

CAPUCHIN SAINTS AND BLESSED

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PREFACE

In 1981, while a missionary in Zambia, I was asked to take in hand the direction of postulants, that is, of men who wished to join the Capuchin Order or who showed some serious interest in doing so. As this worked progressed, it seemed to me that it would be helpful for them to have some knowledge of the Order's history and traditions, especially as expressed in the lives of its saints and blessed. So I compiled a booklet called *Capuchin Saints and Blesseds*, which was published in 1983.

It contained short biographies of the twenty friars whom the church then recognized by those titles. Happily, today their number is much greater – it is ninety-one. This is due principally to the arrival on the canon of saints of the Capuchin martyrs of the French Revolution, the Spanish Civil War, and the Nazi occupation of Poland during World War II. In addition, I am happy to be able to include here the Capuchin nuns, about whom I had access to no information when in Zambia. And there are others also.

They are a mixed bag of humanity, with the strengths and weaknesses, vices and virtues, to which all people are prone. The late Capuchin Cuthbert McCann of Belfast (died 1991) wisely said, 'The saints were not canonized because they were perfect – "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3.23) – but because they offer hope to us who are even more imperfect than they.' Some would have been wonderful

people to live with, some difficult. None would have described themselves as “successful” but they were faithful.

In any event, their lives and deaths were the work of God’s grace without which none of us is anything. To God be the glory for ever and ever. Amen.

NOTE ON CANONIZATION AND BEATIFICATION

Canonization means that a person's name has been added to the canon (Greek: list) of the saints, while beatification means that a person is declared blessed (Latin: beatus) by the church, that is to say, that they enjoy the beatific vision, the vision of God in heaven. In that sense, the blessed are saints no less than those who are called such.

Catholics honour the saints because of the gifts of God they see at work in them. And they pray to them, seeing them as members of the one family of faith, the communion of saints. As Paul asked Christians to pray for him – see Romans 15.30; 2 Corinthians 1.11; Ephesians 6.18-19; and Colossians 4.3 – so we ask the saints to pray for us.

In the early centuries of the church's life, there was no formal process of canonization. Applied almost entirely to martyrs, canonization developed informally in local churches. The bishop, if he established that a person was truly a martyr for Christ, might send an account to neighbouring churches. If these agreed, those whose reputation was thus confirmed were known as vindicated martyrs.

The veneration of confessors – that is, of those who died peacefully after a life of heroic virtue – is not as long-standing as that of the martyrs. A person acquired a reputation for holiness, for an exemplary Christian life, as one who lived by faith, hope and charity.

It seems that the informal process fell victim to popular indiscretion and failure by some bishops to exercise due care in the matter. So it came to be placed in the hands of regional or general councils of the church.

In recent centuries, especially since Popes Urban VIII (1623-1644) and Benedict XIV (1740-1758), the process has become more formal. It involves, among other things, an examination of the person's life, writings and speeches, to see if they are in accord with Christian tradition; this is the *sine qua non*. The process also looks at whether there is in fact a local cult. It looks, too, to see whether alleged miracles, such as cures, said to have been wrought through the person's intercession, are adequately attested, or are explicable by natural causes. In the case of martyrs, and (exceptionally) others, the requirement of a miracle is often dispensed with. If the cult of the holy person is prescribed for the universal church, the person is recognized as a saint, while, if it is simply permitted, or is merely local, then it is called beatification.

Beatification and canonization require papal authorization, even if, occasionally, the formal announcement is delegated to someone else. Because canonization involves a declaration that a given individual now lives with God, it is seen by the church as involving the exercise of infallibility. Beatification is not seen in the same light because it is seen as a permission, not a precept. Saint Thomas Aquinas wrote, 'Since the honour we pay the saints is in a certain sense a profession of faith, i.e., a belief in the glory of the saints,

we must piously believe that in this matter also the judgment of the church is not liable to error.’ (Quodlib. IX, a. 16) While saying nothing about heroic virtue, canonization is generally understood as meaning that the person is in heaven. The wording of decrees of canonization supports this: ‘In honour of Almighty God, we decree and define that Blessed N. is a saint, and we inscribe his (her) name in the canon of the saints.’

**ALPHABETICAL LIST OF CAPUCHIN SAINTS
AND BLESSED, INCLUDING
CAPUCHINESSES.**

Agathangelus and Cassian, Blesseds
Alejandro of Sobradillo, Blessed
Alejo of Terradillos, Blessed
Ambrose of Benaguacil, Blessed
Ambrose of Santibáñez, Blessed
Ángel de Cañete La Real, Blessed
Andrew of Palazuelo, Blessed
Andrew Hyacinth Longhin, Blessed
Angela Maria Astorch, Blessed
Angelus of Acri, Blessed
Anicet Koplinski, Blessed
Apollinaris of Posat, Blessed
Arcángel of Valdavida, Blessed
Aurelio of Ocejó, Blessed
Aurelio of Vinalesa, Blessed
Benedict of Urbino, Blessed
Bernard of Corleone, Blessed
Bernard of Lugar Nuevo de Fenollet, Blessed
Bernard of Offida, Blessed
Bernard of Visantoña, Blessed
Bonaventure of Puzol, Blessed
Carlos of Alcubilla, Blessed
Carmel of Colomé, Blessed
Conrad of Parzham, Saint
Crispín of Cuevas Alta, Blessed
Crispin of Viterbo, Saint
Didacus Joseph of Cadiz, Blessed

Diego of Guadilla, Blessed
Domitilo of Ayoó, Blessed
Eloy of Orihuela, Blessed
Eusebius of Saludes, Blessed
Eustace of Villalquite, Blessed
Felix of Cantalice, Saint
Felix of Nicosia, Blessed
Ferdinand of Santiago, Blessed
Fidelis Chojnacki, Blessed
Fidelis of Puzol, Blessed
Fidelis of Sigmaringen, Saint
Florian Stepniak, Blessed
Florida Cevoli, Blessed
Francis Mary of Camporosso, Blessed
Gabriel of Aróstegui, Blessed
Germán of Carcagente, Blessed
Gil of Puerto de Santa María, Blessed
Gregory of la Mata, Blessed
Henry Krzysztófik, Blessed
Honoratus of Biala Podlaska, Blessed
Honorius of Orihuela, Blessed
Ignatius of Galdácano, Blessed
Ignatius of Láconi, Saint
Ignatius of Santhià, Saint
Ildefonso of Armellada, Blessed
Innocent of Berzo, Blessed
Isabel Calduch Rovira, Blessed
James of Rafelbuñol, Blessed
Jean-Louis of Besançon, Blessed
Jeremiah of Valahia, Blessed
Joaquin of Albocácer, Blessed
John Chrysostom of Gata de Gorgos, Blessed
José of Chauchina, Blessed

José Maria of Manila, Blessed
Joseph of Leonissa, Saint
Lawrence of Brindisi, Saint
Leopold of Herceg Novi, Saint
Luis of Valencina, Blessed
Marco of Aviano, Blessed
Maria Felicidad Masía Farragut, Blessed
Maria Jesús Masía Farragut, Blessed
Maria Teresa Kowalska, Blessed
Maria Veronica Masía Farragut, Blessed
Mary Angela Astorch, Blessed
Mary Magdalen Martinengo, Blessed
Miguel of Grajal, Blessed
Milagros Ortells Gimeno, Blessed
Modesto of Albocácer, Blessed
Nicholas of Gésturi, Blessed
Norberto Cembronos of Villalquite, Blessed
Pacíficus of Ronda, Blessed
Pacíficus of Valencia, Blessed
Peter of Benisa, Blessed
Pio of Pietrelcina, Saint
Primitivus of Villamizar, Blessed
Protase of Sééz, Blessed
Ramirus of Sobradillo, Blessed
Saturninus of Bilbao, Blessed
Sebastian of Nancy, Blessed
Seraphin of Montegranaro, Saint
Symforian Ducki, Blessed
Thomas of Olera, Blessed
Veronica Giuliani, Saint
Yakub of Ghazir, Blessed

DATES OF LITURGICAL CELEBRATIONS OF CAPUCHIN SAINTS AND BLESSED, INCLUDING CAPUCHINESSES

January

- 05 Blessed Didacus Joseph of Cadiz
- 12 Saint Bernard of Corleone

February

- 04 Saint Joseph of Leonissa

April

- 21 Saint Conrad of Parzham
- 24 Saint Fidelis of Sigmaringen
- 30 Blessed Benedict of Urbino

May

- 08 Blessed Jeremiah of Valahia
- 11 Saint Ignatius of Láconi
- 12 Saint Leopold of Herceg Novi
- 18 Saint Felix of Cantalice
- 19 Saint Crispin of Viterbo

June

- 02 Saint Felix of Nicosia
- 08 Blessed Nicholas of Gésturi
- 12 Blessed Florida Cevoli
- 16 Blessed Anicet Koplinski and Companions,
martyrs of the Nazi occupation of Poland
- 26 Blessed Andrew Hyacinth Longhin

July

- 10 Saint Veronica Giuliani
- 21 Saint Lawrence of Brindisi
- 27 Blessed Mary Magdalen Martinengo
- 28 Blessed Maria Teresa Kowalska

August

- 07 Blessed Agathangelus and Cassian
- 13 Blessed Marco of Aviano
- 18 Blessed Jean-Louis of Besançon and the martyrs
of the French Revolution
- 23 Blessed Bernard of Offida

September

- 02 Blessed Apollinaris of Posat
- 19 Saint Francis Mary of Camporosso
- 22 Saint Ignatius of Santhià
- 23 Saint Pio of Pietrelcina
- 26 Blessed Aurelio of Vinalesa and the martyrs of
the Spanish Civil War
- 28 Blessed Innocent of Berzo

October

- 12 Saint Seraphin of Montegranaro
- 13 Blessed Honoratus of Biala Podlaska
- 25 Blessed Maria Jesus Masià Farragut and
Companions
- 31 Blessed Angelo of Acri

December

- 02 Blessed Mary Angela Astorch

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The sources I drew on in writing this book included the following:

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BLESSEDS AGATHANGELUS AND CASSIAN

Francis Noury was born in Vendôme, France, in 1598. In 1619 he joined the Capuchin Order, taking the name of Agathangelus. Shortly after ordination he was assigned to work as a missionary in his home country. Then, in 1628, he was appointed to Syria. He worked principally in Lebanon, then under Syrian control, and was given by people the title of “The Apostle of Lebanon.” Later he went to Egypt where he had close contact with Coptic monks, some of whom he brought into the Catholic Church. He spent five years in and around Cairo until 1638, when he was joined by Cassian.

Cassian Lopes-Netto was a Frenchman, born of Portuguese parents in 1607. He made his profession of vows in 1623 and then continued his studies for the priesthood. After ordination he studied Arabic and Greek, and then, together with Agathangelus, studied Amharic in preparation for their mission to Ethiopia. The two friars began their work in that country in 1638, but were arrested on the orders of the emperor only a few months later. They were jailed in the city of Gondar, then the capital of Ethiopia, for about two months.

Their work in Ethiopia was made more difficult because of restrictions imposed on them by Rome. Agathangelus wrote to the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith about this, ‘To form a judgment about [local] conditions, one must have full and accurate knowledge of all the circumstances.... The teachers of

Christianity cannot have such knowledge, since they are ignorant of the practices of these countries. Wherefore it seems to me that the decision about these things ought to be left to the missionaries. In former times they judged that such communication [in sacred things] should not be forbidden. The opposite opinion destroys every means and hope of doing any good in the mission; indeed, it causes many difficulties.'

