

Martyrs Link Louisiana with Spain

by Carl B. Trutter, O.P.

ROSARYVILLE, LA—On Oct. 28, 2007, six Dominican friars with close links to Louisiana were **beatified** in Rome, according to Fray Vito T. Gomez Garcia, the Dominican postulator of causes. On Sat., October 27, Fray Vito Gómez preached the homily at the morning Mass at Santa Sabina in Rome (in the presence of Fray Carlos Azpiroz, the Master of the Order). That evening at the Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls during the welcoming ceremony, a poem was read that had been written by a lay Dominican, Antero Mateo Garcia; this lay Dominican was executed on Aug. 8, 1936 in Barcelona and beatified on Oct. 28 of 2007.

Cardinal Jose Saraiva Martins, C.M.F., Prefect of the Congregation of Saints, presided at this Beatification Ceremony of Spanish martyrs in the Plaza of St. Peter's Basilica on Oct. 28. Pope Benedict XVI made an appearance at the end of the ceremony, greeting the crowd in several languages. And on the succeeding Monday, a Mass of Thanksgiving was celebrated in St. Peter's Basilica with Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone presiding.

These six priests, along with numerous other Dominicans (two laity, one nun, nine sisters, ten lay brothers and 46 priests) and so many other Catholics, were martyred 71 years ago (in 1936) during the Spanish Civil War (which pitted the Leftist Republicans against Franco's Nationalists).

These Dominican men had significant connections with the Rosaryville House of Theology near Ponchatoula, LA. This Rosaryville Theological Seminary was established in 1911 in the same place the Benedictine monks had previously located their St. Joseph Abbey. The Dominican seminary continued there until it was transferred to the Dominican Sisters of St. Mary's in 1938 and eventually became the Rosaryville Spirit Life Center. 16 of the Spanish Dominicans, who studied, taught or served at Rosaryville and died between 1908 and 1936, are buried in the Friars' Cemetery there.

The Dominicans were members of Holy Rosary Province, one of four Spanish provinces of friars—this one dedicated to foreign missions, especially in the Philippines. Because of their need to learn the English language and to avoid civil conflicts in their native Spain, Fray Tomas Lorente Ibanez in New Orleans arranged for them to come to rural Tangipahoa Parish for 27 years. Many of these were later martyred back in Spain—10 at Oviedo, 14 in Santander and 38 in Madrid.

The 78th master general of the Dominican friars (from 1926-1929 with residence in Manila), Fray Buenaventura **Garcia Paredes**, was instrumental in bringing this theology seminary to Louisiana in 1911. At the same time, his Holy Rosary Province assumed the pastoral ministry of all the Catholic parishes in Tangipahoa (where Dominican friars still care for Ponchatoula, Tickfaw and Hammond). Fray Garcia

Paredes, at the age of 70, was among the Spaniards martyred on Aug. 12, 1936 in Madrid.

Fray Jesus **Villaverde Andres** was the prior at Rosaryville from 1921-1924. After leaving Spain, he had gone to the Philippines to teach; then he served his term as superior in Louisiana. From there he traveled back to Manila to become dean at Santo Tomas University and then rector there of San Juan de Letrán. After his missionary and academic ministry in the Philippines, he returned to his native Spain. During the night of Oct. 15, 1936, he was arrested and was martyred the next day.

Four other Dominican priests, who shed their blood in 1936, had lived at Rosaryville for a number of years.

Leoncio **Arce Urrutla**, after his solemn profession in 1917 at Avila, during 1920-1922 was studying theology at Rosaryville. In 1923, Archbishop John W. Shaw of New Orleans ordained Fray Leoncio a deacon and on June **10**, 1924 Archbishop Shaw ordained him to the presbyterate. After his time in Louisiana, Fray Arce went back to Spain (Valladolid, Avila and Madrid); he was arrested in July of 1936 and was martyred at Porlier in Spain on Sept. 10, 1936.

Antonio **Varona Ortega**, after his solemn profession on Jan, 18, 1922, went to Rosaryville. He continued his theological studies during 1922-1924 in Washington, DC and received a Master of Arts degree in education at the Catholic University of America. He returned to Rosaryville and was ordained subdeacon in 1924 and priest on June 13, 1926 by Archbishop Shaw. Shortly thereafter he was missioned to the Philippines, but while teaching there he contracted tuberculosis and in 1933 he returned to Avila in Spain. Fray Varona became a martyr at Algodor, Spain on July 25, 1936.

Jose Maria **Lopez Carrillo** came from Avila to Rosaryville where he was living in 1915 and where he professed his solemn vows. He was ordained a deacon at Rosaryville by Auxiliary Bishop Jean M. Laval in 1918 and was ordained a priest on Jan. 15, 1919. From 1919 until 1935 he lived in the Orient—first at Manila and then at the Fokién mission in China. Because of a serious illness, he returned to Spain; he became a martyr on Aug. 27, 1936 back in Madrid.

Pedro **Ibanez Alonso** has studied theology at Avila, by 1914 he was at Rosaryville and professed his solemn vows there; in 1916 he traveled to Manila for further studies and was ordained a priest on Apr. 1, 1917. After serving in China and the Philippines he went back to his home in Spain, where he was killed for defending his Catholic faith in Madrid on the same day as Fray Lopez.

A seventh Dominican martyr, although not connected with Louisiana, had lived in Cuero, Texas (about 21 miles northwest of Victoria). Fray Vicente **Rodriguez Fernandez** left Salamanca in Spain for Chihuahua and Tampico in Mexico. There he encountered the religious persecution of President Plutarco Elias Calles and was expelled from Mexico. He escaped to Our Lady of Guadalupe Church in Cuero, where other exiled Spanish friars were caring for the people in Dewitt and Lavaca Counties. He later

returned to Spain and, although he survived the Mexican persecution, he was martyred in Madrid on Nov. 7, 1936.

At this time of their 2007 beatification, these martyred friars, along with so many hundreds of other martyred lay women and men, religious, priests and bishops in Spain, offer us in the United States the example of fortitude in serving Jesus Christ. And the recommended feast day for these Spanish martyrs is Nov. 6.