

**Beatification of 42 Members of the Vincentian Family  
Tarragona, October 13, 2013**

***Teodoro Barquín Franco, C.M.***

Some days before the celebration of the beatification of the five hundred twenty-two martyrs of the faith, the Secretary General of the Episcopal Conference in Spain described the day as one of the most glorious in the history of Spain. The Eucharist was celebrated outdoors in the educational complex in the city of Tarragona and was presided by the representative of Pope Francis, Ángel Cardinal Amato, the Prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints. He was accompanied by one hundred-fourteen bishops, among whom were the President of the Episcopal Conference in Spain, Cardinal Antonio María Rouco Varela, and the Archbishop of Tarragona, Jaime Pujol.

Also in attendance were one thousand three hundred eighty-six priests, two thousand two hundred women and men religious, and thousands of family members of the martyrs. It is estimated that more than twenty five thousand persons participated in this celebration. This historical act will be viewed by future generations as a time in which the Church honored those individuals who proclaimed their faith in a courageous and sincere manner and died in defense of the faith during the war of the 1930's. Here we have a very visible application of the words attributed to Blessed Pope John Paul II at the end of the last millennium: *"The Church has once again become a Church of martyrs"*.

Tertullian (155-222) referred to the third century as the century of martyrs. During the first three centuries many people died for their faith and in many cases were executed for their religious convictions. Nevertheless, during the twentieth century, there were more Christian martyrs than in the previous nineteen centuries combined. Cardinal Ángel Amato, the representative of the Holy Father, described the significance of the beatification during his homily when he employed short, memorable phrases that will be repeated in the histories that recount this event. In his homily he pointed out that

*"The martyrs were not the fallen victims of the Civil War, but the victims of a radical, religious persecution that sought the organized extermination of the Church. These martyrs, our brothers and sisters, were not combatants; they were not armed and were not found on the battlefield; they were not avid supporters of some political party nor were they seeking some provocation in order to launch a rebellion. They were peaceful men and women who were killed as a result of a deep hatred for the faith; they were executed because they were Catholic."*

Then, in order to explain the intensity of the religious persecution that occurred during those years, Cardinal Amato added that *"our noble nation became enveloped in a diabolical cloud that wiped out thousands and thousands of peaceful committed men and women. Church and religious symbols were burned; Catholic school and convents were closed, and part of our precious artistic patrimony was destroyed."* He added that the martyrs *"did not respond to the atrocities of their persecutors with arms and rebellion, but rather with the gentleness of the strong... they hated no one but loved all people and did good"*. The Cardinal highlighted the

courageous response of the beati who were not ashamed of the Gospel and who remained faithful to Christ:

*“In today’s celebration once more we want to shout out and proclaim the fact that the world needs peace and communion and harmony. Nothing can justify war, hateful fratricide, the death of our neighbor. With their charity, the martyrs opposed the onslaught of evil. Indeed, like a reinforced wall they opposed the monstrous violence that swept over them like a wave. With their gentleness they disarmed the tyrants and thus overcame evil with good. They are always the present day prophets of peace on earth.”*

In light of everything above, the five hundred twenty-two persons who were beatified in Tarragona on October 13<sup>th</sup> are honored as the fruit of the social and political disturbances of the 1930’s, but in no way should they be called “martyrs of the civil war”. The civil war was the social/political context which resulted in the death of the majority of these individuals, but they are the victims, not of the civil war but of a religious persecution ... two totally distinct concepts. They were killed *in odium fidei*, as a result of the hatred of the Catholic faith.

### **Reason for the selection of the date and the place for the beatification**

With regard to the selection of the date, the Episcopal Conference was very aware of the words of Pope Benedict XVI when he convoked the Year of Faith and pointed out that *by faith, the martyrs gave their lives, bearing witness to the truth of the Gospel that had transformed them and made them capable of attaining to the greatest gift of love: the forgiveness of their persecutors* (Porta Fidei, #13). The “cause of God” demanded that the martyrs not place anything above the love of God, not even their own life. That is one of the most effective ways to delegitimize atheist ideology.