Then the two men were brought before Bishop Mark, the head of the Coptic Church in Ethiopia, and ordered to renounce the Catholic faith. Not very long before, Bishop Mark, while still an abbot, had accepted the authority of the pope as a result of dialogue with Agathangelus. But, on being appointed bishop, he became anti-Roman and now became the chief persecutor of the two friars. When called upon to abandon the Catholic faith, Cassian replied, 'We wish to live and die as children of the catholic, apostolic and Roman Church, outside of which there is no salvation. We do not wish to buy our lives with the price of renouncing our faith. We do not wish to enjoy honour and riches which you offer us at the price of our immortal souls.'

Both men were sentenced to be hanged and were brought outside the city to the place of execution. There was a delay, as no one had thought of bringing ropes. Each friar offered the cord of his habit for the purpose, Agathangelus saying the cord was a good rope on which to swing to Paradise. So they died on 7 August 1638. Pope Saint Pius X beatified them in 1905.

BLESSED ANDREW HYACINTH LONGHIN

Andrew Hyacinth Longhin was born into a farming family near Padua, Italy, on 22 November 1863. His baptism took place the following day, during which he received the name Hyacinth Bonaventure. Having finished his elementary education, he decided, at the age of 16, to become a Capuchin. His father opposed the idea since it would leave him alone to tend the land. Hyacinth prevailed, and was invested with the Capuchin habit on 27 August 1879, taking the religious name of Andrew. He finished his secondary education at the friary of Padua, and there made his solemn profession on 4 October 1883. He completed his theological studies at Venice and was there ordained to the priesthood on 19 June 1886.

In 1888, he was appointed spiritual director and professor at the Capuchin seminary at Udine; in 1889 he was director and professor of the Capuchin high school seminarians at Padua, and, in 1891, of the theology students in Venice. On 18 April 1902 he was elected provincial minister of Venice.

On 16 April 1904, Pope Pius X appointed Andrew bishop of Pius' home diocese of Treviso, glad to have chosen 'one of the most beautiful flowers of the Capuchin Order' for his own diocese. On 12 August 1907, Pius described Andrew as, 'One of my firstborn sons whom I gave as a gift to my favourite diocese, and I am thrilled every time I hear someone praising him, for

he is a truly holy, learned, old-fashioned bishop, who will leave behind in the diocese an indelible mark of his apostolic zeal.'

Ordained bishop in Rome on 17 April 1904, Andrew arrived in Treviso on 6 August, determined to be a good shepherd, sparing himself 'neither toil nor sacrifice, determined to give his all' for his church, 'his blood, his soul, and even life itself.' For thirty-two years he was a good shepherd to the church of Treviso, while continuing to live Capuchin life to the full.

He devoted much of his energy to the proclamation of the word. Following the example of Pius X, he gave priority to catechesis, teaching the faith through youth clubs, and to Catholic adults by sponsoring cultural events, study days, schools for catechists, and two diocesan catechetical congresses, in 1922 and in 1932. He became known as 'the bishop of the catechism.' He loved his priests and looked after them like a father, taking special care of them even from their seminary days, giving them monthly days of recollection and retreats. He held three pastoral visitations of all 213 parishes, in 1905, 1912 and again in 1926. In 1911, he celebrated a diocesan synod which was considered 'a true masterpiece of order and precision,' which was greatly appreciated by Pope Pius X.

He was a spiritual guide for Saint Maria Bertilla Boscardin, Giuseppe Toniolo, Guido Negri, and Mother Olivia Bonaldo. He enjoyed a close relationship with Saint Leopold Mandic, and also with Pius X, as we know from his copious correspondence, and from his own

words, ‘We who... were so close to his [Pius’s] good heart.’ He supported the laity, especially youth movements, being convinced that – as he insisted in his testament – ‘Today’s families, parishes, the nation, and the world are in need of holy people.’ In April 1914, he declared as sacred ‘the right of workers to organize... in unions for their economic and moral welfare.’ In 1920, Bishop Andrew lent his support to the Leghe Bianche, a union movement with Christian leanings, showing himself an advocate of workers and the poor. At Treviso, in 1920, he founded the Pius X Diocesan College to assure a Christian upbringing for the young.

Without ever abandoning his position or responsibilities, he courageously faced the challenge of the First World War, befriending and offering support to civilians, refugees, soldiers, the wounded and priests. On 27 April 1917, he vowed to build a church in honour of the Blessed Virgin Mary, our Help. Hailed as ‘the bishop of Piave and Montello,’ he was awarded the wartime Cross of Merit. After the war, he travelled throughout his diocese to encourage the re-building of forty-seven churches destroyed during the war, to heal divisions between people, and to re-awaken Christian life by boldly speaking out to save his faithful from anti-Christian and subversive ideologies. The bishops of the Veneto region considered him their “campaign patriarch”, adviser, theologian and tireless apostle. In October 1923, Pius XI acknowledged the ‘great services’ Longhin had provided him, saying, ‘He has worked so much for the church.’ In 1923, Andrew served as apostolic administrator of the diocese of Padua, and, in

1927-28, as visitor and apostolic administrator of the diocese of Udine.

On 4 October 1928, Andrew was named titular archbishop of Patraso. In 1929, on the occasion of his silver jubilee as bishop, Cardinal Pietro La Fontaine wrote, 'It is with joy and admiration that I see in him a copy of the Gospel's Good Shepherd, so very close to the original.' Taken ill on 3 October 1935, Longhin began a nine-month Calvary of suffering. He was able to celebrate Mass until 14 February 1936. Thereafter, he received daily Communion. He died on 26 June 1936. An impressive funeral was celebrated on 30 June, with many people remarking, 'He was truly a saint!' On 5 November 1936, his remains were interred in Treviso cathedral.

He was declared blessed by Pope John Paul II on 20 October 2002.

BLESSED ANGELUS OF ACRI

Angelus was born in the small town of Acri in the province of Calabria in Italy. As a young man he entered the Capuchin novitiate but left after a short time. He had not known what the life was going to be like. After spending a while at home he asked to be re-admitted, and he was. But once again he found the going too hard and left. Back at home he found no peace and decided to try yet again. Surprisingly, he was admitted to the novitiate for the third time. He still found it very hard and was often tempted to leave. In a great spiritual struggle he prayed, 'Lord, I cannot trust myself. You know my weakness. Help me with your grace.' He resolved to consecrate each hour of the day to some aspect of the passion of Jesus. Strengthened by this, he persevered till the end of the novitiate.

As a priest, he sometimes became so completely absorbed in the Mass, and in thinking of the sufferings of Jesus, that he completely forgot his surroundings. After Mass, he used to spend a long time in thanksgiving.

In 1702 he was appointed to preach missions. He prepared with great care but, in his first sermon, after speaking for only a short time, he forgot everything and had to leave the pulpit. Returning to his room, he prayed to God for help. Then he seemed to hear a voice saying, 'Fear nothing. I will give you the gift of preaching.' Angelus asked, 'Who are you?' and the voice answered, 'I am who I am. In future you will preach in a familiar

style, with simple words, so that all may understand you.’

Now Angelus knew what God wanted. He decided to prepare for preaching more by prayer than by personal effort. The result was that God worked through him. He spoke with such clarity and depth that his hearers were moved.

Angelus preached far and wide in Italy. On one occasion he was asked to preach in Naples, away from his home area. Some people there laughed at his accent but he kept speaking anyway. The story is told that one of those who was laughing the most got up to leave the church. Angelus interrupted the sermon to ask people to pray for an unfortunate soul who was going to meet an unexpected death. Hardly had he said that when the person who had been laughing dropped dead!

In addition to preaching well it was said that he could read people's thoughts even when they did their best to conceal them. After thirty-six years of preaching, he died on 30 October 1739. In 1825, Pope Leo XII declared him blessed.

BLESSED APOLLINARIS OF POSAT

John James Morel was born in the village of Posat near Fribourg in Switzerland in 1739. His father left home without returning before the birth of the youngest daughter, leaving the mother to rear three children alone, while continuing to work as a midwife. His father's brother, a newly-ordained priest, undertook to look after John James and had him educated by Jesuits. They considered him an outstanding pupil and invited him to join them, but he had already decided on the Capuchin Order. He entered it on 26 September 1762, and was given the name of Apollinaris.

Following the very unusual custom of the time, he was ordained just two years after becoming a novice, and then continued with his studies. When these were complete, he was appointed preacher and confessor. A former teacher and guardian of his wrote, 'I lived with him for seven years. I can testify to his extraordinary zeal for the conversion of sinners, instructing people through sermons and catechesis. Few would equal him. He never spared effort when helping in parishes or on retreats. What he said was always adapted to the level of his listeners.'

In 1774, he was appointed teacher of young clerics of the Order. He impressed on their minds that piety and learning were the two most important qualities in the life of a priest.

Then began a series of troubles. First, a man brought a charge of libel against him. The verdict, unusually, declared him innocent and praised him for his behaviour. Then he was asked by a public official to provide tuition for his two sons. This went so well that others asked to join them. But some friars complained that his new work was disturbing regular observance. Then someone published libellous material about him and the public official.

Although exonerated, Apollinaris, for the sake of peace, asked for a transfer. He was sent to Stans to take charge of the friary school and catechesis. His classes were so good that adults began to attend them. But detraction followed him. He was accused of ‘confusing the students’ and not teaching the full faith. Then accusations of immorality were made. The matter went to court, where town officials and his Capuchin brothers supported him; his name was cleared. He was urged to take a case for libel against his detractors, but he refused, instead asking to be removed from Stans.

In 1788, he was appointed to the East as a missionary but first had to go to Paris to study eastern languages. While there, he became chaplain to the five-thousand-strong German-speaking community in the city.

Then the Revolution broke out. On 13 February 1790, religious orders were suppressed, their houses closed and the religious scattered. In future, under the *Civil Constitution of the Clergy*, bishops and priests would be chosen by the people, whether Catholic or not, and there would be no contact with the pope in the matter. Pope

Pius VI condemned the new law as interference by the state in church affairs.

Detraction followed Apollinaris to France. He was accused of taking the oath, and the story even reached Switzerland. But he emphatically denied doing so. He worked underground for the German community, even though, as a Swiss citizen, he could have left the country safely had he wished. On 27 April 1792, he wrote to a confrère, Br. Jann at Altdorf, 'The Lord always looked after me in my troubles in Switzerland.... Don't be sorry for me.... I will take the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord.' To another he wrote, 'As a man, I am afraid. As a Christian, I hope. As a religious, I am filled with joy. As a pastor of five thousand souls I rejoice that I have not taken the oath. Soon, France, saturated with the blood of so many martyrs, will enjoy a new springtime of religion on its soil. My father and my mother left me, but God has taken care of me. The martyr's crown is a baptism which I must undergo, but I do not know when it may come.'

He went to the public authorities and declared, 'I am not a rebel, but I have not taken the oath.' He was arrested, and, together with about one hundred and eighty-five other people, mostly priests, was imprisoned in a confiscated Carmelite church. A priest who escaped wrote that Apollinaris spent his time hearing confessions, praying, and performing works of service.

In 1792, a new oath was proposed. It was ambiguous, but most priests, including those in the Carmelite church, regarded it as unacceptable. The penalty for not swearing

it was deportation, except in Paris, where the Commune insisted on the death penalty. On 31 August, the prisoners were told they would be deported, but, in fact, a mass grave had already been dug for them. On Sunday, 2 September, they were brought to court in groups of two. The “trial” consisted of one question, ‘Have you taken the oath?’ If the answer was ‘No’ defendants were moved on to swordsmen, who killed them. By 8 p.m., all, including Apollinaris, were dead.

