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**HONG KONG (SAR), CHINA**



**ORDEN DE PREDICADORES**  
*Provincia de Ntra. Sra. del Rosario*

## **THE MARTYRS OF ROSARYVILLE**

We have gathered in this holy place to recall and honour the memory of the martyrs of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century in Spain who lived here for a few years while being trained for the priesthood and the mission which the Province would entrust to them. Our brothers “received the love of God poured out into their hearts through the Holy Spirit” and lived in this memorable and significant place as professors and students, gaining knowledge, wisdom and spiritual strength, preparing themselves for their mission and eventual martyrdom. It may be said that they were ordinary and simple students, unaware of the destiny awaiting them after a rather short but meaningful life but convinced that they were justified by faith and peace, gaining access to Jesus’ grace.

Countless numbers of times these martyrs were to experience sorrow, pain and uncertainty in life and in mission. However, their determination was not broken, and they continued to work in pursuing the goals of their missionary vocation, encouraged by the hope they had placed in God whom they loved beyond any other thing. Likewise, they understood their obligation to confess the faith, and that to die for the faith was a privilege of the few; they were, thus, privileged. The Lord called them to confess Him by shedding their blood for the Gospel with a generous “yes” to the call they had received in their youth.

The story of these martyrs cannot be separated from the socio-religious tensions of the Spanish civil war of 1936. That history of violence and sectarianism recalls similar situations lived by the friars of the Province in many other places where a great number of them sealed the testimony of the Gospel they preached with martyrdom. In the midst of the senseless fratricidal war, in which all of us would end up losing, there blossomed forth these beautiful testimonies of fortitude, of goodness, of forgiveness and of reconciliation. In these situations, our martyrs were like a miracle of grace.

The injustice suffered by Jesus when He was condemned to death, with the support and the misplaced glee of those who did not accept his message and his person, is repeated anew every time a martyr sheds his or her blood for the sake of the Gospel. How many times had these recently beatified martyrs read the lives of our martyrs of the Orient! Perhaps they thought that they would never have the chance to experience martyrdom, but the time came when they knew that they had to bring to harvest and make themselves part of martyrial heritage of the Province, which is fruitful once again, and at the same time, remained a patrimony for all.

Among the Blessed martyrs of Rosaryville we remember Fr. Buenaventura de Paredes, the Prior Provincial and former Master of the Order, under whose mandate as Prior Provincial, the House of Studies of Rosaryville was purchased, blessed and opened in compliance with what was decided at the Provincial Chapter of the Province of Our Lady of the Rosary celebrated in 1910. It was at this chapter that Blessed Buenaventura de Paredes was elected Prior Provincial. The chapter entrusted to Father Llorente the purchase of a place for a House of Formation of the Province of Our Lady of the Rosary given the political instability of Spain. Fr. Llorente who had accompanied Bishop Placide L. Chapelle, from the Philippines to New Orleans, had received from Bishop Chapelle the Parish of San Anthony on October 1, 1903. The Parish Church was later expropriated and a new one built in Canal Street.

In fulfilment of the ordination of the Provincial Chapter, and, having obtained the permission from the Holy See, Father Llorente acquired and renovated the former house of the Benedictines. Later, on November 16, this house and the Church of Our Lady of the Rosary were blessed and inaugurated. The house was located within the jurisdiction of the town of Livingston and six miles from Pouchatoula a mission which had also been entrusted to the pastoral care of the Dominicans.

Among the blessed martyrs who lived here we can mention:

Blessed Jesus Villaverde Andres, born in Leon on December 4, 1877; ordained on July 26, 1903; Doctor in Theology; Professor at the University de Sto. Tomás, Manila; Missionary in Batanes Islands, Philippines; Rector/Prior of the Studium of Theology in Rosaryville (USA). After having occupied important offices in Manila and Spain he suffered Martyrdom on October 16, 1936.

Blessed Jose Maria Carrillo (1892-1936), ordained in Manila 15/1/19 and missionary in China.

Blessed Pedro Ibañez Alonso 1892-1936. Ordained in Manila 1/04/17 missionary in the Philippines and China.

Blessed Antonio Varona Ortega 1901-1936. He studied theology here and took postgraduate studies at the Catholic University of America in Washington. He was a missionary in the Philippines.

Blessed Leoncio Arce Urrutia, 1899-1936, ordained in New Orleans 10/06/1924 and worked in Spain

The life of these Brothers and companion Martyrs must be seen in line with the particular missionary charism of the Province of Our Lady of the Rosary, established for the mission to the non-Christians and, at that time, engaged in the missions of a number of countries where these martyrs lived and worked, among them: Japan, China, Taiwan, Vietnam, the Philippines, Spain, United States of America, Italy, Venezuela and Peru. Among the 21 martyrs of the 20<sup>th</sup> century of Spain, members of the Province of Our Lady of the Rosary, there were priests and cooperator brothers who had worked in one or two of the above countries, a perfect symbol and embodiment of the missionary charism of the Province of which they were members, as well as an expression of the international character and the specific mission of the Province of Our Lady of the Rosary, its presence and apostolic action throughout history.

As we recall the testimony of these confessors and preachers of the truth, we realize that the words of the Gospel were perfectly fulfilled in their lives. They were apprehended for one exclusive reason, that of being priests: “When they hand you over, do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say. It will be given at that moment what you are to say. For it will not be you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you”. Thus, we understand how important it is for us, their Brothers, to be imbued with the zeal of the Gospel which, as Dominicans, we must study and contemplate in our daily life and ministry in that interwoven communion of a strong prayerful and apostolic community desired by all, though, at times, we fail to build with our own generous contribution, dedication and communion.

