, and numerous bishops of the Catalan dioceses, the rest of Spain and other parts of the world, including a group of 13 Claretian bishops. The Eucharist, which will start at 10am, will be broadcast live on 13TV and various internet platforms specially on the official website dedicated for the 109 cmf martyrs: www.109cmf.org.

This large group of Claretian martyrs joins the 75 who have been beatified over the last 25 years. On October 25, 1992, John Paul II beatified in Rome the 51 martyrs of Barbastro, the “martyr seminary”, as he called it. The film *A Forbidden God* (2014) has spread their moving story. Thirteen years later, on November 20, 2005, in Guadalajara, Mexico, was beatified Father Andrés Solá Molist, a Catalan Claretian missionary, murdered on April 25, 1927, at the San Joaquín Ranch, near the city of León, in Mexico. And on October 13, 2013, in Tarragona, 23 other Claretian martyrs (murdered in Sigüenza, Fernán Caballero and Tarragona) were beatified, forming part of the group of 522 “martyrs of the twentieth century in Spain” who were beatified on that day.

The 109 martyrs came from the Claretian communities of Barcelona (8), Castro Urdiales (3), Cervera-Mas Claret (60), Sabadell (8), Vic-Sallent (15), Lleida (11) and Valencia (4). At the head of this large group of martyrs are three names: Mateu Casals (priest), Teófilo Casajús

(student) and Ferran Saperas (brother). They symbolize the 49 priests, 31 brothers and 29 students who will be beatified. Catalans (the majority), Navarrese, Aragonese, Castilians ... all shared the common religious profession and a great love for Jesus Christ and for the Church. Except for two, who died in 1937, all were martyred in the final months of 1936, during the religious persecution that took place in the Spanish Civil War. The biographies of each of them and various accounts of their martyrdom can be found on the website that the Claretian Missionaries have created for the beatification (www.109cmf.org).

Testimonies abound about how they faced death. Father Julio Leache, a 27-year-old Navarrese, who was murdered at the Mas Claret farmestate, near Cervera (Lleida), clarifies the true motives of martyrdom: ““If they want to kill us, I would want it to be only for God, or rather, that they kill me celebrating, administering the sacraments or praying. But not for other human or political reasons. If they kill us as fascists, it has little grace or little merit, as there are fascists of every colour. But if they kill us for saying Mass or for being Catholics, this is meritorious before God, this is to be martyrs.” Fr Jaume Payàs, assassinated in Sallent (Barcelona), explains that they die without hatred, pardoning their executioners: “I forgive all those who wish me ill and I give them an embrace of friendship, I hold no resentment towards anyone, nor to those who have hurled me in the house like a dog; they also did it to You.” Fr. Emili Bover, who was murdered in the Cervera cemetery on August 20, exclaimed before his death: “I forgive you from my heart for the love of God.”

It is not easy to understand today the impressive strength of these testimonies. In the letter that the Superior General of the Claretians, the Indian Mathew Vattamattam, has published on the occasion of the beatification, writes: “In fluid times like ours, their firm stand of faith in Christ before an impending death disarms our defenses and moves us to be faithful in our commitment. With the grace of God, it is always possible to be faithful to Jesus.” And later, he adds: “A beatification is always a celebration of faith and of pardon, not of judgement or revenge. Therefore, it always has meaning. It is not a settling of accounts with the past, but is rather forward-looking. We are only able to live together when we learn to respect and pardon each other.”

The motto chosen for beatification is Missionaries to the end. The word Missionaries sums up the charismatic identity of the Claretians. The expression to the end, written in red letters, symbolizing the shed blood, evokes a missionary life carried to its ultimate consequences: to give his life for Christ as he did for us (cf. Jn 13:1).

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Source: claret.net