



Fr. Jakob Gapp, SM - An Advocate for Social Justice

By Bro. David Betz

On August 13th we celebrated the Memorial of Blessed Jakob Gapp, SM. Our Austrian Marianist Brother was martyred in 1943 for his activities that were deemed detrimental to the Nazi Regime. He persisted in speaking out against the National Socialists since he strongly believed that this government was not conducive to Catholic Christian values. For him one's Catholic faith was more important than any nationality. Here is testimony from his interrogation that expounds on his belief when asked about public resistance to National Socialism:

“That is what I really believe about the obligation of priests today. I do not in any way want to obligate anyone to think as I do. However, I am convinced that it is necessary for a certain number of faithful Christians and of priests to give testimony to Catholic truth, without any compromise with “the world.” If I acted any differently than I did, I could never forgive myself, for I would know that I was a traitor and hypocrite. And, although I regret that I might have been harmful to the Third Reich by my attachment to the Catholic faith, in conscience I could not do otherwise; my faith means more than anything else in this world...”

Blessed Jakob was not known for keeping quiet or backing down from what he believed was the truth. Because of this behavior he was transferred several times during his religious life since the brothers with whom he lived were fearful for their safety.

Jakob was also an advocate for social justice for those who were in need. He would share the coal that was meant for him and give it to the unemployed who were freezing in their apartments. When he was living in Spain he spoke out against the injustices that the employees of the institution where the brothers

worked. Because of these actions he was labeled a revolutionary and a fool behind his back by his fellow brothers. It was these actions and his unwillingness to keep quiet that led to his capture and eventual execution by the Nazi Regime.

So what does Blessed Jakob Gapp's life and martyrdom mean for us, Marianists, today? He is a model for advocacy against the injustices in society. He is a symbol for us who want to make society a better place for the marginalized. He can be called a prophet who challenged the status quo and called people back to the true meaning of the Gospel. And we need prophets in this present day and age to do the same. Therefore in being the sons and daughters of Mary, we are being invited to see Jakob Gapp as a way to emulate Mary who birthed Jesus, the Word of God who came to make all things new by lifting the poor, setting captives free, giving sight to the blind, raising the downtrodden, and to proclaim a year of favor. (See Luke 4: 18-19). We rebirth Jesus by righting the wrongs, uplifting the marginalized and speaking out for the Gospel. What an amazing responsibility to have as we remember Blessed Jakob Gapp. It is essential to our call as Missionaries of Mary!

See: 1) A Portrait of Courage, published in November 1990 by Province of Meribah,

Mineola, N.Y.

2) Blessed Jakob Gapp, Marianist: A Witness of Catholic Faith confronts the Nazi

World

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