

# 100 years ago, Jakob Gapp joined the Society of Mary

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Life is full of events, encounters and highlights. Opening the book of one's life sometimes allows us to find a hidden meaning in it, a particular resonance that gives meaning to today.

It was Jakob Gapp's experience on August 13, 1943 in the Berlin prison of Plötzensee, which served as a reminder of that very same summer day in a previous year, a happier day, a day that would be fully brought to completion in the sacrifice of his life: "On August 13, 1920, I began my novitiate, the most beautiful year of my life, and today I hope to be able to begin the life of blessed eternity."



Born on July 26, 1897 in Wattens, Austrian Tyrol. He was not yet 18 when he volunteered to defend his homeland in 1915. After the war and the prison camp, this 23-year-old young man wanted to enter religious life with as much ardor as he had displayed during his military commitment. He was a man of great frankness and when he went to Freistadt to meet the provincial, as he got off the train, he announced to the religious who came to pick him up: "Here I am, I'm a socialist and I want to be a priest. If you don't

agree, tell me right now, and I'll go home."

Jakob was admitted to the novitiate at Greisinghof where he arrived on August 13, 1920. It was a beginning that foreshadowed an end yet unknown. Who would have thought that 23 years later, on the same day of the calendar, it would be Jakob's day of offering the totality of his life?

In this man full of ideals, the search for truth was constant. It was in this spirit that he began his studies to become a priest: "When I entered the seminary in 1925, at the age of 28, I said to myself with great conviction: during these years of study, I will only be able to adhere to what I really feel, for I must not believe half or out of obligation in the dogmas of the Church. I will only be able to speak about my faith to others in a truly convincing way if that faith has really penetrated me and is really mine..." It is also in this spirit that he

conversed at length with his teachers to understand, verify and deepen his knowledge.

During the rise of National Socialism, he scrutinized this ideology and was now convinced of one thing: National Socialism is incompatible with the Christian faith. This conviction became a struggle that he shared with his students and all those he met, including from the pulpit in his native village. He became an outlaw and was followed by the Gestapo. Then, exiled in France and then in Spain, he was misunderstood.

At the moment when he was about to give the supreme testimony of his life, he wrote to Father Jung, Vicar General of the Society of Mary who was replacing the deceased Superior General (a letter that would remain in the file of his conviction in Berlin and would not be found until years later). You can read or reread it (see box below).

Let us not forget to remember him and trust in his intercession.

***Plötzensee, August 13, 1943***

***Venerable and dear Superior,***

***A few hours before my death, I feel the need to say goodbye to you as well. I was sentenced to death for treason on July 2, the feast of the Sacred Heart. The execution will take place tonight at 7:00.***

***During the time of my captivity, since November 9 of last year, I have had ample time to reflect on my life.***

***I thank you from the bottom of my heart for all the good you have done me since I have known you.***

***I still consider myself a member of the Society of Mary; I renew my vows and offer myself to God through the hands of our dear Heavenly Mother.***

***Forgive me for any trouble I may have caused you. I went through some very difficult times; but now I am perfectly happy. I think these hard times have sanctified me.***

***Please give my regards to all the confreres. I will greet those who are already up there. Everything passes, except heaven.***

***On August 13, 1920, I began my novitiate, the most beautiful year of my life, and today I***

*hope to be able to begin the life of blessed eternity.*

*Goodbye! Pray for me. I am praying for you. We will meet again!*

*Yours very much and very grateful in J.M.J.*

*Jakob*