

Marianist Martyrs of Spain

Seven Marianist martyrs who were victims of religious persecution in the Spanish Civil War in 1936 have been beatified. They were sought and martyred because of their faith and membership in a religious congregation, and for teaching in Marianist schools in Ciudad Real and in Madrid.

Three Marianist Brothers martyred at Ciudad Real 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. September 18 is the day we honor them in the Church calendar.

Four Marianists gave their lives in Madrid for the same cause and were beatified by Pope Benedict XVI in 2007: Blessed Miguel Leibar, S.M., Blessed Florencio Arnaiz, S.M., Brother Joaquin Ochoa, S.M., and Brother Sabino Ayastuy, S.M. Their feast day in the liturgical calendar is November 6.

Fifteen Marianists were martyred for their faith in 1936. Because of the anarchy of the times, it has been difficult to gather sufficiently detailed information to introduce the causes of the other eight Marianist martyrs.

None of these martyrs was involved in politics in any way, nor did they bear arms. These Marianists 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. Though civil war erupted in 1931, the worst upheaval in 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 as high as 500,000. Included in the many ruthless massacres were 12 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 Guadarama range as a huge cavern, and topped by the world's tallest memorial cross. This memorial known as *Valle de los Caidos*, 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.

Biographies of the Ciudad Real Marianist martyrs by Father Emilio Ortega, S.M., have been translated into English under a single cover. Father Jose Maria Salaverri, S.M., a former superior general of the S.M., has completed in Spanish a volume containing the biographies of the four Marianists martyred in Madrid. In the latter book 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. Father Torres' essay is attached. These books are available from the North American Center for Marianist Studies in Dayton, Ohio.

-- Brother John Samaha, S.M.