The beatification of these five hundred twenty-two martyrs during this Year of Faith has a special significance for society and for the church. The witness of the martyrs contains a sign of hope, one that encourages and strengthens people to renew their Christian life. This sign of hope also contains power of the witness of the martyrs because they remained faithful to Jesus Christ as they lived out their Christian life and vocation. The example of the martyrs is a powerful witness and encourages us to follow Christ. Tertullian said it so well: *Sanguis martyrum, semen est christianorum* (the blood of the martyrs is the seed of Christians).

For those who do not know the history of the Church in Tarragona it might appear strange that this Diocese was selected as the site for the beatification. Nevertheless the history of the Church informs us that Tarragona has a long tradition of martyrdom that dates back to the early centuries of Christianity. Several historical events confirm that reality: St. Paul, after proclaiming the Good News in that city, professed his faith as he was martyred in Rome; the protectors of the city, Saint Tecla and Saint Magin, were also martyrs; here also Fructuoso, bishop, and his two deacons, Augurio and Eulogio were the first martyrs of that city. Today we remember that one third of the new beati (one hundred forty-seven martyrs) ministered in the Diocese of Tarragona, including auxiliary bishop, Manuel Borrás and sixty-six diocesan priests.

In selecting this city as the site for the beatification, the bishops were mindful of the significant historical importance of the city which UNESCO has declared as the Patrimony of Humanity. All of this was taken into consideration when making the decision to name Tarragona as the site for the largest beatification ceremony in the history of the church in Spain. The entire environment of this celebration was influenced by the historical events that occurred in this city. The witness to the faith of those first martyrs in Spain, as well as the large number of present day martyrs who were included in the cause for the saints from Tarragona, led the bishops to select this Province as the site for the beatification.

### **Why are these “blessed ones” called “martyrs of the twentieth century”?**

Numerous writers on this theme have stated that, in this case, when the victims are referred to as “the martyrs of the civil war”, there is a manipulation of language. In 1922, on the eve of his execution, Benjamin, Metropolitan of St. Petersburg, wrote: *“the times have changed and there has arisen the possibility of suffering and dying for the love of Christ”*. The reporter, José Francisco Serrano Oceja, took up the words of Benjamin to show the religious persecution in Spain during the twentieth century was not some idiosyncrasy of the century. The same reporter explains this situation with the following commentary:

*“Spain was the victim of revolutionary atheistic ideologies. Even though the material authors of this slaughter acted because they viewed their victims as enemies of the revolution, the larger plan was outlined from another perspective. Originally, it sought the extermination of the church and annihilation of the religious dimension from every aspect of life. The martyrs of the faith did not engage in combat on the battlefield and did not fall as victims of political repression. They died as a result of hatred for the faith. Blessed John Paul II defined the martyrs of the twentieth century as “the great cause of God”. The martyrs did not place anything above the love of God, not even their own life. This was one of the most effective ways to demonstrate the illegitimacy of the atheistic ideologies which viewed the will of the human person as all powerful.*

The religious persecution of the 1930’s was not a reprisal for the Church’s support of the nationalists during the civil war; nor the result of a social-economic situation; or the result of the sins/vices of the clergy (a reason expounded by various authors to explain the persecution). The primary reason for the “religious purification” was “odium fidei” ... the hatred of the faith.

The historical context for the religious persecution is related to the Second Spanish Republic (1934) and the first year of the civil war (1936) ... years of an unprecedented religious persecution in Spain, a persecution that finds its only parallel in the persecution that occurred during the time of the Roman Empire. An article entitled, *Down with the Church*, and published by the Workers’ Solidarity Group, explains the intention of the revolutionary government:

*“The church has to disappear forever. The church buildings can no longer serve these lying schemers. The church has to be uprooted by force. Therefore we must take possession of all of the Church’s possessions which rightly belong to the people. The religious orders must be suppressed. The bishops and cardinals have to be executed and the church’s good have to be confiscated”.*

## **The Vincentian Family, a group sought after in the time of the religious persecution**

On March 19, 1937, Pope Pius XI, who lived during the time of the Spanish civil war, stated in his encyclical, *Divini Redemptoris*, that the unique characteristic of the religious purification in Spain can be seen in the fact that the members of the religious congregations that ministered with great zeal and determination on behalf of the poor, the infirm and the abandoned were sought out, persecuted and removed from the social life of Spain. This was precisely the activity that the members of the Vincentian Family were engaged in as they lived out their charism. The confreres evangelized the poor country people through preaching popular missions and educated the most abandoned members of society. The Daughters of Charity, the largest group of women religious with over nine thousand members, ministered throughout Spain with charity and love toward the poor in countless neighborhoods, hospital and orphanages and were involved in three fundamental areas of ministry: education, health care and social work.