On 17 October 1925, Pope Pius XI declared Apollinaris and one hundred and ninety other of the September martyrs blessed.

BLESSED BENEDICT OF URBINO

Benedict was born on 14 May to the noble family of the Passionei in the palace of Urbino, Italy, in 1560. His father and mother died when he was only seven years of age. At his mother's deathbed, Benedict placed himself under the care of Our Lady, asking her protection throughout his life. As a young man he studied at the universities of Perugia and Padua. In his studies, he prayed, 'Grant me, Lord, that knowledge which will teach me to know you. But grant me above all the grace to love you; because I desire to know you only so that I may love you.' At the age of twenty-two he obtained a doctorate in law, much to the satisfaction of his relatives who expected him to add honour to the family name with a legal career.

After graduation, he went to Rome to enter on a career in the household of a cardinal. But he did not stay there long. He returned to Urbino to find his real vocation. After much thought, he entered the Capuchin friary there on 1 May 1584.

However, his poor health soon created problems. The superiors believed that he could not live the Capuchin life and so they decided to send him away. Benedict heard about this and asked Our Lady for health. His health improved so much that he was able to continue to ordination and undertake missionary work. With his Capuchin confrère, Lawrence of Brindisi (later canonized) and ten other friars, he went to Bohemia to

preach the faith. After some years he returned to his native Italy to continue preaching.

Among his confrères he was noted for his humility. He would confess openly even the smallest fault. When he was told that only novices were expected to do that, he replied, 'I'm still a novice in virtue.' He was a great lover of poverty, having little in his room, being careful always to return books to the library and writing out sermons on scraps of paper. As a Guardian he was particularly strict about poverty. He slept only three hours a night, and fasted nearly the whole year.

Even during his lifetime Benedict was noted as a worker of miracles and these increased after his death in 1625. Pope Pius IX beatified him on 10 February 1867.

SAINT BERNARD OF CORLEONE

Philip Latini was born on the island of Sicily, Italy, on 6 February 1605. His father was a shoemaker and taught his son his trade. But the young man, true to the traditions of his island and his town, was violent and aggressive. Although he was brought up in the Catholic faith and well-instructed in it, he was more interested in soldiering, and spent his time practising with his sword, gaining the reputation of being the best swordsman in Sicily. He was strongly built and willing to challenge anyone to a fight. Despite this, however, he showed respect and even care for the elderly, and sought to protect the defenceless from injustice. He prayed to Saint Francis and used to visit a shrine on pilgrimage.

One day a foolish man challenged him to a sword fight. Without too much thought or effort, Philip wounded him severely, cutting off a hand. He thought he had killed him and fled to the Capuchin friary for sanctuary. Reflecting afterwards on what he had done, he felt sorry and decided to change his way of life.

He was admitted to the Capuchin novitiate on 13 December 1632 and given the name Bernard. He now let loose his aggression on his sinfulness. He fasted almost permanently on bread and water, slept for only three hours a night on a board with a block of wood for a pillow, and scourged himself to blood seven times a day. If he was given any pleasant tasting food he would taste a little without swallowing it and leave the rest aside. He

would not wear a new habit or have any new furnishing in his room. He worked long hours caring for the sick, and, with the passage of time, became gentle and kind.

God rewarded him with great graces in prayer, including the gift of knowing the date of his death four months in advance, and the grace of miracles. He died in Palermo, Sicily, on 12 January 1667, and was beatified by Pope Clement XIII on 15 May 1768. Pope John Paul II canonized him on 10 June 2001.

SAINT BERNARD OF OFFIDA

Bernard was born in 1604 to a poor family in the town of Offida, Italy. There were seven children in the family and Bernard was always known among them for his good conduct. He would take the blame when others did wrong and accept their punishment. As he grew up he was employed as a herdsman. In that unexacting job, he had plenty of time for prayer and reflection, and he used it to the full. On Sundays, he spent almost the whole day in the church, without food. It was obvious to all that God was calling him to his service, so it was no surprise when Bernard entered the Capuchin novitiate.

In the Order he led such a quiet, hidden life that almost nothing is known of him until his sixtieth year when he was transferred to his hometown of Offida. His work was to collect food for the friars and answer the doorbell. This work brought him into contact with the people, who soon recognized his qualities. They noted his gratitude for any help offered, the fact that he never accepted anything unnecessary and for his gift of reconciling enemies. For this reason the people called him "The Angel of Peace."

Once a man intended to tell him what he was suffering because of quarrels between his wife and his mother. But before he could begin, Bernard said to him, 'Listen, your mother is a cross for your wife, and your mother and your wife together are a cross for you. Bear it patiently!' Those few words enabled the man to find peace.

Bernard's gifts as a peacemaker were such that two bishops said that he had done more for their dioceses than many prominent missionaries and preachers.

To the end of his life Bernard had a great love for Our Lady, being especially faithful to the rosary. When he was eighty he was relieved of external work, but continued to work within the friary. He cared for the sick friars, provided food for the poor who came to the door and occasionally warned his confrères about carelessness in the matter of poverty. He hated waste and used to say, 'Whatever we don't need, Christ's poor do.'

He died at the age of 90 in 1694. He was canonized in 2005 by Pope Benedict XVI.

SAINT CONRAD OF PARZHAM

John Birndorfer was born in Bavaria in the south of Germany in the year 1818. His parents were small farmers near the town of Parzham. As a young man, Conrad used to look for quiet places where he could pray by himself. He had a particular devotion to Mary, the Mother of Jesus, saying the rosary every day, and often walking long distances to visit her shrines. His family lived a long way from the church but that did not prevent him from going to Mass often, even in cold or wet weather.

At the age of thirty-one, he made a will in which he surrendered his share of a large inheritance and then joined the Capuchin Order, receiving the name of Conrad. After his profession of vows in 1842, he was appointed to the friary at Altötting, famous for its shrine to Mary, the Mother of Mercy. He was given the job of porter, that is, of answering the door to callers. Since it was not unusual to have hundreds or even thousands of visitors a day to the shrine, his job was a busy one. Conrad continued at this work for 52 years until his death in 1894. It was his responsibility to care for the poor who came to the door, to find confessors who those who wished to confess their sins and to extend a welcome to strangers. He spent a great part of the day walking in and out to the door and back again, always there to be called by the bell. In the evening, when things were a little quieter, he spent his time in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. It was the same later on and he

was accustomed to spend a good part of each night in prayer.

He wrote to a friend, 'My way of life is wholly this: to love and to suffer, always contemplating, adoring, alive to the indescribable love that God bears towards the least of his creatures. There is no journey's end in such love of God.... The busier I am the more united to God I feel. I talk with God, easily, like a son with his father.' And he added, 'The crucifix is my book.'

His work was often monotonous, while at the same time giving him very little rest. Often when he would be about to sit down for a few moments, the bell would ring again. He tried to find periods of silence during the day so that he could turn to God but it was often impossible. In addition, the help he offered to people was not always well received. One day he gave a man a plate of soup, but, far from being thankful, the man hurled it in his face, saying, 'Eat those slops yourself!'

In 1881, a serious illness nearly took his life, but he recovered and returned to his old work until three days before his death on 21 April 1894. He was beatified in 1930 by Pope Pius XI and canonized four years later by the same pope.

SAINT CRISPIN OF VITERBO

At Viterbo, Italy, on 13 November 1668, Peter Fioretti was born to a family of shopkeepers. When he was five years old his mother consecrated him to Our Lady of the Oaks near Viterbo. She said to him, 'Mary is also your mother. I have made you a gift to her.' Peter tried throughout his life to be faithful to his mother's wish.

When he had finished school, he began to learn Latin. He had ability, but his parents had no money to pay a teacher, so he went to live with an uncle who was a shoe-maker. His uncle taught him the trade, and so Peter was able to make enough money to pay for his tuition.

One day, seeing a group of Capuchin novices in a procession, he was so moved that he applied immediately to join the Order. The provincial minister, Angelo of Rieti, accepted him. But Peter met with opposition from his family, especially from his mother. Reminding her that she had already given him to the Virgin Mary, she finally consented to his going to "serve the Madonna." Having entered the novitiate, Peter also met with resistance from the novice master, who, seeing his frailty, advised him to return home, while allowing him to stay as a guest until the provincial came. Angelo accepted him, and gave him the name of Crispin, the patron saint of shoemakers. That was on 22 July 1693.

During his fifty-seven years as a Capuchin, Crispin served as a cook, infirmarian, orchard keeper and

questor. Oddly enough, he was never asked to work as a shoe-maker, his trade!

As a young Capuchin he took as his patron Saint Felix of Cantalice whose memory was still fresh in the minds of many people. (Felix had died in 1587.) As cook he set up a shrine to Our Lady in the kitchen, and it was said that sick people were cured by eating food that he placed there for Mary's blessing. When stationed near Rome, one of the pope's servants was brought to him, seriously ill. Crispin brought the sick man to his kitchen shrine and prayed for him. Seeing the sick man recover, the pope's doctor said to Crispin, 'Brother, your remedies are more effective than ours', to which Crispin replied, 'The Blessed Virgin can do more than all the doctors in the world.'

On another occasion a prominent man who had led an evil life asked Crispin to pray to Our Lady for him. Crispin replied, 'Sir, you want Our Lady to cure you. But, tell me, doesn't the person who offends the Son offend also his Mother? True veneration of Our Lady consists in not offending her Son in any way.' The brother's rebuke moved the man to repentance and he promised to amend his life. Crispin blessed him; he was cured, and kept his promise.

One day, when Crispin was talking to the provincial minister, a message arrived saying that all the friars in one friary were ill with a contagious disease; help was needed. Without hesitation, Crispin volunteered. The provincial hesitated, saying that he did not want to send Crispin against his will. Crispin replied, 'Will, Father?

What will? When I entered the Order I left my will at home. Here I recognize only your will.’ When the provincial pointed out that there was real danger in the situation, Crispin said, ‘That’s nothing. I have a marvellous preventative invented by Saint Francis - obedience.’ In fact, Crispin healed the whole community and returned in perfect health himself.

He knew everyone and everyone knew him. He had an amazing ability to integrate a life of feverish activity, on the one hand, with a solid interior life on the other. Without concern for his wellbeing, Crispin cared for those stricken during epidemics. As questor, he begged for food, not only on behalf of his Capuchin brothers, but also to provide for all the needy of his big “family.” For the friars, he would beg only for necessities, nothing more.

Crispin accomplished a remarkable amount of good in both social and spiritual assistance, energetically ministering among the sick, the imprisoned, sinners, unwed mothers, families experiencing hardship and those on the brink of despair. He was a skilled peacemaker within his own Capuchin community and among others. Before beginning any task, Crispin always prayed first to Mary, his mother. He possessed a contagious joviality, and his ministry was marked by a deep sense of joy. Nothing escaped his notice, particularly in discerning what people really needed. Daily he visited the sick and local prisoners, pleading their cause, urging the guards to respect their human dignity, bringing them bread, chestnuts and tobacco, and arranging for families to take turns providing the

prisoners with home-cooked meals. Babies were often abandoned on the doorstep of the friary and then placed in the care of *Our Lady of the Star Shelter*. Crispin took a personal interest in these foundlings, arranging for their being apprenticed in one trade or another, and keeping in touch with many of them well into their adult lives. He was filled with intuition and insight which prompted many learned people to seek his counsel.

He was convinced that much human misery, both material and spiritual, was due to injustice. He therefore set out to confront it by admonishing merchants, reminding employers of workers' rights, and asking forgiveness for debts, whenever possible. He used his sense of humour to lighten people's burdens. Every little occurrence found its way to his ears. Without hesitation, he would offer himself as a mediator, friend, and counsellor.

