22 April

Anniversary of the Blessing of Picpus Chapel

In a letter dated February 21, 1805, submitted to Gabriel de la Barre and intended for Fr. Isidoro David, we find the first mention of Picpus.

"We have nothing positive to write to you about the many interesting things. The only thing that is easy is the acquisition for thirty years of a house with a church at the Barrier of the Throne, where more than 1400 martyrs are buried!"

The former convent on Picpus Street is less than five hundred meters from the Barrier of the Throne, (Place de la Nation). From the 14th to the 27th of July 1794, the guillotine was put to work there daily.

The Fouquier-Tinville revolutionary court was supplying their daily ration of heads to be severed. One thousand three hundred and six have tumbled at the end of this period.

Picture captions:

1. *Robespierre installed the guillotine at Place du Trone-Renverse, today called Place de la Nation. Photo Credit: forquignon.com*
2. *Picpus Convent (35 Rue de Picpus) in the 1860s.*

In the vicinity, the garden of Canonesas offers a discreet place for burial. Despite the protests of the new owner, three pits are dug there. At nightfall, a sinister procession of dumpers with dripping blood painfully moved to the Picpus Garden.

After being stripped and registered, bodies are thrown in jumble into the pits. Among the record meticulously kept, the big names of ancient France were listed together with the anonymous, the poet Andrés Chénier with the blessed Carmelites of Compiegne.

On November 14, 1796, Princess Amelia of Hohenzollern, whose brother lies in the pits of Picpus, is presented as the purchaser of the land. In 1803, the families of the victims bought the rest of the monastery and the surrounding land. The oratorio people may come to pray for the victims of the Terror.

Madame de Montagu, the sister in law of La Fayette, was the intermediary between the families of the victims and Fr. Coudrin. The Montagu and the Noailles were those who frequented San Roque. The influence of Fr. Coudrin, the upper-class relations of Mother Henriette and her bishop uncle settled the rest.

The "Zealot" sisters arrived on March 22, 1805 and took possession of the convent building. On April 22, 1805, Cardinal Dubelloy, archbishop of Paris, authorized the worship in the chapel.

In the early days, Bishop Chabot and Fr. Coudrin stayed nearby in Saint-Mandé. In June or July of 1805 they moved into the two adjoining houses on Picpus Street. Since then, the twin communities can: “honor the childhood of the Savior" by opening classes for the poor.

With the passage of time it became necessary to enlarge the chapel. As Superior General, Mgr. Bonamie, Archbishop of Chalcedon and successor to the Good Father, blessed the present chapel on April 22, 1841.