Sown in Blood:
Martyrdoom as a Religious Vocation

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A great historian once said that it is difficult to overstate the influence that martyrdom had on early Christian spirituality (Bouyer). After the Gospel, nothing had a greater influence. For, the martyr continues the self-sacrifice of Christ on the cross and thus identifies with that death which conquered the death and brought true Life.

Religious Life came into being when, within the Church, the Spirit willed that such an example of Christ's self sacrifice should not be lost, even though the persecutions had ceased; that is why it is the heir to martyrdom, the heir to that total identification with Christ even unto death, to that eschatological awareness and to that uneasy relationship with the world. But we must speak of a 'martyrdom of desire': should we not all possess this ardent desire, we who, in our consecration to the Sacred Hearts, profess a service in which we wish to live... and die!? Without a doubt, for the martyr does not seek death; he seeks Christ to the point of making his own the attitudes, choices and tasks that led to his heart being pierced on the cross (cf. Constitutions, art. 3).

Our brothers Fr Teófilo and his four companions are a supreme witness to this consecration. They were victims of religious persecution in which they chose to give up their lives rather than renounce their faith, signing their act of religious profession with their own blood.

Fr **Teófilo** saw it coming and said, “I have a premonition that I am going to die, and I am glad to die by firing squad. Our Lord suffered even more for us. It is the least we can offer Him.”

Fr **Isidro** Íñiguez presented himself as a religious who took pride in being one, deeply satisfied with his profession, or the young Fr **Mario** Ros who would never deny that he was a priest and a religious, even if they were to kill him, or Fr **Eladio** who said, “You know I am a priest; let them do with me as they please”.

The novitiate concludes with temporary profession, but the theological root of the vows, as our brothers reflect, goes beyond a temporary commitment and points to a total and irrevocable surrender to God within a world that can present highly adverse contests to the faith.

The time of Adoration, during which our lives are continually renewed and offered up, ultimately aims to make our lives a Eucharistic sacrifice.

Fr **Gonzalo** Barrón, an apostle of nightly Adoration at home, was able to live out his martyrdom as the fulfilment of the Eucharist, in which it is not the sacrament but his very self that is offered as the host. It is the foreshadowing by Jesus at the Last Supper of his sacrifice on the cross.

And how might we present the martyrs of the Spanish Civil War within a political context? By showing that their martyrdom did not arise from resentment or armed conflict; they were men of peace. Faced with the violence of their persecutors, they responded with the meekness of the strong, armed only with the weapon of faith. A peace that Pope Leo would call ‘unarmed’ and ‘disarming’. A peace that overcomes evil with the overflowing love in the hearts of Jesus and Mary.

This lesson must be learnt by all of us, even if we do not live in a context of bloody martyrdom, we must swim against the tide. Without seeking to assign blame or harbouring resentment, we must learn to be agents of communion in the world (cf. Constitution, Art. 6) and see how the martyr, through his suffering, transforms the story of death into a hymn to Life.

SSCC brothers at the Piedra del Mochuelo, where Blessed Teófilo was martyred.