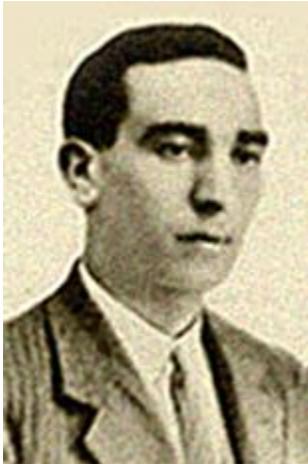


Marianist Moment:

A continuation of the Marianist Martyrs of Madrid, 1936

This edition focuses on three of the four Marianist Martyrs of Madrid. Padre Miguel Leibar, the fourth, was featured in the October issue of FamilyOnline.



Bro. Florencio



Bro. Sabino



Bro. Joachin

After World War I ended in 1918, most of the French returned to France. Only two Marianists remained in the Escorianza community. In 1924, scholastics moved to Vitoria and three postulants stayed in Escorianza: Florencio Arnaiz, Sabino Ayastuy and Joaquin Ochoa.

Florencio Arnaiz, the son of Toronto Arnaiz and Mari Cruz Cejudo, the youngest of four children, was born May 10, 1909 in Espinoza de Ferraro. He was a docile but jovial child and admired by his teachers for his intelligence and dedication to his studies. He became the teachers' assistant and showed an interested in religion quite early, especially serving Mass. His friend, Agapito Alonso had cousins in the Marianist postulate. When Agapito and Florencio decided to join, they took the entrance exam and were accepted into the postulate in 1921. His superior commented that he was a serious worker, quiet but energetic, and somewhat shy, but also self-confident. He did not let others dominate him. He was viewed by his companions as a model of piety and discipline. He began the novitiate in 1925.

Sabino Ayastuy Errasti was born in Aozaraza on Dec. 29, 1911, to Eulogio Ayastuy and Matiasa Errasti. He was the sixth of seven children. Two months after the youngest

child, Severiano, was born their father died, leaving their 38-year-old mother to raise them. The oldest son, Pedro, became the father of the family.

Sabino began his schooling in the village but later went to the school connected to the convent of the Marianists in Escoriaza. He entered the postulate at age 10. He was joined by Miguel Léibar's brother, Martín. He might be considered a typical 10-year-old, as his director described him as having a happy temperament, impressionable, bearing good judgment, always in motion, gifted and a bit superficial. He neglected to add that he was an energetic hard worker, impulsive and often short-tempered. He was a deeply religious, sensitive child showing humility, thanking people when they corrected him. Martín saw no malice or duplicity in him. When Sabino visited his home and family, he liked to lead the rosary and assist the pastor. His mother hoped he would become a priest.

Joaquin Ochoa Salazar was born April 16, 1910 in Villanueva de Valdegovia to Castro Ochoa and Trinidad Salazar. His father worked repairing roads. He was the fourth of six children. He was baptized the day after he was born and confirmed at age 2 because that was when the Bishop visited the area. He attended public school near their home in La Corzanilla, a small village. Joaquin was a quiet, amiable boy. At school, he met and became friends with Augustin Alonso who at the end of the school term told him a Marianist was coming to give him an entrance exam in the hope that he would go to school in Escoriaza. Joaquin asked if he could do that too. Joaquin's brother, Eladio also had an interview. Fr. Gregorio Lasagabaster called this "a miraculous catch" four boys joined him at Escoriaza that next fall.

The Formative and Challenging Years

An old family mansion in Elorrio, purchased in 1924, was to become their religious community. The school opened with Don Francisco Lasagabaster as the director. He was a veteran educator and the second cousin to Sabino Ayastuy. There were 130 postulants that year, Sabino among them. Sabino was a good student of Latin but was teased for his inability to sing. He wanted very much to become a priest, so he studied hard. One day he lost his temper in class because he had not properly prepared for the questions the teacher asked. He was accused of not studying and relegated to work in the orchard. After a week, he went to the director and begged his forgiveness, thanking him, too, for not expelling him. He was allowed to return to class. This experience led Francisco to read the lives of the saints, determined to be one.

Joaquin, Sabino, and Martin were among the 24 men who began their novitiate in September 1927. That November, Fr. Miguel Pro had died a martyr in Mexico. The Novice Master commented, "we must be ready to give our lives to Christ. Perhaps not in the way of Fr. Pro, as martyrs, but all of us with our generous dedication every day."

Joaquin was not very intelligent, but a quiet, steady worker and edifying novice, according to his novice master. He was a simple, respectful, serious young man who showed a lot of Family Spirit. He wanted to be a teacher.

When petitioning for admission into the Society of Mary, in 1935, he wrote: "I do not want anything so much in this life as to be admitted to definitive profession...I want with all resolve and energy to enroll forever under the standard of Most Holy Mary, our Mother, to work for her honor until the hour comes to die in her service." He made perpetual vows on September 1, 1935.

