

Martyrs for Mary

The following article was written by Bro. John M. Samaha, S.M.

Four members of Blessed William Joseph Chaminade's Society of Mary, known as Marianists, who were martyred in Madrid during the Spanish Civil War in 1936, have been declared "Venerable" by Pope Benedict XVI. These religious are members of a congregation dedicated to participating in Mary's apostolic mission to bring Christ to all peoples. They are **Father Miguel Leibar**, S.M. (1885-1936), **Brother Florencio Arnaiz**, S.M. (1909-1936), **Brother Joaquin Ochoa**, S.M. (1910-1936), and **Brother Sabino Ayastuy**, S.M. (1911-1936).



During an audience on June 26, 2006, with Cardinal Jose Saraiva Martins, C.M.F., prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints, Pope Benedict XVI pronounced these Marianists authentic martyrs for the faith who practiced heroic virtue. They may now be called "Venerable." The next step in the process is beatification. Because they are martyrs, a miracle is not needed to advance to "Blessed." They may be eligible for beatification within a year.*

These Marianist martyrs were victims of religious persecution in the Spanish Civil War. They were sought and martyred because of their faith and membership in a religious congregation, and for teaching in a noted Marianist school in Madrid, Colegio Nuestra Senora del Pilar. Brothers Florencio, Joaquin, and Sabino were executed at El Pardo, Madrid, on September 14, 1936; Father Miguel, at Vallecas, Madrid, on July 28, 1936, only several days after the beginning of hostilities.

Three Marianist Brothers martyred at Ciudad Real in 1936 were beatified in 1995 by Pope John Paul II. They are Blessed Carlos Erana, S.M., Blessed Jesus Hita, S.M., and Blessed Fidel Fuidio, S.M. These men were also exemplary Christian educators and apostles of Mary.

None of these martyrs was involved in politics in any way. These religious were simply religious educators standing staunchly for their Christian convictions.

A note on the severity and complexity of the Spanish Civil War may be helpful. This upheaval of Spain lasted from July 17, 1936, to April 1, 1939, and was a brutal conflict in which the Nationalists overcame the Loyalists. The Church was a primary target of attack.

The death toll was high. Estimates of the number killed run from 300,000 to 500,000. Included in the many ruthless massacres were twelve bishops, 283 Sisters, 2,365 monks and Brothers, and 4,184 priests.

In the reconstruction following the bloody strife, Franco built a monumental basilica church hewn from a granite ridge in the Guadarrama range as a huge cavern, and topped by the world's tallest memorial cross. This memorial known as Valle de los Caídos, Valley of the Fallen, contains the remains of about 40,000 of both sides who died in the war. One of the Marianist martyrs of Ciudad Real, Brother Fidel Fuidio, is represented in the vast interior mosaic decorations.

Father Jose Maria Salaverri, S.M., a former superior general of the Marianists, has completed in Spanish a volume containing the biographies of these martyrs. The introduction by Father Enrique Torres, S.M., former postulator general of the Marianist causes for sainthood, is an excellent theological reflection on the meaning of martyrdom.

Venerable Miguel, Florencio, Joaquin, and Sabino, pray for us!