

DECREE OF MARTYRDOM
OF THE SERVANT OF GOD, JUAN MARIA DE LA CRUZ

The Congregation of the Causes of Saints

“*Happy is the lot of the one who sheds his blood for our Lord!*”. Thus the Servant of God, Juan Maria de la Cruz García Méndez, a member of the Congregation of Priests of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, indicated his ardent longing while in 1936 in Spain, his homeland, a civil war was going on - as well as a persecution against the Catholic Church and especially against its ministers.

Born on September 25 in the year 1891 in the town of *San Esteban de los Patos* (Province of Avila), the Servant of God was baptized on the 27th following and was called Mariano. He was the eldest of 15 children of a family of farmers rich in faith and a most lively religious practice.

A religious vocation soon took root in the soul of the young Mariano, who attended the diocesan seminary at Avila from 1903 on; he completed his studies and exemplary formation with priestly ordination on March 18, 1916.

He was made parish priest of *Hernansancho* and immediately showed signs of a priestly life that was intensely eucharistic and Marian and of apostolic zeal that can be defined heroic. The people venerated him as a saint. He, however, manifested that he had an irresistible yearning for religious life. The bishop sent him to fulfill the ministry of chaplain at the novitiate of the Brothers of Christian Schools in a town called *Nanclares de Oca*. Shortly thereafter the Servant of God earnestly begged his bishop to leave and to enter the Carmelites at *Larrea Amorebieta* (in *Vizcaya*). Accepted as a novice on September 2, 1922, he received the name Juan Maria de la Cruz which ever after remained dear to him.

Due to weak health he was to leave the Carmelites and return to his diocese of Avila, once again taking up parish ministry; but only for a brief while because he always felt a lively desire for the religious life. In 1925 he was accepted by the Priests of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in the town of *Novelda* (province of *Alicante*) and on October 31, 1926, on the Solemnity of Christ the King, he made his first vows with the name Juan Maria de la Cruz.

Thus, he embraced that “profession of love, oblation, and reparation” belonging to the Congregation of Priests of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, founded in 1878 at Saint Quentin in France by the Venerable Servant of God, Fr. Leo Dehon; and by living this vocation of a Priest of the Sacred Heart he prepared himself for the offering of that supreme sacrifice which made him the first martyr of the Dehonian Congregation.

After he fulfilled his assignment at the Apostolic School at *Puente la Reina* (in *Navarra*) with humble fidelity, as vocations promoter and fund raiser among

benefactors from 1927 through 1936, when the civil war broke out he was sent to Valencia to seek refuge among his friends. When he had arrived at the city an unrepressed zeal led him to protest the burning of a church called “*Santos Juanes*” and the desecration done by militant anarchists and communist soldiers. He was immediately apprehended and put into the jail called *Carcere Modello di Valencia*. The date was July 23, 1936.

During the month in which he was incarcerated, the Servant of God was an example to all by his priestly and religious conduct, showing an indomitable courage in keeping with his character which affirmed “The greatest reward would be to give one’s life for Christ”.

When he was summoned for departure by prison authorities, along with nine other fellow prisoners, on the evening of August 23, 1936, he went happily and without delay, almost jumping for joy, almost foreseeing that he would be taken to his martyrdom.

That night, August 23, he was shot, as were the other nine, at a place called *Silla*, a short distance outside Valencia. He was buried in a common grave in the cemetery of that town.

In 1940, when the civil war was over, it was possible to exhume the victims. The body of the servant of God was immediately identified because of his profession cross which he wore and because of the scapular of the Sacred Heart, perforated by two bullet holes. He also had with him his small personal calendar book in which the Servant of God, during the month he was in prison, wrote down the daily schedule he observed as a faithful Priest of the Sacred Heart.

At present the Servant of God’s remains rest in a sarcophagus located in the sacristy of the Apostolic School of *Puente la Reina* that was so dear to him. Wherever the news of his death reached, the unanimous feeling was that his death was truly a martyrdom.

The Ordinary Process, begun at Valencia in 1959 and concluded in 1960, proved that the entire life of the Servant of God was lived with an ever greater spiritual ascent, and that his generous sacrifice, which he so ardently desired, was his crowning glory, putting him fully in conformation with Christ the Redeemer. As the Servant of God himself exclaimed: “Oh! That I could have the same death, to be persecuted and to die for Christ!”

The Congregation for the Causes of Saints approved the authority and validity of this Process by decree on October 1, 1993. Once the *Positio* had been completed, an inquiry was made to decide if the Servant of God truly died a martyr’s death. After a favorable outcome, a special Congress of the Theological Consulters was held on February 23, 1999, and on December 5, 2000 the Ordinary Session of the Cardinals and Bishops took place while the Cause was presented to them by His Excellency, Msgr. Joseph Sebastian Laboa, Titular Archbishop of Zarai.

The Supreme Pontiff John Paul II, informed of these matters by the Prefect whose signature is given below, and obtaining and ratifying the votes of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, ordered that the decree of martyrdom of the Servant of God be issued.

All this having been done, today at a meeting of the Prefect named below, together with the Presenter of the Cause and the Secretary of the Congregation, and others who are usually asked to be present as witnesses, The Most Holy Father declared:

“The martyrdom and the cause of the Servant of God Juan Maria de la Cruz (in the world Mariano García Méndez), Priest of the Congregation of Priests of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, killed in 1936, has been established for the case and scope under consideration.”

His Holiness desired that this decree be published according to Canon Law and placed in the Acts of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints.

Given at Rome, December 18, 2000

+GIUSEPPE SARAIVA MARTINS
Titular Archbishop of Tuburnica
Prefect

L. + S.

+EDWARD NOWAK
Titular Archbishop of Luni
Secretary