Nonetheless, he was not without both critics and crosses, both in and outside the friary. Some called him opinionated and aggressive; others, a hypocrite. Some friars expected Crispin to make their life easier. When their expectations were not met, they became embittered. Besides many letters, Crispin left a treasury of maxims, among them, 'One doesn't get to heaven in a taxi.' He was a hard worker, and when work piled up he used to say, 'This is good; Paradise is not for lazybones.' A favourite saying of his was, 'Let us love God who deserves it!'

During the winter of 1747-48, he fell ill and was transferred to the provincial infirmary at Rome. When

the doctor told him he was going to die, Crispin said, 'I rejoiced when I heard them say, "Let us go to God's house."' (Psalm 122.1) On 19 May 1750, the 82-year-old Crispin died of pneumonia. He was beatified by Pope Pius VII on 7 September 1806. His incorrupt body is honoured in a Capuchin church in Rome. Pope John Paul II canonized him on 20 June 1982.

BLESSED DIDACUS JOSEPH OF CADIZ

Joseph Francis Lopez Caamano was born in Cadiz, Spain in 1743. As a boy he was so slow at school that he was given the nickname of “the Stupid One.” Yet later on in life he was so outstanding in his knowledge that he was called a second Saint Paul. A school companion of his, the Dominican Antonio Querero, who heard him preach was astonished that Joseph knew so much and concluded that his former school companion had received exceptional graces.

Didacus Joseph's early years as a Capuchin were not unusual. He entered the novitiate in Seville and made his profession in 1759. After completing his studies for the priesthood and being ordained he was appointed to be a preacher. It was at this point that Didacus Joseph, as he was known in the Order, surprised everyone. The “Stupid One” impressed people by the extraordinary power of his preaching. He prepared his sermons, not so much by study, as by prayer. He used to scourge himself until blood flowed, saying, ‘My sins and the sins of the people compel me to do it. Those who have been charged with the conversion of sinners must remember that the Lord has imposed on them the sins of all their clients. By means of our penances we should atone for the sins of our fellow men and so preserve them and ourselves from eternal death. It would hardly be too much if we shed the last drop of our blood for their conversion.’

He journeyed throughout Spain preaching devotion to the Holy Trinity and Our Lady. His impact was so great that he came to be called the apostle of the century. He was called upon to fill difficult offices in the Church. The “Stupid One” had come a long way. He died at the age of 58 in 1801, and, in 1894, was beatified by Pope Leo XIII.

SAINT FELIX OF CANTALICE

In the Italian village of Cantalice, Felix Porri was born in 1515. As a boy he herded cattle and later became a farm labourer. He never went to school and remained illiterate all his life. His heart was attracted to God, and, in the evening after work, he used to spend his time in prayer. He used to regret his inability to go daily to Mass. He would gladly have given his whole life to God but he could see no way of doing this.

One day, when he was ploughing in the fields, the oxen pulling the plough broke loose and ran wildly. They knocked Felix down and pulled the plough over his body. The neighbours ran out expecting to find him dead but only his clothes had been torn and he himself was unhurt. This incident moved Felix to commit himself completely to God so that, at the age of twenty-eight, he joined the Capuchins.

While a novice, he suffered from various illnesses and the friars thought more than once of sending him home, as he seemed unable to live the life. By a great act of will, Felix rose from his sick bed and took a full part in all the normal activities of the friars. In fact, he suffered no more ill health until his death.

After his profession of vows, he was appointed to a friary in Rome to be a questor, that is, to beg on the streets for food for the friars. For forty years he went barefoot through the city with his begging bag over his shoulder; he was polite, gentle and simple. He used to

say to his confrères, 'Let us go, with rosary in hand, eyes to the ground and our spirit in heaven.' The people called him *Brother Deo Gratias*, (Brother Thanks be to God), because he said it so often. One day on the street he met two duellists with sword in their hands. He asked them to repeat after him, 'Deo gratias!' which they finally agreed to do. After taking him as arbiter of their quarrel, they separated as friends. Felix spoke little but what he said was worth hearing. He had a great love for children and used to compose songs for them. He would sing these songs with anyone who came along, and was friends with Saints Camillus de Lellis, John Leonardi, Philip Neri and Charles Borromeo.

Felix was soft-hearted but not soft-headed. On one occasion people called him to a house to pray for a man who lay in bed and for whom the doctors had given up hope. Perhaps the brother would have a word of comfort for him? Felix looked at the man and called out, 'Get up, lazy-bones! There's nothing wrong with you but lack of fresh air and exercise. Out of bed!' The man rose from bed, recovered.

Nor was he afraid to challenge those in high office. He once said to the Cardinal of San Severino, 'My lord Cardinal, you have been appointed Protector of the Order to protect it, not to meddle in matters that belong to the superiors.' To Cardinal Montalto, who had been a friar, on the eve of a papal election, he said, 'If you are elected pope, act as pope for God's glory and for the good of the Church; otherwise you would have done better to have remained a simple friar.' The cardinal was

elected pope a few days later and took the name of Sixtus V; he is known to history as a reformer.

Once, when plague and famine struck Rome, Felix gave away to the poor much of what he had collected for the friars. The guardian of the friary objected, saying that there would be nothing left for the brothers if Felix kept this up. But Felix replied, 'Do you think that the friars will starve if the poor are fed? Believe me, if the poor are fed, the friars will not go hungry.' And he got his way. He had a great love for Mary, the mother of Jesus, and he prayed to her for several hours each evening. It was even said that she appeared to him and placed the child Jesus in his arms. He used to commend to her care the people who provided food for the friars.

Like Saint Francis before him, Felix loved poverty. He would not accept money from anyone because of the prohibition of Saint Francis. Once when somebody, unknown to him, had put money in his bag, Felix found himself unable to lift it. Surprised, he opened the bag and found the money. He threw it away and cheerfully and easily took up the bag and went on his rounds.

He has been called "a street contemplative" because he prayed as went along. But, when he returned to his friary in the evening he prayed again, and for much of the night also.

When he was nearly eighty he finally had to give up work. He said, 'The ass can do no more; he has fallen down.' He had spent his life going out to Rome; in his dying it seemed that all of Rome came in to him,

everyone from cardinals to children to the ordinary men and women of the city. As he lay dying he composed and sang a new hymn that he repeated for days: -

‘Jesus, Jesus, O my love,
why delay? Come, take my heart;
and neither now nor e’er again
give back my heart to me.’

From the beginning of the Capuchin reform in the early sixteenth century, Felix has been regarded as the friar who best embodied its spirit. Indeed, not long before he joined the Order, Bernardino of Ochino, Vicar General of the Order, had gone over to the Protestant reform and Pope Paul III was minded to suppress the Capuchins altogether, saying, ‘Soon there will be no more Capuchins.’ But Felix, by his evident holiness, helped the Order surmount the crisis. Felix died on the feast of Pentecost, 18 May 1587. He was the first Capuchin to be canonized, being raised to the honours of the altar by Pope Clement XI in 1709.

SAINT FELIX OF NICOSIA

Felix was born at Nicosia, in Sicily, Italy, in the year 1715. His parents were poor but they gave their son the gift of faith, a gift that he cherished all his life. As a young man he learned his father's trade, that of shoe-making. By the time he was twenty his parents were dead, so Felix applied to join the Capuchins. This request was the first of a series of lifelong encounters with a heavy-handed, unsympathetic authority. His application was refused. He prayed, waited, then asked again and was refused again. This went on for eight years until he was finally admitted on 19 October 1743.

After making his profession of vows, Felix was sent to his hometown to be questor, that is, to go around begging for food for the friars. His behaviour in this work was quiet, gentle, humble, and of such a kind that all sorts of people asked for his prayers and advice. He received extraordinary gifts. It was said that he was lifted into the air while praying, that he could foretell the future and that he could be in two places at one time.

However, his life in the friary was very hard. He had the misfortune to be stationed in a house which, through some canonical aberration, had the same guardian for twenty-four years. This man criticized and humiliated Felix at every opportunity. Whatever Felix did was wrong, it seemed, in his eyes: either what Felix did, or how or why he did it, or why he had not done something else instead.

Many years later, when Felix lay dying, the guardian even criticized him for dying without first asking permission! So Felix asked for permission, and - true to form - the guardian refused it, saying he alone had the authority to decide such matters. When the doctor came he could find no pulse - yet Felix was still living. The guardian said he was waiting for permission to die. As he said the prayers for the dying and pronounced the words, 'Go forth, Christian soul...' Felix died.

Pope Leo XIII beatified him on 12 February 1888, and he was canonized by Pope Benedict XVI on 23 October 2005.

SAINT FIDELIS OF SIGMARINGEN: 24 APRIL

Mark Rey (or Roy) was born at Sigmaringen in Germany in 1577. When he had completed his studies in philosophy and law at the University of Freiburg im Breisgau, the parents of three young noblemen were looking for a tutor who would accompany their sons on a “Grand Tour” of Europe. Professors at the university drew their attention to Mark whom they considered qualified for the position by both moral and mental gifts. He accepted the position, and the group began their journey in 1604. To the young men who had been entrusted to his care, he pointed out not only things of cultural interest but matters of spiritual significance also. He himself was a remarkable example. In six years of supervising their travels he frequently attended Mass. In every town where he came, he visited hospitals and churches, passed several hours on his knees in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, and sometimes gave the poor the clothes off his back. The young men said they never saw him angry.

Returning home, Mark followed the legal profession as an advocate at Colmar in Alsace, where he became known as the “poor man's lawyer.” He carefully avoided saying anything that might detract from the reputation of an adversary. He gained a doctorate in law, and then went on to teach it at his *alma mater*. But he became disillusioned with his profession when he saw that some lawyers, motivated by greed, acted unjustly: on one occasion, he overheard them discuss how to prolong a

case so as to win larger fees. It was this that finally prompted him to abandon law.

Mark had an older brother in the Capuchins, so it was natural that he should think of them. He joined the order in 1612, receiving the name of Fidelis, meaning faithful. He quickly completed his theology studies, and, after ordination to the priesthood, was appointed preacher. In community, he was considered to be a wise adviser and was appointed Guardian (local leader) after only a few years.

In this position he worked hard to promote Capuchin life. He insisted on the strict observance of poverty, tolerating no violation of it. But he was stricter towards himself than to others, and was especially kind to friars who were ill. When a disease broke out among the soldiers of the garrison in the town of Feldkirch he personally undertook their care and gave them every service he could.

In 1622, the Vatican Congregation of *Propaganda Fide*, (now today as the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples), which had been set up shortly before by Pope Gregory XV, sent Fidelis to the Grisons area of Switzerland with eight other friars to counter the influence of the followers of John Calvin and Ulrich Zwingli. His work in the Grisons was so successful that it aroused the hostility of his opponents. The local bishop (of Coire) sent a full account of his work to the Congregation in Rome. Fidelis had long prayed to God that he would be given the grace of martyrdom. Now his prayer was about to be heard.

On 24 April 1622, he went to confession, celebrated Mass and preached. At the end of the sermon, which he delivered with exceptional fervour, he stood silently for a while, seemingly in ecstasy. He had already foretold his death to several persons, and began signing his letters, 'Father Fidelis, near to the day when he becomes food for worms.' He travelled to Seewis, and his companions on the way noted that he was particularly cheerful. He used to say, 'It is because of faith that we exchange the present for the future.'

