

## BEATIFIED REDEMPTORISTS

From the origins of the Congregation, there always has been a concern to keep alive the memory of the most exemplary Redemptorists. The first to have shown an interest in this was St Alphonsus himself when he published a biography of Gennaro Maria Sarnelli, 'a friend of the heart, and united in spirit'. Alphonsus also wrote about Vitus Curzius, the first coadjutor Brother of the Institute; and about Paolo Cafaro, his spiritual director. Moreover, he commissioned Fr Gaspar Caione to gather the memories of St Gerard Majella.

From the outset, these memoirs were collected from the historical manuscripts of the Congregation (1782), from the writings of Fr Giuseppe Landi, and then in the biography penned by Antonio Tannoia (1811). As early as the 1700s, Fr Landi published the biography of Fr Caesar Sportelli and of the student Domenico Blasucci.

After the death of the Founder (1787), Fr Tannoia published his biography in three volumes. Ten years later, in 1812, the lives of Frs Alessandro Di Meo, and Angelo Latessa, as well as of the lay brothers Gioacchino Gaudiello and Francesco Tartaglione were published. Even though some of these Redemptorists were noted for their holiness while they were still alive, the Congregation – being more concerned with assuring its own future and because of the lack of funds – did not begin any process of canonisation before the death of the Founder. The Redemptorists' first cause of canonisation was that of Alphonsus, who was already known in almost all of Europe for his holiness and his doctrinal teaching. It was not until the mid-1800s, after the canonisation of Alphonsus (1839), that the causes of Gerard Majella and subsequently those of Clement Hofbauer and Gennaro Sarnelli were introduced. At present, the Congregation has four saints and nine beati, five of whom are martyrs of the Greek Catholic Church.

Considering the historical period in which they lived, one can affirm that our beati cover the whole span of the 276 years of the Institute. If one analyzes how they lived their vocation, one can see how they developed the charism of the Congregation.

In the first 12 years of the Congregation, Gennaro Sarnelli (1702-44) was, like Alphonsus, a towering presence. Besides being a prolific writer, with a specific concern for the marginalised, Sarnelli made evident the social implications of the Redemptorist charism. He recognised in prostitutes, the imprisoned, the sick, the aged, and bonded child-labourers a humanity 'most deprived and destitute of spiritual help'.

The expansion of the Congregation outside the confines of Italy, promoted by Clement Mary Hofbauer, opened the doors of Redemptorist houses in all the five continents to thousands of men who were called to be a sign of the mercy of Christ to the abandoned.

Among our beati, especially from the 1800s, we highlight the following:

**Blessed Petrus Donders** (1809-87) left the Netherlands to become a missionary among the slaves of the plantations, the indigenous, the blacks and the lepers of Surinam. He joined the Redemptorists in 1867 and lived an authentic experience of evangelization in an apostolic community.

**Blessed Francis Xavier Seelos** (1819-67) left Bavaria as a seminarian to become a Redemptorist in North America. Collaborating with his confrere John Nepomucene Neumann, he immersed himself in prolific itinerant missionary activity, particularly among immigrants, without neglecting his offices as superior, parish priest and formator. He succumbed to yellow fever, which he contracted when helping the sick in his New Orleans parish.

**Blessed Kaspar Stanggassinger** (1871-99) knew the Redemptorists and was inspired by the writings of Alphonsus before he left the diocesan seminary of Freising, Germany, to enter the Congregation with the intention of carrying the Gospel to people outside Europe. His superiors instead assigned him to the

formation of future Redemptorists. He thus witnessed to obedience, generously dedicating himself to the youth and preaching in the nearby town of Gars, where he died of peritonitis when barely 28 years old.

During the 20th century, the Congregation not only expanded to the five continents, but also witnessed to the proclamation of redemption to the point of shedding blood on account of totalitarian regimes and the violent propagation of atheism. Among the many beatified martyrs in the Greek Catholic Church there are five Redemptorists: four from the Ukraine and one from the Czech Republic, all killed under the Soviet regime.

**Blessed Nicholas Charnetsky** (1882-1959) left the Stanislaviv seminary at the age of 35 to become a Redemptorist. He dedicated himself to missionary activity until he was nominated a bishop. Following the Soviet occupation, he worked as a stone cutter, continuing his apostolic activity clandestinely until he was arrested and forced to live in some 30 camps and prisons. He survived a total of 600 hours of torture and interrogation. He was released from prison in 1956, because he was believed to be near to death. He lived for another three years, dying in 1959 of cancer of the duodenum (or small intestines).

**Blessed Vasyl Velyčkovsky** (1903-73) entered the Congregation after his diaconate. He preached for almost 20 years on the popular missions until he was arrested and forced to work in coal mines. Released from jail, he was secretly ordained a bishop in 1963 – in a Moscow hotel. Six years later he was arrested again, but released a few months later because of a heart ailment. He was expelled from the Ukraine in 1972 and sent to Yugoslavia, where he was allowed to escape. He first went to Rome and then to Winnipeg in Canada. The following year he died from slow-acting poison administered before his release from prison.

**Blessed Zenon Kovalyk** (1903-41) was an elementary school teacher before becoming a Redemptorist and dedicating himself to preaching missions, while also being responsible for the finances of the Metropolitan. He was arrested by the Bolsheviks during the night of 20-21 December 1940. All trace of him was lost until 29 June 1941, when German troops found his corpse crucified on the wall of a prison corridor in the Bryghidky jail.

**Blessed Ivan Ziatyk** (1899-1952), after being assigned to formation and teaching in the Redemptorist seminary of Peremyshl, was nominated vice-provincial and vicar-general of the Greek Catholic Church. After his arrest he was subjected to 72 nights of interrogation, during which he was tortured to induce him to switch to the Orthodox Church and collaborate with the police. He resisted the coercion and was deported to a Siberian camp where he was clubbed to death on 17 May 1952.

**Blessed metodij Dominik Trčka** (1886-1959) was involved in popular missions in the Latin Church before being sent to serve among the Greek Catholics in the eparchy in Slovakia to found the Redemptorist Vice-Province of Michalovce. He became the first superior entrusted with the foundation of new houses and in the formation of new confreres. When the Vice-Province was suppressed by the Soviets, he was jailed and condemned to 12 years of imprisonment. He was subjected to extensive interrogation and terrible torture. He was transferred to the prison of Leopoldov and died in his cell of rigours, as a consequence of pneumonia, on 23 March 1959.

## SUGGESTED READINGS

- Fenili, J. Robert C.Ss.R. (ed): *Blessed Peter Donders: His Writings and Spirituality*. Liguori, Missouri. 2007
- Hoegerl, Carel W. C.Ss.R & Alicia Von Stamwitz: *A Life of Blessed Francis Xavier Seelos*. Liguori, Missouri. 2000
- Chiovaro, Francesco C.Ss.R (translated by Fenili, J. Robert C.Ss.R.): *A Life of Blessed Gennaro Maria Sarnelli, Redemptorist*. Liguori, Missouri. 2003

- Weiss, Otto: Beatus Gaspar Stanggassinger, Redemptorista. Materdomini. 1987.

### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. We understand the holiness of individual confreres. How we understand the holiness of the Congregation?
2. What is the modern profile of Redemptorist holiness?
3. Do we have or encourage a desire for holiness?

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