Since he and Florencio were stationed at the elementary school, they also lived together in community where D. Carlos Eraña was the director.

Sabino was a very confident and optimistic character with normal intelligence. He had a short temper, but forgot easily and did not hold grudges. He was vain, pious and often laughed at others and was in need of discipline to curb his faults. Greatly influenced by Kempis' *Imitation of Christ*, he took to heart "you are not something more because people praise you, nor something less because they criticize you. You are what you are before God. That, and nothing more." In time he overcame those shortcomings in large part.

When petitioning for admission into the Society of Mary, Sabino requested the priesthood, which the council agreed to if he would continue to work at overcoming his faults. The General Administration was not in support of this application but left the decision to the Provincial Administration, which chose in Sabino's favor. Though he passed his exams in June 1931, his spiritual director had suggested that he not remain in the Society, probably due to his reckless and aggressive nature. This upset him greatly, but he relaxed a little following a retreat with Fr. Domingo Lazaro. In September, he and Joaquin were assigned to Escoriaza. Joaquin taught the external students and Sabino was assigned to teach the third-year postulants. One year later, Joaquin was sent to the Pillar School in Madrid and Sabino had to report for military service in San Sebastian. When the military drew lots a month later, he was deemed exempt from full service.

In 1933, Sabino asked to make perpetual vows, but was told by the General Administration to wait another year. When he applied again in 1934, he was accepted, along with Florencio Arnaiz. They consecrated themselves on Sept. 2, 1934, despite the anti-clerical and anti-religious atmosphere in Spain at the time. Sabino remained teaching the postulants and Florencio returned to the Pillar school in Madrid. In 1935, Sabino went to Our Lady of the Pillar school in Madrid. This move allowed him more time for personal study before entering the seminary in Fribourg.

Florencio's first assignment was to teach at St. John the Baptist school in Jerez de la Frontera. He taught the youngest children and supervised some of the boarders. He did very well in this assignment, garnering positive responses from the Marianist Inspector. He consistently worked hard on classroom preparation and his own personal study. He was moved to the Pillar school in Madrid in 1933.

The buildings were not adequate for the number of religious at the time. So, The Marianists bought the Oblate Sisters' convent in Segovia, which served as the Scholasticate for second and third year students. Upon their arrival in September 1929, the first seventeen scholastics worked at the renovation of the building.

In October 1930, the community was asked to house an exiled Mexican priest, whose two brothers had been executed under the Calles regime. When the priest told the stories of martyrdom, it left quite an impression on the young men.

January 1931 brought the establishment of the Republic, which resulted in burning churches and convents in Madrid in May. Civil Guards were sent to the Marianist residence as a precaution. At St. John the Baptist school, the brothers had removed religious artifacts and library books to a home nearby. Looters and rioters came but were dissuaded by men on horseback.

In 1933, when the new Constitution banned religious from teaching, it affected Our Lady of the Pillar Convent. The number of postulants sank from 120 to seventy, and further to nineteen. With parents' permission sixteen young men went to France to continue studying with the Marianists. By November 1933, things began to change due to new government leadership. Religious dressed like lay people to conceal their identity. In Sabino's belligerent style, when it came time to vote, he dressed wearing a black overcoat.

In January 1936, Fr. Florentino Fernandez cautioned the brothers to avoid any semblance of political involvement, and that the Society could work under any form of government. Twelve future martyrs heard those words.

In February, the Popular Front won the election. Violence, vandalism and destruction of religious buildings was rampant. The leftist groups were determined to destroy private schools and remove all religious from teaching. Conditions were so bad that at the annual retreat in June, the Provincial told the brothers that places in South America were poised to welcome them, should it be necessary. July events caused the religious to scatter. Florencio, Joaquin and Sabino ended up at a home near the school. They saw the school taken over by the Republican Left and learned quickly the fate of Fr. Miguel, and the domestic servants, Melitón and Fabiana.

On Sept. 11, the house was raided and the five religious were taken to the former convent. They were separated and beaten for not disclosing the location of other religious. They were then driven out to a highway that led to Pardo where they were shot to death. Their bodies were discovered by agents from the General Office of Security on Sept. 14, the Feast of the Exultation of the Holy Cross.

The photographs taken of the dead were discovered by an alumnus of the Pillar school in November 1939. Severiano, Sabino's brother, was able to identify the three Marianists. Later, Joaquin's military ID and Sabino's University ID were discovered in the barracks of a Civil Guard. Forensic experts were able to identify their bones some time later. The man who buried their bodies had written a detailed description of their clothing and noted their crucifixes and medals. In 1966, their remains were transferred to the Marianist mausoleum in Carabanchel Alto, along with those of Miguel Léibar.