On arrival, he was shot at by a Calvinist. Local Catholics urged him to leave for his safety, and he did so, but later decided to return. On his way back he was confronted by twenty Calvinist soldiers who demanded that he renounce the Catholic faith. When he refused, they killed him. His remains are buried in the Capuchin church at Weltkirchen, Feldkirch, Austria.

He was the first member of the new Congregation to die for the Catholic faith. Fidelis had indeed been faithful until death and received the crown of life. (Revelation 2.10) He was canonized by Pope Benedict XIV in 1746.

BLESSED FLORIDA CEVOLI

Lucretia Helena Cevoli was born on 11 November 1685. She came from a well-off family and received a good Christian education. She spent her early teens at a convent school run by the Poor Clares in Pisa. It may have been through them that she received her religious vocation.

The Capuchinesses were reluctant to receive her because they doubted if she would be suitable for the hardships of their life. But eventually they relented and she was received into the Order on the feast of the Body and Blood of Christ, 8 June 1703, in the monastery at Tiferno, Italy. She was given the name of Florida. Her novice mistress was Sister (later Saint) Veronica Giuliani. They lived and worked there all their adult lives.

Florida valued Veronica's spiritual direction so highly that she asked to remain a novice for an extra three years in order to benefit from her counsel. But she was a different person from her and developed spiritually along the path that God led her. Her devotional life was strong, with priority given to the cross and the eucharist. She went to confession daily. A hard worker, at different times, she looked after the kitchen, the church, the infirmary and dealt with callers at the door. She carried on a large correspondence with people who wrote to her for advice or prayer. Her motto was, 'Beloved Jesus, your will be done, not ours.'

Florida received on her head the marks of the crown of thorns Jesus endured in his passion. (See John 19.2) It was said that she also bore - invisibly - in her hands, feet and side the marks of the five wounds of the passion of Jesus. In her daily activities, she tried to keep her heart fixed on God, while at the same time doing her work well. She used to say, 'You need a hundred eyes and as many hands in the service of others, but the heart must be with God alone.'

Veronica was elected abbess and Florida vicar of the house. Despite their preoccupation with God – or perhaps because of it – they were both practical, down-to-earth people who took good care of the sisters and ran the house well.

Suffering, both physical and spiritual, was Florida's constant companion. Her confessor ordered her to write a detailed account of these. Reluctantly, she complied, but, when he died, she recovered the manuscript and threw it on a fire! She had a dislike for anything exhibitionistic. But she carefully preserved Veronica's *Diary*.

In 1764, Florida stood down from her position as vicar as her health was beginning to decline seriously. Her own remaining task was to prepare for death. Her constant prayer was, 'Help us to love God and one another.' And her last words were, 'Beloved, I can do no more.' Aged eighty-two, she died in 1767.

The cause of her beatification began fifty years after her death, as was then the custom. For a long time little seemed to happen. But then, in 1928, a six year old boy from Tiferno, Augustine Panfili, became seriously ill with heart and lung problems. His doctors saw his position as irrecoverable. But his family prayed to Florida and, after sleeping for about twenty minutes, he woke up, got up, and had something to eat; he was fully recovered. Florida was beatified in 1993.

SAINT FRANCIS MARY OF CAMPOROSSO

In a cemetery in Genoa, Italy, a statue of Saint Francis Mary may be seen bearing the following inscription: 'Francis of Camporosso was born on 27 December 1804 and died on 17 September 1866. This poor man of Christ was more blessed in giving than in receiving. With bread and advice and consolation, he was ever prepared to minister to the sufferings and needs of all who came to him. His austere and holy life he crowned with the sacrifice he made of himself at the beginning of the epidemic of 1866. The sorrow and gratitude of the people prompted them to immortalize his image in this marble statue.' It needed only a few words to say all that needed to be said about this apostle of the people.

Francis Mary was baptized John Evangelist Croese and grew up to be a herdsman in his home village of Camporosso near San Remo. Later he joined the Capuchins in Genoa. He expressed his ideal simply, 'I came to the friary to be its beast of burden.' For many years he had the task of looking after the sick friars.

Then he was appointed to do the work of begging for food. He had the job of questor for forty years. He called at the palaces of the rich but more often at the homes of the poor to distribute to them what he had received. He used to go to the red light areas of the city and there he was sometimes stoned. When this happened he would pick up the stones and kiss them. Gradually people came to respect him and would ask him to pray for them. He

would then say to them, 'Go to Our Lady! Pray to her and don't forget to say that poor Brother Francis sent you. She'll help, you'll see.' Soon it was reported that he was working miracles, cures and conversions of all sorts. Rich and poor came to seek his advice.

He often spent the entire night in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. When an epidemic of cholera broke out in 1866 he knelt before the altar of Our Lady and offered his life to God through her. On 17 September he departed this life, and the epidemic ceased on that day.

Francis Mary was beatified by Pope Pius XI in 1929 and canonized by Pope John XXIII in 1962.

BLESSED HONORATUS OF BIALA PODLASKA

Wenceslaus Kozminski was born in Biala Podlaska, Siedlce, Poland, in 1825 and studied architecture at the School of Fine Arts in Warsaw. When he was fifteen, his father died. Suspected of participating in a rebellious conspiracy, he was imprisoned from April 1846 until March 1847. In 1848, he received the Capuchin habit and the name of Honoratus. Four years later he was ordained. In 1855, he helped Blessed Mary Angela Truszkowska establish the Felician Sisters.

Honoratus served as guardian in a Warsaw friary in 1860. He dedicated his energies to preaching, to spiritual direction and to confessions, and worked tirelessly with the Secular Franciscan Order.

The failed revolt against Czar Alexander III in 1864 led to the suppression of all religious orders in the Russian-ruled part of Poland. The Capuchins were expelled from Warsaw and forced to live in Zakroczym, where Honoratus continued his ministry and began founding twenty-six male and female religious congregations, whose members took vows but wore no religious habit and did not live in community. They operated much as today's secular institutes do. Seventeen of these groups still exist as religious congregations.

Honoratus' writings are extensive: forty-two volumes of sermons, twenty-one of letters, and fifty-two on

ascetical theology, Marian devotion, along with historical and pastoral writings - not counting many for the religious congregations he founded. One of his sayings was, 'No one ever went to heaven on a bed of roses,' and wrote, 'Perseverance is the grace among graces, it is everything, the most important value. Without it, all those holy deeds would have led to nothing; without it, every effort is in vain. In order to persevere, two things are necessary above all else: a robust and lively faith, and the capacity to act as faith dictates.'

In 1906, various bishops sought the reorganization of these groups under their authority. Honoratus defended their independence but was removed from their direction in 1908. He promptly urged the members of these congregations to obey the Church's decisions regarding their future.

'He always walked with God,' said a contemporary. In 1895 he was appointed Commissary General of the Capuchins in Poland. He died at Nowe Miasto in 1916 and was declared blessed in 1988.

SAINT IGNATIUS OF LACONI

Ignatius Vincent Peis-Sanna, the son of religious parents, was born in 1701 at Láconi, in Sicily, Italy. As a young man during a serious illness, he vowed that if he recovered his health he would consecrate his life to God in the Capuchin Order. He regained his health but each day kept putting off the fulfilment of his promise. Then, as if to warn him, his life was again threatened when a horse he was riding nearly threw him when it took fright. Ignatius called upon Saint Francis, renewing his promise and again received help. This time he acted on his promise.

He asked for admission at the friary of Cagliari, but the superiors hesitated at first because of his delicate health. Ignatius asked the help of an influential friend, who pleaded with the friars for him, and he was received. His enthusiasm motivated him so strongly that he was able to attend all the exercises of the community and he was fully faithful to the observance of the Rule of Saint Francis.

After working in the friary for several years at various occupations, he was given the job of begging food for the friars. The citizens of Cagliari soon came to see that Brother Ignatius gave them more than they gave him. His gentle behaviour was like a quiet sermon to all who saw him. He spoke little, but when he felt that it was necessary, he spoke with exceptional kindness. He would also instruct children and the uneducated, comfort

the sick, and urge sinners to be converted and to do penance. He accepted calmly the mockery and contempt he occasionally received and replied only with kindness.

He punctually obeyed his superiors even when they gave him a task that was not what he wanted. In his work he sometimes passed by the house of an extortionate moneylender. He did not ask him for any help for the brothers because he did not want to share in the proceeds of the man's injustice. But when the man complained and the Guardian of the friary told Ignatius to ask him for help, he did so. The man was converted from his former way of life.

Ignatius' sister had often written to him asking him to visit her so that she could get his advice. Ignatius agreed to go to see her only when the Guardian told him. But he left again as soon as he had given the required advice.

When his brother was sent to prison, people expected that Ignatius would ask for his release because he, Ignatius, was popular with the people. The Guardian sent him to the prison governor, but Ignatius simply asked that his brother be treated with justice. He did not want to influence the governor in doing his duty.

Ignatius continued at his work until he was eighty years old. Even after he became blind he still continued for two years to do his daily duty. People's respect for him was very great and sick people were healed by him.

He died on 11 May 1781, and miracles occurred at his grave. He was beatified on 16 June 1940 and canonized on 21 October 1951.

SAINT IGNATIUS OF SANTHIÀ

Laurence Maurice Belvisotti, born in Santhià in Piedmont, Italy, on 5 June 1686, was ordained a priest of the diocese of Vercelli in 1710. After six years of excellent service to the diocese, he was asked to become a parish priest and offered the title of canon. However, he felt that the Lord had other things in mind for him, so, after much prayer and reflection, he declined the offers and applied to the Capuchins of Turin to be accepted as a novice.

During his year as a novice, from 24 May 1716 to 24 May 1717, Ignatius (his religious name) was placed under the tutelage of an ardent young novice who, though not half his age, set about teaching him in an over-zealous manner about the Order, the spiritual life, and even how to say Mass! Ignatius accepted this tutoring with humility and even, perhaps, with a smile. Profession made, he was sent to a friary and given the office of sacristan. Then, after a short spell as assistant novice master, he was sent to “Capuchin Hill” in Turin in 1723. Again he was sacristan, not an easy job, with eighty-seven priests and no concelebration.

In 1731, he was made novice master. There he remained until an eye illness forced him to relinquish the job in 1744. Soon he was well again, and even though he was nearly sixty years of age, he accepted the challenging task of head chaplain to the forces of the king of Piedmont, who were fighting against the

invading Franco-Hispanic armies. He was present at the battle of Assietta on 19 July 1747. Ignatius was able to win the respect of both friends and enemies by the sacramental and spiritual care he gave to all, as well as the medical care he administered. Once the war over, he returned to the regular life of the friars.

He was then given the task of confessor and religious instructor to the lay-brothers, who were at that time trained separately from the clerics. It was in this work that he was able to show and to increase his love for the Franciscan vocation and that of the lay brothers. His appreciation for the lay brothers was evident in that he did not think twice about lending a hand when he saw that it was needed. Whether it was sweeping floors, cleaning toilets or washing dishes, he did his part. Even as guardian, he would do jobs such as questing which were traditionally considered the realm of the lay brother. In fact, in this way he discovered the power of reaching out to people in a personal way, and became aware of the daily troubles in the domestic lives of the people. Very soon people realized that here was a priest who did not stay in the sacristy, but went out among the people ministering to their personal needs. Ignatius seemed to be everywhere in the city, and at every door, enquiring about people who were ill and giving a blessing to every house.

As he advanced in years, Ignatius gave more and more of his time to visiting the sick and the poor in the city of Turin. Towards the end of his life, when he could no longer go about so readily, thousands of people flocked to Capuchin Hill daily to receive a blessing from him or

to hear a consoling word. He had become their saintly spiritual father.