The governing bodies of these public charitable institutions began to expel the Sisters from these works with the intention of eliminating Christian influence in the area of health care, education and other areas of social work. These charitable institutions, however, were unable to find a sufficient number of people to replace the Sisters. The patients in these hospitals were mostly women who were invalids and therefore totally dependent and needed the continual dedication and care that only Christian charity can offer. The sons and daughters of Saint Vincent were motivated by the principles of the charism that their Founders had entrusted to them and that we find summarized in the following words: *their passion: Jesus Christ; their inspiration: the gospel; their "chosen ones": the poor; their path: prayer; their lifestyle: simplicity, humility and charity; their family: the Congregation of the Mission and the Company of the Daughters of Charity*. The religious purification that was demanded by the legislation that was put in place by the 1931 Constitution encouraged the persecutors in their efforts to eliminate anything and anyone that was religious. The members of the Vincentian Family, like many other people, were hunted down, mistreated and executed.

Sisters Ángeles Infante and Lucrecia Díez have provide us with detailed accounts of the martyrdom of the twenty-seven Daughters of Charity and the lay woman, Dolores Broseta Bonet, as well as the ministry in which each of these women were involved. Indeed, we are given a description of the character and the human values of each one of these individuals. Father Antonio Orcajo does the same with the Missionaries.

### **The martyrs of Leganés (Madrid) – Puerta de Hierro Date of Martyrdom: August 12, 1936**

***Sister Melchora Adoración Cortés Bueno*** Age: 42

She was born in Sos del Rey Católico (Zaragoza). She radiated the light of knowledge and faith in several school where she taught, the last school being that of Leganés.

***Sister María Severina Díaz-Pardo Gauna*** Age: 41

She was born in Vitoria. Her joy was contagious to students in Leganés where she taught music.

***Sister María Dolores Barroso Villaseñor*** Age: 40

She was born in Bonares (Huelva). She was noted for her kindness and her commitment to the elderly and the mentally infirm in Leganés.

***Sister Estefanía Saldaña Mayoral*** Age: 63

She was born in Tabé de las Calzadas (Burgos). She rejoiced in teaching the younger children and preparing them for First Communion.

***Sister María Asunción Mayoral Peña*** Age: 57

She was born in Tardajos (Burgos). She followed Jesus Christ as a dedicated nurse who cared for those who were blind or who were afflicted with tuberculosis.

### **Martyrs on the road from Jaén to Madrid – Vallecas, the death train**

***Date of Martyrdom: August 12, 1936***

***Sister Ramona Cao Fernández*** Age: 53

She was born in La Rúa de Valdeorras (Orense). She committed her life to caring for women with incurable diseases, soldiers wounded in war, and those who were afflicted with tuberculosis.

***Sister Juana Pérez Abascal*** Age: 50

She was born in Madrid, and was seen as one always available to others and faithful to Christ. She ministered to children and to those persons in Jaén afflicted with tuberculosis.

### **Martyrs at the Asilo de San Eugenio – Benavites, Valencia**

***Date of Martyrdom: August 18, 1936***

***Sister María Rosario Ciercoles Gascón*** Age: 63

She was born in Zaragoza and was known to be very creative in evangelizing, as she prepared children for their future teaching them different professional trades.

***Sister Micaela Hernán Martínez*** Age: 55

She was born in Burgos. Through her simplicity and responsibility she followed Jesus Christ as she ministered as a teacher and an educator.

***Sister María Bermúdez Ruiz*** Age: 43

She was born in Sabugueria (Coruña) and was known as a faithful servant of the Lord, who engaged in various ministries, especially as a sewing teacher.