These Martyrs valiantly confessed their faith, vocation and convictions as they were about to entrust their whole life to our Father in heaven in that heroic sacrifice which they were privileged to make while uttering expressions like: “No one takes my side?” For in Jesus’ case, no one took his side. Let us go to die for him!” or “Here I am, to die for Christ” “I have been a missionary in China, but I shall die for my faith here!” “I am an Apostolic, Roman, Catholic and Dominican priest until death” “With outstretched arms and blessing everyone in the name of the Lord the King of the Universe I die” “It was a consolation to have him at home” one of their hosts had said.

Today’s Gospel reading also says: “You will be hated by all because of my name but whoever endures to the end will be saved”. A missionary and a preacher understands the importance and urgency of ‘missio ad gentes’, so essential to our identity as preachers and entrusted by Jesus to

his Apostles and those who have been called to follow him. If we assume this charism, it will help us not only to live a holy life but to improve in our fraternal relations as the Order desires.

**Why do we fear whenever a sacrifice is demanded from us?** Most probably because changes and the unknown bear with them instability, need for adaptation and many other things, which we resist and even reject, or because we have not understood that consecrated life is not concerned with structures but with the total dedication to the cause of the Gospel in faithfulness to the Truth. Should we not maintain that our future clings to the reality of God? There is no hope, brothers for the kingdom unless, we who believe and answered God's call are ready to give up everything in a complete self-surrender so that He can abide, inspire and guide our apostolate, then, for sure we be admired and respected because of the testimony of authentic men and women of God.

A number of the martyrs had left their parents, their land, its tranquillity and peace to walk behind Jesus through the unknown deserts. As their brethren of another era and of a context so different from theirs, what do they want to tell us? What message must we read in these testimonies? We envy them, and why not? The grace of martyrdom! They had professed truth and justice, even after having crossed the seas and spent many years of their lives in the service of the Kingdom in far away places, they had the joy of offering their lives for their own countrymen as an evening sacrifice, in silence and solitude, sometimes without even any witness other than the many brothers and sisters who had also offered their lives like blossoms that wither, without bidding farewell to those whom they have the right to embrace and to console.

Called by Jesus to follow in His steps, they struggled to follow the Lamb even to the point of giving up their lives for Christ as the ultimate testimony of their total consecration to a way of life that implied a total giving of their person. Animated by their example, we want to follow the Divine Master in the path of perfection; we want to live in obedience till death, despite so many human social and political as well as religious deficiencies that hinder the path of fidelity.

Our brothers had consecrated and spent their lives whether they were short or long doing good and as witnesses of their faith in the far away regions until sickness or obedience imposed on them a new assignment in their own country. They were forced and obliged like Saint Paul to go where they did not want to, as they were forced to leave their priories, and in chains, they were led to jail, to be tortured and to die. Their only accusation was: "you are a believer in Jesus, in His Church and in His gospel". For many there was no judicial hearing because they were already condemned when they were arrested. The sentence was written in consonance with the life they had chosen, that is why like Father Buenaventura García de Paredes, they only had time to say: "Is there no one to defend me? And neither were those who were on the side of Jesus, come".

Short was their imprisonment, short was the suffering but it was sufficiently long so that the richness of their generosity would be poured out and communicated to those who had the privilege of being witnesses to their end; and upon us who today venerate them as martyrs of Christ. Their resignation, prayer and oblation to the Author of life when they were snatched away, against all rights, made them to be born anew with Him who had called them to follow in His steps and offer the gift of life received in their own land, just as did many others who did so in other countries. For them martyrdom was a moment of grace in order to offer oneself in holocaust, to surrender oneself without reserve to Him in whom they believed and hoped when they thus gave the testimony of their faith.

Some were professors, others missionaries, while some were Cooperator Brothers. The professors explained in their classrooms the mystery without any hint whatsoever of what was in store for them. The missionaries experienced the sowing, the joy of baptizing and preaching and

the abundance of the harvest germinated by the seed of faith. The co-operator brothers were witnesses of service as co-operators of the Word flowing from the simplicity, service and humility, an unequivocal testimony of the greatness of Him who exalts the lowly. Although we are in a new world and a new culture, the Lord continues to call us to follow his footsteps with the same courage and abnegation, with the same courage and sense of responsibility, with the same spirit of prophetism and realism, with the same commitment and testimony.

These testimonies leave us not with the violence that caused so much death, but with the coherence of faith and life which the martyrs had demonstrated; with the gift of magnanimity which the Lord had bestowed on them to die forgiving. May we learn how to have the coherence of faith and life in order to face the challenges of our times which present themselves before us. Now more than ever, Christian life and our apostolate are being questioned, and in some situations it is looked down upon more than ever. Are we capable of listening to the voice of the Spirit in our world? Are we capable of reviving the prophetic voice to proclaim with the power from on high, the Gospel message in all its authenticity? Our mission is incompatible with anger, resentment or vengeance; it is only compatible with conversion, reconciliation and the forgiveness of Christ which we preach.

May we discover the will of the Father for us all and generously offer ourselves in the service to the truth which we preach.

I should like to thank Father Marty Gleeson and the members of the Dominican Province of Saint Martin, USA, for having thought about honouring these martyrs in this place where they lived for a few years of their meaningful life and for having invited me to attend this ceremony. Thanks.