He wrote to a friend that, 'It is not enough to carry the cross in order to be saved. It is essential to carry it with Christ, and like Christ.'

As his health began to fail, he prepared for death with a greater devotion than before. The well-loved friar died a peaceful and gracious death on 22 September 1770. He was aged 84 and had been in the Capuchin Order for 54 years.

Pope Paul VI declared him blessed on 17 April 1966, and Pope John Paul II declared him a saint on 19 May 2002.

BLESSED INNOCENT OF BERZO

Innocent was born in 1844 in the town of Berzo, near Brescia, in Italy. When he finished school he entered the diocesan seminary and was ordained priest in 1867. He worked for seven years in his own diocese and then applied for admission to the Capuchins. He entered the novitiate on 16 April 1874 when he was thirty years of age.

After he made his profession of vows, Innocent was appointed assistant novice master and director of candidates to the Order. In regard to the direction of youth, he said, 'Let everyone pay attention to his own nature. For while one person can get along with less indulgence, I would not have another, who requires more, try to imitate him; but rather let him take his own nature into account and grant it what it truly needs. Just as we must guard against excess in food, so must we beware of too great abstinence. God wants mercy, not sacrifice.' He realized that mere external conformity with rules was without value unless there was a corresponding inner conversion. The outstanding characteristic of his relationship with novices and students was that he loved them and they loved him.

In addition to the work described above, Innocent was often called upon as a preacher. It was while preaching near Bergamo that he caught influenza and died on 3 March 1890, at the early age of 46. The process of his beatification began soon after. The two miracles that

were accepted as evidence were cures of sick children who had been apparently incurable. Pope John XXIII beatified him on 12 November 1961.

BLESSED JEREMIAH OF VALAHIA

Jeremiah was born, the eldest of four boys and two girls, on 29 August 1556 in Valahia, a region in the south of Romania, to a prosperous farming family. His baptismal name was John Kostistk. The Catholic community in Romania was small, constantly under pressure from the larger Orthodox, Protestant and Muslim communities. His parents brought him up well, giving him an example of serving the poor through their work and at their own expense. His mother used to say to him that it would be great to live in Italy where everyone was Catholic.

John dreamed of this, and thought of travelling there, though he lived in times when travel was dangerous. He set out, seemingly without saying anything to his parents, and worked along the way in factories, farms and shops. He was illiterate and with few skills. He spent two years as a servant at the residence of Prince Stephen of Hungary. The prince was ill, and a doctor had come from Italy to treat him. When the prince recovered, Jeremiah found his opportunity; he accompanied the doctor back to Italy, walking alongside his horse. The journey to the Adriatic coast was about 1,000 km as the crow flies.

After travelling for three months, John felt his dream had come true when they arrived in Bari. Even better, the doctor employed him in his pharmacy. He felt that, at last, he would find good Catholics. But he was soon

disappointed: instead of holy people, he met murderers, thieves, liars, drunkards and adulterers. He was so disappointed that he decided to return home. On his way to the port, a man called him by name and asked him where he was going. John replied that he was going home. But the man said to him that he should not judge all of Italy by Bari, and urged him to visit Rome, Loreto, and Naples.

So, with a letter of introduction from his employer, he went to Naples and found work there. It was Lent of 1578 and there was a spirit of penance in the air. He met Capuchins there, as he had in Bari also, and was impressed by them. He applied to join, but was refused. He tried again and was refused again. He tried a third time, and was accepted. A Br. Pacificus accompanied him to the novitiate, but had a surprise on the way when John gave away both their lunches to a poor man!

John was received into the novitiate and was given the name of Jeremiah. In his first ten years in the Order, he received several appointments, but then was sent to Saint Ephraim's friary in Naples as infirmarian, where he cared for the sick until his death.

The upbringing he received from his parents in caring for the poor always influenced him. He was shocked when the brother gardener put up a fence to protect the garden, and said to him, 'You'll never have good onions again! I would gladly give my eyes to the poor.'

The friary had one hundred and sixty beds, half of them for the sick. In them, the friars provided care,

rather than medical or surgical help, for friars and laypeople from the surrounding region, and also from further afield and even from abroad. Jeremiah was compassionate and caring, giving intensive care to chronically ill people. He won the respect and affection of all for his kindness and selflessness. He summarized his own outlook in the advice he gave a young friar, 'Don't waste time, but keep busy. Fulfil your obligations because, in doing so, you will serve and love God. The rest of your time spend in prayer.' People said of him that he had a happy face that cheered them up. He had a sense of humour, too, and took delight in giving the ill a glass of wine to cheer them up.

On one occasion the vicar of the friary scolded him for not being punctual at meals. He explained that his work often made that impossible, and that the provincial had given him permission to be flexible in the matter, but he would change if the vicar really wanted it. No, that was no good; the vicar was still angry. Jeremiah said to him very gently, 'Father Vicar, you are tired and stressed out. Let me make you a hot herbal bath for your feet to soothe and relax you.' The matter ended with peace restored.

Jeremiah was as joyful in his prayer as he was in his life. He would say, 'Let us love this great God who deserves to be loved. Let us love him because he is so good, and has done so much for us!' On 14 August 1608, he had what seems to have been a vision of Our Lady. He was surprised that she wore no crown, and asked her why. She said, 'My Son is my crown.'

In February 1625, accompanied by Br. Pacificus, he walked through a snow-storm for ten km. to treat one John Avalos. But Jeremiah, now sixty-eight, contracted pneumonia on his return to the friary and died there on 5 March. His funeral the following day was attended by huge crowds. So well-loved was he that his cause of beatification was begun on the 20th of the same month.

For some reason, nothing came of it until 1947. A Romanian professor, Gregory Manoilescu, a member of the Orthodox church, discovered his tomb, and that re-awakened interest in him. Pope John XXIII, who had served as papal nuncio in Bulgaria, a neighbour of Romania's, believed that Jeremiah could serve as a beacon of hope for relations between Catholics and Orthodox as he was loved by both. The man known as "The Selfless Servant of the Sick" and as "The Witness from the East" was declared blessed by Pope John Paul II on 30 October 1983.

BLESSED JOSÉ TOUS Y SOLER

He was born on 31 March 1811, in Igualada, Catalonia, Spain, to Nicolás Tous Carrera and Francisca Soler Ferrer, the ninth of twelve children. He was baptized the following day with the names José Nicolás Jaime, was confirmed in 1817, and made his first Communion a year later. His family, which was prosperous, brought him up in a strong faith tradition. In 1820, they moved to Barcelona, and it was there that José had his first contact with Capuchins.

On 18 February 1827, he was received into the novitiate at Sarrià, a place known as “the desert”; he was not yet sixteen years old. It is unclear whether he received a religious name as was customary. After what seems to have been an exemplary novitiate he made his first profession of vows on 19 February 1828. After the normal course of studies, he was ordained priest on 24 May 1834. His first appointment was to the church of Santa Madrona in Barcelona, where he was noted for his devotion to Jesus crucified, the Eucharist, and Mary, Mother of the Good Shepherd.

José’s lifetime coincided with a difficult time in the history of his country. Spain was politically, socially, and economically unstable. In the early years of his life, it was invaded by France. In his later years, there were overseas wars and the loss of most of Spain’s colonies. At times there was persecution of the church, with

religious orders being suppressed, and priests and religious imprisoned or killed.

In 1835, religious orders were suppressed by the State. After a short period of imprisonment, José had to go into exile, first in France, then in Italy, then back to France again, in Grenoble, Marseilles, and Toulouse. Here he completed studies in moral theology and received his patents for preaching. For a time he was chaplain to a convent of Benedictine nuns.

Although compelled to live outside the friary, and involved in intense pastoral activity, José always remained at heart a Capuchin. He lived a simple life, cultivating prayer and silence, while being active in meeting the material and spiritual needs of those he met.

In 1843, he returned to Spain, hoping to resume conventual life. But the laws enacted by the “Liberal” government prevented this, so he lived with his family while exercising a parochial ministry as a curate in the parishes of Esparragure and San Francesco de Paola.

It was while he was in this latter parish that José became aware of how ignorant children were of the faith, ‘like sheep without a shepherd,’ (Matthew 9.36) often suffering material deprivation as well. In response to their needs, he founded, in 1850, the Capuchin Sisters of the Mother of the Divine Shepherd. This was an outgrowth from an association of women who devoted themselves to the education of girls and young women. He wrote to them, saying, ‘Let [the sisters] love poor children and admit them all to class, however many may

present themselves, as many as space allows, and without excluding or rejecting those unable to pay the contributions.' The new institute grew quickly and received papal approval in 1897.

Because of the troubled state of Spain, José lived much of his life away from a fraternity. Wherever he went, he fitted in with the people and served their needs, responding to them in practical ways. He was described as being austere yet generous, prayerful yet active, sensitive to the needs of the sick and the poor,

José died at the age of fifty-nine on 27 February 1871 while celebrating Mass. He was declared blessed in Barcelona on 24 April 2010.

SAINT JOSEPH OF LEONISSA

In the year 1556, at Leonissa in the kingdom of Naples, Italy, a boy was born to John Desideri and his wife, Frances Paulina. They gave him the name Euphranius. John and Frances were devoted parents and brought up their children in the Catholic faith. It was said that even as a child Euphranius fasted. At school he made such an impression on everyone that a nobleman offered him his daughter in marriage, together with a large sum of money. However, the young man had already made his decision and, in 1573, entered the Capuchin novitiate, taking the name of Joseph.

In his new life, Joseph found what he had wanted - penance. His room was so small and narrow that it was hard either to sit, stand or lie down in it. He slept on the ground with a block of wood for a pillow. He ate food that had been left over by the other friars, such as mouldy bread or stale beans.

After his ordination to the priesthood he was appointed to the work of preaching. His great desire was to go to the Turks to proclaim the Gospel to them. In the year 1587, he went to Constantinople (now Istanbul), the capital of the Turkish Empire, and began work among Christian slaves who served on Turkish ships. His activities quickly became known and he was taken prisoner. For three days he was hanged by hooks forced through his right hand and foot while a slow fire burned beneath him. Suffering intensely from his wounds he

endured the torment of being half-burned and suffocated. On the fourth day he was set free and returned to Italy. There he resumed his former work of preaching and won many people by his great kindness. He said, 'The Gospel... is not chiefly something to be written on parchment but in our hearts.... Therefore every Christian should be a living book in which the teaching of the Gospel can be read.' He was very successful in reconciling people who were living in hatred and bitterness because of past quarrels.

In his prayer he was often seen to be totally absorbed in God. He was given the gift of miracles, prophecy and understanding people's secret thoughts. He even foretold the day of his death, 4 February 1612. He was beatified by Pope Clement XII and canonized by Pope Benedict XIV in 1747.

SAINT LAWRENCE OF BRINDISI

Cesare de Rossi was born at Brindisi in Italy in 1559. As a child he displayed extraordinary mental and spiritual gifts. There was a custom in parts of Italy at that time of inviting a boy to give a sermon in church in remembrance of Jesus being found in the temple at the age of twelve. Lawrence gave his first sermon at the age of six! We are told that it was given with such strength that people were moved to reform their lives.

Lawrence entered the Capuchin novitiate at Verona when he was sixteen. From the beginning he was recognized as a man of rare ability and spirituality. He studied for the priesthood at Padua and learned six languages, including Greek and Hebrew. He was quoted as saying that if every Bible in the world was lost he could dictate it all in Greek and Hebrew! He attributed his intellectual gifts to Our Lady, Seat of Wisdom, to whom he had a special devotion. His writings, mostly sermons, run to fifteen large volumes, the most important of which is an exposition of Catholic doctrine on Our Lady, the *Mariale*.