### **Martyrs of Vallecas (Madrid)**

***Date of Martyrdom: September 3, 1936***

***Sister María Dolores Úrsula Caro Martín*** Age: 43

She was born in Granátula de Calatrava (Ciudad Real). She was a generous and loving teacher and catechist and risked and offered her own life to save the life of her companion Sisters.

***Sister Concepción Pérez Giral*** Age: 49

She was born in Madrid, and ministering among the sick, while also educating young children.

***Sister Andrea Calle González*** Age: 32

She was born in Plasencia (Cárceres). She continued the mission of Jesus Christ as she ministered among the sick and cared for people in the various Mercy Centers.

***Sister Martina Vázquez Gordo*** Age: 71

She was born in Cuella (Segovia) and was totally committed to the various ministries entrusted to her. A courageous witness of the faith, she was martyred in Algar de Palancia (Valencia).

***Sister Josefa Martínez Pérez*** Age: 39

She was born in Alberique (Valencia). She was noted for her gentleness in ministering to children in the hospital and offered her own life to save the life of two other Sisters. She was martyred in Llosa de Ranes (Valencia).

#### **Martyrs at the Casa de Beneficencia, Valencia – Gilet**

***Date of Martyrdom: October 29, 1936***

***Sister Victoria Arregui Guinea*** Age: 42

She was born in Bilbao. She served the Lord in the Charity Center in Valencia teaching in the school and offered workshops on sewing.

***Sister Joaquina Rey Aguirre*** Age: 41

She was born in Bilbao. She evangelized as an administrator and as a teacher of sports.

#### **Martyrs of the Eucharist – the Toledo Road**

***Date of Martyrdom: October 31, 1936***

***Sister Modesta Moro Briz*** Age: 35

She was born in Santibañez de Béjar (Salamanca). She was a witness to charity both in the School as well as in the Pharmacy at the Hospital.

***Sister Pilar Isabel Sánchez Suárez***

Age: 30

She was born in Madrid. She lived out her charitable commitment on a daily basis as she ministers in the shelters of the homeless and the wards of the hospital.

***Sister Gaudencia Benavides Herrero***

Age: 59

She was born in Valdemorrila (León). She was a missionary and experienced a slow martyrdom in prison. She was martyred in Madrid, in the prison of San Rafael de Chamartin.

#### **Martyrs of Las Vistillas (Madrid) – Parque de Las Vistillas**

***Date of Martyrdom: November 22, 1936***

***Sister Josefa Gironés Arteta*** Age: 29

She was born in Garísosain (Navarra). She so loved the passion and the martyrdom Jesus Christ that she asked for the gift of martyrdom at time that she professed her vows.

***Sister Lorenza Díaz Bolaños*** Age: 40

She was born in Sta. María de Guía (Las Palmas de G. Canaria). She was a catechist from the time of her youth and a witness of charity in the hospital

### **Martyrs of the Colegio de Bétera (Valencia) – Paterna**

Date of martyrdom: December 9, 1936

***Sister Josefa Laborra Goyeneche*** Age: 72

She was born in Sangüesa (Navarra). She encouraged the Sisters to remain faithful to Christ during their life and death and asked to be the last one to be executed.

***Sister Carmen Rodríguez Banazal*** Age: 59

She was born in San Cristovo de Cea (Orense). During the time of her various assignments she left behind imprints of her goodness as she ministered to the children in the Asilo de Bétera.

***Sister Estefania Irisarri Irigaray***

She was born in Peralta (Navarra). She was an apostle among the young children and a servant to many families during the time of epidemic and illness.

***Sister Pilar Nalda Franco*** Age: 65

She was born in Algodonales (Cádiz). She was an exemplary teacher and a witness to happiness and goodness in her ministry as choir director.

***Sister Isidora Izquierdo García*** Age: 51

She was born in Páramo del Arroyo (Burgos). She was faithful to her vocation and reflected the goodness of God as she ministered to the children of Bétera.

***Dolores Broseta Bonet*** Age: 44

She was born in Bétera (Valencia). An apostle of the Miraculous Medal she was martyred because she helped the Daughters of Charity who ministered in Bétera.