After his ordination he was called on to preach. He quickly became so popular that whenever he went to a town all work stopped. Farmers came in from the surrounding countryside to hear him. He described preaching as, ‘an apostolic task, an angelic task, a Christian task, a divine task,’ and said, ‘The word of the Lord is light to the mind and fire to the will, enabling us

to know and love God.' His preaching was learned, but it was a learning that was alive with emotion. Sometimes it aroused violent opposition. In later years he had such success in bringing Protestants to the Catholic faith that an attempt was made to kill him. A gang of ruffians tried to throw him from a bridge, while on another occasion they attacked the friary where he was staying and shot at the guardian.

He was called to Rome to work for the conversion of Jews living there. His knowledge of Hebrew and his gentle persuasion helped him in this work and some Jews became Christian.

In his person he was a quiet man with great inner strength. He said little, had a ready smile, but was firm when the situation called for it. In later years, when he was sent to Germany with twelve other friars, including Blessed Benedict of Urbino, to work for the conversion of Lutherans to the Catholic Church, he had some difficulty with the papal nuncio. Without reference to Lawrence who was the friars' guardian, the nuncio had appointed them to various offices. Lawrence reminded the nuncio that he, Lawrence, was in charge; he cancelled the nuncio's appointments and made his own.

His devotion to the Mass was outstanding. He sometimes became so absorbed in it that he forgot everything else. On one occasion it took him eighteen hours to say it! He remarked afterwards that he had never felt the time passing.

While he was preaching in Central Europe the Turkish army invaded. This army of Moslems was greatly feared and Christian people believed they would have to resist it by force of arms if they were to keep their freedom, and, with it, their religion. Lawrence roused the Christian leaders of Central Europe to unite and he personally led the army into action. The turning point in the war came in a four-day battle in which Lawrence led the Christian soldiers, holding up a crucifix in front of them and calling out encouragement. The Turkish army, though superior in numbers, was defeated and its threat to Europe ended.

Lawrence then returned to Italy where he hoped he might serve God in solitude. But a Chapter of the Order elected him General Minister and he accepted the office. During a visitation of the brothers in Germany he succeeded in reconciling the Holy Roman Emperor and his brother, Matthias. On returning to Italy, the people of the south of the country appealed to him for help. Their governor, appointed by King Philip II of Spain, was cruelly oppressing them. Lawrence agreed to go to Spain to plead on their behalf. On arriving there, he found that the king was in Portugal so he had to journey again. Meeting King Philip in Lisbon, he pleaded the people's case and the governor was replaced.

But all these labours, with endless travel under difficult conditions, changing from one kind of work to another, had worn him down. He died in Lisbon on his sixtieth birthday, 22 July 1619.

Lawrence was beatified by Pope Pius VI in 1783 and canonized by Pope Leo XIII on 8 December 1881. In December 1958, Pope John XXIII declared him a Doctor of the Church, a title given to a small number of saints whose teaching has made an outstanding contribution to the life of the Church. He was given the title of *Doctor Evangelicus*. Saint Lawrence is the patron saint of Capuchin students, and the International College of the Capuchin Order in Rome is named in his honour.

BLESSED LEOPOLD OF ALPANDEIRE

He was born Francisco Tomás de San Juan Bautista Márquez y Sánchez in the town of Alpandere in Spain on 24 June 1864. He came from a peasant family and was the eldest of four children, three boys and one girl.

In 1894, he heard a Capuchin preach on the occasion of the beatification of the Spanish Capuchin, Blessed Didacus Joseph of Cadiz, and that motivated him to join the friars. He said that the friars' way of life had made a good impression on him. He was attracted by the idea of serving God and becoming like them. After being refused four times, he was finally admitted at the age of thirty-five.

In 1900, he entered the novitiate in Seville and received the religious name of Leopold. After successive assignments to Antequera, Granada and Seville, he was moved to the friary in Granada, where he lived for the next forty-two years.

In Granada, he worked as questor asking for alms for the support of the friars, the poor and the missions. At the same time, he helped people through giving comfort and advice. Gradually he became a familiar sight in the city. Many people sought his advice or intercession, coming to know him as "the humble beggar of the three Hail Marys," because that was the prayer he dedicated to those who asked his blessing. His life was not distinguished for any spectacular work but rather for the

simplicity of his life, his kindness and generosity, especially towards deprived people.

After a long illness borne with courage, he returned to the Lord on 9 February 1956 and is buried in the crypt of the friary church dedicated to his name. Devotion to him is strong in the region of Málaga in the south-east of Spain. He was declared blessed by Pope Benedict XVI on 12 September 2010.

SAINT LEOPOLD OF HERCEG NOVI

On 28 May 1886, a boy was born to Pietro Mandich and Carolina Zarevich in the town of Herceg Novi in present-day Montenegro. The parents were ethnic Croats, though their country was at that time part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The boy was the last of their twelve children and was baptized with the name of Bogdan, a Croatian name meaning “a gift of God.” He was a frail child and never enjoyed good health. He suffered from various physical deformities: his feet were misshapen, he could never speak properly and he was very short. As an adult he was only 1.35 metres in height.

But he was bright at school and was helpful to his companions, sharing his food with those who had little. His mother was the great influence in his life. He said of her, ‘To her especially I owe what I am today.’ While still a boy he was caught in some act of wrongdoing and was severely taken to task by an older sister who hauled him off to church and made him go to confession. He told the priest what he had done and was deeply hurt when he was given a severe scolding and ordered to kneel in the middle of the church as a penance. That incident prompted him to promise God that he would be a confessor and would treat penitents with the gentleness which he had hoped for in vain in that incident. ‘Do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil by good’ (Romans 12.21) might have been his motto.

He entered the Capuchin novitiate on 2 May 1884 and was given the name of Leopold. However, some friars - not very kindly - gave him the nickname of "The Pocket Edition" because of his short stature. He was sensitive about his height and those jokes at his expense hurt him. He had to struggle hard to overcome the psychological problems caused by thoughtless humour. He knew he was pitied or laughed at, and his speech impediment made matters worse. He could not pronounce words properly. He would try with great effort to do so but the words would tumble out in a senseless mumble. It was only by long effort that he was able to pronounce clearly the words of the consecration at Mass or of absolution in confession. He could never preach. On the street he was made the object of practical jokes. Boys would gather round him and fill his *capuce* (the hood of his Capuchin habit) with stones. 'Let them have their fun,' he would say, 'I'm not much use for anything else.' On another occasion he bumped into a young man who was getting off a bus. He apologized, but the young man slapped him across the face. Leopold answered, 'Hit me on the other cheek as well. I'll look ridiculous walking round with one red cheek.' Not expecting such a reaction, the young man had the decency to apologize.

The other sore spot in his life was his nationality. He was a Croat by birth and any insult to his people or language would have him boiling with rage. Although hot-tempered by nature he worked to control his anger. In later years, during the First World War, when he was stationed in Italy, he found himself in an awkward situation. Although Croat by race, language and culture he was legally Austrian, and Austria was at war against

Italy. He was given the choice of taking Italian nationality or of living in semi-exile in the south of Italy, well away from the battlefield. He chose exile. This decision drew criticism from some confrères who said he was being stubborn and was making an issue out of nothing. He answered that he could not return to his own people and face them in honesty if he had abandoned his nationality in time of crisis.

Having completed his studies he was ordained priest in Venice on 20 September 1890. For the first eight years after ordination he was posted to various friaries in the Capuchin Province of Venice. His work was that of confessor, although his hope was that he would be able to return to his own country. In preparation for an anticipated return, he learned Slovene and also Greek. His hope seemed close to fulfilment when he was appointed guardian of a friary at Zara near his home country but this appointment lasted only two years.

He was sent to one town where he found himself in an unusual kind of trouble. The other friars had the practice of taking a *siesta* after lunch. He spent *siesta* time in prayer in the church and was sometimes asked for confession. This conduct caused unfavourable comparisons to be made with the other friars and he was told to stop. He obeyed and prayed in his room instead.

His great desire was to work among the Orthodox Christians of his country for their reconciliation with the Catholic Church. He prayed for this intention and took a vow for the purpose, promising, 'I, Leopold, before God, in the presence of the Virgin his mother and of all the

saints, acknowledge that I am obliged by vow to work for the return of our separated brothers of the East to Catholic unity.' He renewed this vow all through his life even though he never had the opportunity of acting directly for its fulfilment. He attributed this sense of being called by God to work for Christian unity to a spiritual experience that he had had on 18 June 1887. He never explained what the experience was, but fifty years later he could still recall it clearly. Gradually he came to understand that perhaps what God wanted of him was different from what he had expected. In his own words, 'Some time ago I happened to meet and give Communion to a very holy person. Afterwards this person said to me, "Jesus has told me that your East is in every soul that you help in confession."'

In 1906 he was appointed to Padua, where he was to remain for the remaining thirty-six years of his life. He passed largely unnoticed in the community. He was regarded as a good, even exemplary friar, but nothing more. Some of his confrères described him as having a happy temperament, with a good sense of humour, a man who got on well with everyone. But others could see more than that. They saw that he slept for only five hours a day, and, when not hearing confessions, was in the church praying. He seems to have followed the dictum that the first quality of a good confessor is that he should be a good penitent, because he himself went to confession daily. When urged to rest from time to time he replied, 'We are called to hard work. We should pray to God that we may die of hard work in the apostolate.' His calm and his great respect for people were the qualities that people most noted in him. He was strict

with himself, especially in obedience, saying, ‘Anyone who will not obey can give up hope.’ Yet he advised his provincial minister, ‘Try not to load the consciences of the communities with rules that are not really necessary... You see, rules are made to be kept, but if they are not truly necessary they are a trap for weaker brethren.’

He remained a student all his life and often surprised people by how well he kept himself informed of current affairs as well as matters of philosophy and theology. They didn't see how he found time for it, but he did. He was active in promoting the reading of scripture by laypeople and wrote a series of articles for members of the Secular Franciscan Order to encourage and help them to do so. He thoroughly enjoyed a discussion in theology, especially on the works of Saints Augustine, Thomas Aquinas and Alphonsus Liguori or on papal encyclicals. He sometimes surprised his confrères with his opinions. At a time when the rights of trades unions were not well recognized he was asked if he thought it was legitimate for workers to try to improve their situation. He replied, ‘The fruits of the field are the fruits of capital contributed by the owner, and of work contributed by the labourer. Capital means money, but labour means blood and sweat and life. Which is more valuable, money or life? Life! Well, then, you understand me...’

Leopold was not an intellectual but he read widely and thought clearly. His answers to questions were usually so realistically thought through and clearly expressed that they seemed obvious, indeed the ideal solution, and

people were often astonished that they had not thought the matter out for themselves. He studied about Our Lady all through his life and gave his devotion to her a solid theological basis. He was delighted when the writings of Saint Lawrence of Brindisi were published and he concentrated his attention on the saint's great work, the *Mariale*.

One of his great burdens in life was his health. In addition to his speech defect, he suffered from arthritis and almost constant stomach trouble. Even when in his seventies, he would not allow any heating in the confessional where he spent hours each day, no matter how cold the weather. His explanation was simple, 'The poor can't afford heat.'

The great apostolic work of Leopold's life was the confessional, and it can be stated simply. He spent about twelve hours a day for forty years hearing confessions. Anyone who has heard confessions has a good appreciation of what that means. Leopold did this work willingly. He never sent anyone away or complained that the time was unsuitable. At the end of a long day it sometimes happened that he would be just back in his room when the bell would ring again for confession. His answer invariably was, 'Here I am, sir! Here I am!' If he had just gone to bed at night and a friar came to him for confession it was the same, 'Here I am! At your service!' His confrères sometimes criticized him for giving penances they considered too light, but his answer was that this was the reason he spent his spare time in prayer; he was saying people's penances for them.