For more complete biographies of these Vincentian martyrs see:

[http://famvin.org/wiki/Category:Blesseds - Vincentian Family](http://famvin.org/wiki/Category:Blesseds_-_Vincentian_Family) or

[http://famvin.org/wiki/Category:Saints and Blesseds of the Vincentian Family](http://famvin.org/wiki/Category:Saints_and_Blesseds_of_the_Vincentian_Family)

In Spanish one can read these biographies in the book written by Sor Ángeles Infante and Sor Lucrecia Díez entitled, *Un Diamante de Treinta Caras (Hijas de la Caridad, mártires de la Fe)* Editorial La Milagrosa, García de Paredes, 45 --- 28010, Madrid ([www.editorialamilagrosa.net](http://www.editorialamilagrosa.net)).

## **Vincentian Confreres who were Martyrs**

### ***The community in Guadalajara***

#### ***Father Ireneo Rodríguez González*** Age: 57

He was born in Los Balbases (Burgos) on February 10, 1879 and was ordained on November 1, 1903. He was then immediately missioned to the seminary in the Philippines, and from there went to Cuba. Finally, in 1931 was missioned to Guadalajara (Spain). On December 6, 1936 he was cruelly assassinated.

#### ***Father Gregorio Cermeño Barceló*** Age: 62

He was born in Zaragoza during the month of May, 1873. In 1882 he was living at the Asilo de Jesús, a home for poor boys. He was ordained on September 8, 1899. He was assigned to Porto Alegre (Brazil) where he remained for two years. He was sent to Guadalajara in 1929 and on December 6, 1936 gave witness of his faith and love for Christ.

#### ***Father Vicente Vilumbrales Fuente*** Age: 27

On April 5, 1909, he was born in Reinoso de Bureba (Burgos). After attending a mission preached by Vincentians, he entered the Congregation of the Mission. He was ordained on September 9, 1934 and sent to Guadalajara in February, 1936. On December 6, 1936 his body was burned to ashes as he gave witness to his profound faith in Jesus Christ.

#### ***Brother Narciso Pascual Pascual*** Age: 19

He was born in Sarreus de Tioira (Orense). He entered the Congregation on November 26, 1933 in order to prepare to be a Brother. He took his vows on November 27<sup>th</sup>, 1935 and in the middle of May, 1936 was assigned to Guadalajara. On December 6, 1936, together with his confrere, Father Vilumbrales, his body was reduced to ashes. He was nineteen years old.

### ***The community in Alcorisa (Teruel)***

#### ***Father Fortunato Velasco Tobar*** Age: 30

He was born in Tardajos (Burgos) on June 1, 1906, and was ordained October 11, 1931. He ministered as an educator and a formator in the apostolic seminaries of the Congregation in Álava, Teruel and finally in Alcorisa (Teruel), where he gave witness to his faith and love of Jesus Christ and his Church. He was killed and shed his blood on August 24, 1936

#### ***Father Leoncio Pérez Nebreda*** Age: 41

He was born on March 18, 1895 in Vallarmentero (Burgos). He was ordained on August 10, 1921 after having completed his theological studies with excellent grades. His first assignment was the Vincentian seminary at Teruel (1921-1935). From Teruel he was assigned to Alcorisa. In Oliete, near Alcorisa, he was betrayed and like St. Stephen, he was stoned to death on August 2, 1936. Soon after, one of his murderers bragged about having seen “a fat bird fall”.

#### ***Brother Luis Aguirre Bilbao*** Age: 22

He was born on August 19, 1914 in Munguia. On June 29, 1931, he entered the Congregation to prepare to be a Brother, and took vows on June 30, 1933. He was assigned to



Alcorisa (Teruel) where he devoted himself to manual labor. When religious persecution erupted, he remained at the Seminary until he was arrested and imprisoned. With arms outstretched he cried out: *Long live Christ the King!* and was executed by a firing squad on July 29, 1936.

### ***The community at Oviedo***

#### ***Father Tomás Pallarés Ibáñez*** Age: 46

He was born in La Iglesuela del Cid (Teruel) on March 6, 1890. He was ordained on August 29, 1915. He was assigned to Tenerife (1915-1923) and lastly, in 1930, to the seminary in Oviedo. On October 13, 1934 he died giving witness of his faith and love.

#### ***Brother Salustiano González Crespo*** Age: 65

He was born in Tapia de la Ribera (León) on May 1st, 1871. He entered the Congregation of the Mission on October 28, 1894. On October 29, 1896 he was sent to Ávila and from there to Valdemor (Madrid), La Laguna (Tenerife), Santa Cruz de Tenerife (Cuenca) and finally to Oviedo where he was tireless in his ministry on behalf of the poor and children. On October 13, 1934, he gave witness to his faith and love.

### ***The community at Seo de Urgel***

#### ***Father Antonio Carmanís y Mercader*** Age: 76

He was born in Rialp (Lérida) on April 17, 1860. Gifted with a great intellect, he entered the Diocesan Seminary in Seo de Urgel in 1872. But in 1879 he requested entrance into the Congregation of the Mission, and was ordained in 1855. He was missioned in Palma de Mallorca, Barcelona, Rialp in various ministries. After a long, painful agony, he was martyred in Llavorsi on August 17, 1936 before a firing squad. He died forgiving his executioners.

### ***The community at Gijón***

#### ***Father Amado García Sánchez*** Age: 33

He was born in Moscardón (Teruel) on April 29<sup>th</sup>, 1903. He was ordained on May 2, 1926. That same year he was assigned to the Casa Misión in Ávila and from there he went to Granada and finally to Gijón in 1929. He died on October 24, 1936 (the eve of the feast of Christ the King) giving witness to his faith.

#### ***Father Andrés Avelino Gutiérrez Moral*** Age: 50

He was born in Salazar de Amaya (Burgos) on November 12, 1886 and was ordained in October, 1911. From Limpías, his first assignment, was in Tardajos in 1917. The people called him “Father Task-master”. In 1930 he was assigned to Orense and in 1933 was missioned to Gijón. There on August 3, 1936, cruelly executed death, he gave witness to his faith.

#### ***Father Ricardo Atanes Castro*** Age: 61

He was born on August 5, 1875 in Cualedro (Orense) and was ordained on May 27, 1899. He was assigned to Mérida de Yucatán (Mexico) where he remained until 1914 when served in Fort Worth, Texas, USA. In 1924 he was sent to Orense (Spain) and in 1935 to Gijón. On August 14, 1936 he died in Gijón giving witness to his faith and love.

**Father Pelayo José Granado Prieto** Age: 41

He was born in Santa Maria de los Llanos (Cuenca) on July 30, 1895 and was ordained on May 25, 1923. He was involved in evangelizing the poor first in Écija (Sevilla) and then in Granada (1927), Pagés del Corro, Sevilla (1929), Badajoz (1932), and finally, Gijón (1936). He was cruelly put to death on August 27, 1936.

For more complete biographies of these Vincentian martyrs see:

[http://famvin.org/wiki/Category:Blesseds - Vincentian Family](http://famvin.org/wiki/Category:Blesseds_-_Vincentian_Family) or

[http://famvin.org/wiki/Category:Saints and Blesseds of the Vincentian Family](http://famvin.org/wiki/Category:Saints_and_Blesseds_of_the_Vincentian_Family)

In Spanish one can read these biographies in the book written by Antonio Orcajo, *Misioneros Paúles Martires de la Revolución Religiosa en España (1934-1936)*, Editorial La Milagrosa, Garcia de Paredes, 45 --- 28010, Madrid ([www.editoriallamilagrosa.net](http://www.editoriallamilagrosa.net)).

**Witness of the Martyrs**

The forty-two members of the Vincentian Family who died during the religious persecution of the 1930's are, and will continue to be, living witnesses of the Christian faith in the Vincentian Family and in the Church, people who lived the extreme dimension of love. All these individuals will be recognized in the history of the Church of Spain as unique witnesses to God, distinguished by the presence of Love in their life, totally dedicated to God for the noblest of causes: the triumph of love over hatred, the triumph of forgiveness over vengeance, and the triumph of peace over war. The martyrs were courageous in suffering, and were filled with a love that enabled them to discover the fact that the truth and the dignity of the human person and the most authentic fulfillment of the person is freedom. This reality allowed them to seal their witness to the faith with the shedding of their blood for the cause of love and forgiveness.

In his homily Cardinal Ángelo Amato referred to the message that the ancient and modern martyrs offer us and stated that these martyrs offer us a twofold message:

*“Above all else they invite us to forgive. Pope Francis recently reminded us that the joy of God is forgiving ... The whole Gospel, all of Christianity, is here! But make sure that it is not just some sentiment, it is not being a “do-gooder”! On the contrary, mercy is the true force that can save people and the world from the “cancer” that is sin, moral evil, spiritual evil. Only love fills the void, the negative chasms that evil opens in hearts and in history. Only love can do this, and this is God’s joy!”*

The members of the Vincentian Family, following the counsel of St. Vincent, viewed martyrdom as a grace. Thus, strengthened by this grace, they made the supreme sacrifice of laying down their life to give witness to their faith. There was no act of apostasy and none of the martyrs experienced doubts of faith at the time of their execution. No one could have shown greater love than these martyrs who died for the very cause of love.

All that is stated here is confirmed in the account that Sisters Ángeles Infante and Lucrecia Díez provide us with when describing the death of Blessed Sister Martina, a Daughter

of Charity who was referred to as a “woman of steel” and “a creative woman”. Before her death she revealed her boldness and her creativity as she saved the life of nine companions. She begged her captors: *“These women can heal people. You have placed them in a hospital in Segorbe and if you give them a nurses’ uniform, they will do much good.”* She told her executioners: *“Do not kill them ...”* and they listened to her.

Sr. Martina continued to give this powerful witness up to the time that she was to be executed by a young man whom she had taken off the streets. This individual wanted to blindfold her but she said: *“My son, do not cover my eyes. Jesus Christ died facing those who crucified him and forgave them. I want to die the same way. I forgive you because you do not know what you are doing. You are following orders. You are opening the doors of heaven to me and so allow me to die with my eyes open and do not blindfold me.”* She invoked the Blessed Mother as she prayed: *O Mary, conceived without sin ...* and then professed her faith anew as she cried out: *Long live Christ the King! ...* then Sr. Martina died.

To obtain the gift that was given to the martyrs we must be animated by religious values, which one does not obtain over night. To obtain this gift, we, brothers and sisters who are united by the Vincentian charism have to learn from the life of these martyrs, where and how to renew the spirit to enable us to be faithful martyrs like them, echoing the words that St. Vincent de Paul spoke to the Missionaries:

*“ God grant, my dear confreres, that all those who present themselves to join the Company will come with the thought of martyrdom, desiring to suffer it and so devote themselves entirely to the service of God, whether in far off lands or here, wherever it may please God to make use of the poor Little Company! Yes, with the thought of martyrdom. How often we should ask Our Lord for that grace and the disposition to be ready to risk our lives for his glory and the salvation of the neighbor (CCD:XI: 334-335).*

Fr. Fortunato Velasco internalized those words of St. Vincent. He desired martyrdom and was prayed for God to give him that grace. He expressed those feelings when granted provisional freedom, even though he was still being watched. It was a time of great tension, for me, having obtained freedom he said with some disappointment: *“I have not received martyrdom because I have not been found worthy of this grace”*. He was imprisoned anew and a few hours before his execution, he wrote the following in a letter to a Vincentian seminarian, Manuel Herranz, who would later become a Missionary: *“I am writing to you to communicate to you the following ... I have spent the whole night in prison and this morning I gave my statement. We are held responsible for the whole movement and therefore I expect that at any moment they are going to execute me. Pray for me ... I will die as a martyr in defense of the faith ... I have offered myself to God so that he might do his holy will.”*

In the account of the lives of each of these martyrs, we discover that all of them were men and women of faith and profound prayer that was centered on the Eucharist and on devotion to the Blessed Virgin. Thus, for as long as it was possible (and this includes during the time that they were imprisoned), these members of the Vincentian Family participated in the Eucharist, received Communion and invoked the name of Mary as they prayed the rosary. They were apostles until the last moment of their lives. They were courageous when they had to openly

profess they were believers. They comforted and supported one another in their imprisonment and rejected any offer that would have forced them to renounce their Christian identity. They were strong when they were mistreated and tortured; they forgave their persecutors and prayed for them. At the time of their death, they revealed a profound calmness and peace; they praised God and proclaimed Christ to be the only Lord.

*Translated from Spanish by: Charles T. Plock, CM*