In fifty years as a confessor he refused absolution only three times and often said afterwards that if he had tried harder or prayed better then perhaps that misfortune could have been avoided. He had very clear and firm ideas about authority in confession. For him, the priest was in the place of Christ. The personal or moral qualities of the confessor had nothing to do with it; he was appointed by God. What the priest said in confession was the same as if Christ himself had spoken. He expected penitents to obey him, no matter who they were. Bishops and priests alike listened to him because he spoke with authority. This sense of authority was not pushy assertiveness; it was not egotistic. Before coming to a decision, Leopold would listen carefully to advice but, having done so, he was decisive and precise. He would say, 'Have faith; do this and this... that is enough.' People accepted his firmness because they believed that it was Christ who spoke through him, not Leopold who spoke.

Patience, gentleness, wisdom and firmness... those were the qualities that brought penitents to him from all over Italy, sometimes waiting in a queue for hours. There were those who came with little motivation, little preparation or little purpose of amendment, with the weight of years of sin, perhaps some deep-seated personal hatred which had lasted a lifetime - these came and were conquered. They went away unburdened, freed from the weight of sin, liberated from the narrowness of some selfishness, purified by the tears of remorse. In being forgiven, some found the grace to forgive and went away resolved to be reconciled to someone, loved perhaps in the distant past but hated for many years, and

now brought together again in the recovery of their long-lost love.

Part of Leopold's influence can be traced to the extraordinary gifts that God gave him. Penitents who found it difficult to remember or confess their sins were astonished to find that sometimes Leopold told them what they were. He could recount details of incidents in their lives that he could not have known by human means. On one occasion a student asked to make a general confession of all the sins of his life. Leopold replied that there was no need, as he knew it all. The student insisted so Leopold replied, 'Alright, so that you may have peace I will tell you what you have done' and proceeded to do so for twenty minutes, including matters which the student had forgotten. Then he concluded, 'You see! It was not necessary. Learn to trust your confessor.'

At Eastertide in 1934 a man went into the church for confession. He did not really want to go but felt drawn there. He was hoping for an excuse that would enable him to go away. When he saw a long line of people waiting outside Leopold's confessional he felt excused: nobody could be expected to wait for so long. To his astonishment, the door of the confessional opened, Leopold came out, walked over to him, and said, 'Come with me now or you'll go away without it.' The man went to confession.

His memory for people and for events was remarkable. Brother Alfonso Orlini was one day sitting in the dining room when Leopold said to him, 'Twenty five years ago

today you first came to me for confession.’ It was true. Visitors who came to Padua to confess and then returned many years later might be greeted in the confessional with something like, ‘How did that problem with your son turn out?’ People sometimes asked for prayers for sick relatives and Leopold would reply, ‘Go to Mass tomorrow and have faith.’ Many recorded that when they obeyed his instructions the hoped-for cure followed.

He had an extraordinary power of prophecy. In wartime, people would ask for his help in tracing missing relatives. Mothers would come asking about their sons in the army and Leopold would reply, ‘He will be taken prisoner and you will hear from him at Easter.’ That was a fairly common occurrence. Two remarkable instances are on record. On 23 March 1932, a man who came to his confessional found him in a depressed state. He enquired what the matter was. Leopold was reluctant to say anything but finally blurted out twice, ‘I saw Italy in a sea of fire and blood. Pray God that I may be wrong.’ Whenever the future of Italy was mentioned in conversation, he would cry and say, ‘God have pity on Italy.’ In June 1940, he told his confrères that Padua would be bombed and the church and friary destroyed. Two years after his death, on 14 May 1944, a heavy Allied air raid bombed Padua. The church and friary were destroyed – all except for Leopold's confessional.

Leopold set a high standard in confession and he expected a lot from penitents. On one occasion a man came, not so much to confess his sins as to justify them. He had a theory to explain everything. Leopold tried for a long time to point out to the man where and how he

was wrong but the man persisted in justifying himself. Finally, Leopold said firmly, 'Sir, you cannot play with God. Go and die in your sins.' The man, totally taken aback, woke from his folly and asked for forgiveness. Leopold said, 'Now we are brothers' and the confession went ahead as normal. On another occasion a scantily dressed lady presented herself and was met by an angry Leopold saying, 'Go home and dress yourself; then come back.'

Where a person stubbornly or stupidly refused to see sin where there was sin he did not hesitate to speak strongly. To a woman who had forced her daughter into an unsuitable marriage which quickly broke up, and then came looking for an annulment, he said, 'You did a shabby bit of trading with your daughter, Madam. I can't put it any other way.' Young men who made women pregnant and then abandoned them came in for harsh words, 'I lash them,' he said. To a man who habitually beat his wife but did not confess it, he said plainly, 'You are a criminal.' When the man became angry and demanded an apology, Leopold replied, 'I apologize for nothing. I am telling you the truth in the name of God, and I repeat it. You are a criminal.' The man acknowledged that it was true and went on to make a proper confession. A lady who asked for advice about her son, whom she said had no discipline, was told simply, 'Punish him. There is no other way.' Leopold particularly disliked a tendency to explain away personal responsibility by referring to psychological factors. He was aware of those and allowed for them but did not regard them as removing personal responsibility in a normal person. That Leopold was gentle in almost every

instance gave added force to his toughness if he felt it was justified.

Leopold did not relish confrontation; he dreaded it. Whenever such an incident occurred he would spend many hours, even several nights, praying for the person concerned and asking God's forgiveness for any fault of his own in the matter. He suffered spiritually, sometimes being tempted against faith and hope. He could not understand how the doctrine of hell could be reconciled with a merciful God and was thrown into an agony of doubt. He could only say, 'God is our Father - that is enough. He alone knows how to do what is good.'

At other times he would be thrown into doubt about the meaning and value of everything in his life. He felt personally responsible for the failings of his penitents. He sometimes became angry about his health and his physical deformities. He did not know to whom to turn for help. On one occasion he went to his confessor in the friary who shouted at him to clear off, in a voice that could be heard throughout the house. He appeared to others to be confused, disfigured, even an imbecile. At times it was so bad that people wondered about his mental stability. In those difficulties he turned to prayer even though he found no comfort in it. Quite the contrary. Sometimes he found it utterly empty, meaningless, a mere mouthing of words. But he persevered in it. He used to say, 'We are called to Mount Tabor but are formed on Mount Calvary.' When he had finally found his way through these trials, which never seemed to affect his confessional practice, he was able to

help others who found themselves in a similar predicament.

It was in this way that he climbed his Calvary carrying his cross until early in 1942. Then seventy-eight years of age, his health steadily deteriorated and he was confined to bed, but still continued to hear confessions, especially of priests, for whom he had a life-long affection. On 29 July he heard the confessions of fifty priests in his room. At 7 a.m. on the following day, he died.

It was a measure of his popularity that some twenty-five thousand people streamed through the church to see his body laid out before the main altar. On 31 July, his funeral brought Padua to a standstill as almost the entire population attended.

On 2 May 1976, Pope Paul VI declared Leopold Mandich blessed. In 1983, during the Synod of Bishops on the theme of reconciliation and penance, Pope John Paul II declared him a saint.

BLESSED MARCO OF AVIANO

Blessed Marco was born Carlo Domenico Cristófori into a wealthy family in Aviano, Friuli, Italy, on 17 November 1631. Educated by Jesuits, he went to stay with Capuchins at Capo d'Istria. He was received into the Order in 1649 and given the name of Marco. He was ordained priest in 1655.

Until the age of forty-five, he lived the life of a simple friar, with no great responsibilities, though his reputation as a preacher gradually grew. His life changed radically when, on 18 September 1676, during a sermon in Padua, he healed a religious sister who had been ill for thirteen years. He became a popular preacher, travelling throughout Italy. Miracles increased, including the healing of a friar who had been ill for seven years. Tens of thousands of people thronged churches in the Low Countries, Germany, Switzerland and Austria, even though Marco spoke in Italian with only a few phrases in German. Protestants came to hear him – a most remarkable matter at the time - and Marco blessed them, too. After preaching in Linz, Austria, in the presence of the Hapsburg Emperor, Leopold I, he became an adviser to the emperor. But Marco continued to follow an austere and pious lifestyle. He was regarded as the greatest miracle-worker of the seventeenth century, a mystic and man of prayer.

In September 1683, as envoy of Pope Innocent XI, he rallied dispirited Christian troops against an invading

Turkish force of 150,000 men under Kara Mustapha, vizier of Sultan Mohammad IV of the Ottoman Empire. His sermons were fiery; it has recently been said that they would today land him in the Court of Human Rights for inciting racial hatred. Was he a war-monger or a man of dialogue? Against all odds he urged troops to hold out until the arrival of King Jan Sobieski of Poland, whose forces turned the tide against the Turks. The Turks were defeated, saving not only Vienna and Austria, but perhaps Europe also.

Marco did not rest there. He went on to exercise a role in motivating troops for further battles against the Turks, resulting in the liberation of Budapest in a three-year campaign from 1684 to 1686, while also fighting at Neuhausel in 1685, Mohacz, Hungary, in 1687, Belgrade, Serbia, in 1688, up to the Peace of Karlowitz in 1689. He has been described as a blend of Joan of Arc, Peter the Hermit and Padre Pio.

On a lighter note, he is said by some to have been the unwitting inventor of the cappuccino coffee. According to legend, when the Turks fled from the field after their defeat at Vienna, they left behind sacks of coffee beans. Marco brewed them, diluting the coffee with milk and honey, and giving it to the soldiers, who called it the Cappuccino because its colour was similar to that of Marco's religious habit. Others regard this story as an invention.

Worn out by these exertions, Marco died of a cancerous tumour in Vienna on 13 August 1699, with Emperor Leopold and Empress Leonora at his side. He is

buried beside the hearts of the Austrian emperors in the Capuchin church in Vienna. He has been described as a citizen of Europe, and is said to be a national hero in Austria and Eastern Europe, part of every school curriculum.

There was some surprise at the decision to declare him blessed in view of the church's desire to promote good relations with Moslems, and because of the Anglo-American war against Iraq then under way in April 2003. Cardinal Schönborn of Vienna advised against it, as being untimely. But he was declared blessed by Pope John Paul II on 27 April 2003. The pope praised his 'courageous' preaching, saying that Marco was 'inspired by the circumstances to commit himself actively to defend freedom and the unity of Christian Europe'. His example, the pope said, should remind Europe that 'its unity will be more solid if based on common Christian roots.'

BLESSED MARY ANGELA ASTORCH

Jerónima Maria Agnes was the last of four children of Catherine and Christopher Astorch. She was born in Barcelona, Spain, on 1 September 1592. Her father was a judge and a member of the minor nobility. Her mother died when Jerónima was just one year old, and her father when she was seven. She was subsequently cared for by an aunt.

Isabella, Jerónima's older sister, was attracted to the spirituality of Angela Serafina Prat, who was the foundress of the Spanish Capuchinesses, and she joined them. Jerónima was also attracted, but for another reason. When she was seven years old she ate some poisonous fruit, and collapsed. She appeared lifeless and was being prepared for burial, when she was restored to health, seemingly by Angela's prayers. Jerónima wrote of this experience, 'My childhood ended at the age of seven. From then on I was specially endowed with spiritual gifts, especially prudence, patience and silence.' That makes her sound precocious, or even full of herself, but maybe she just knew herself well and attributed her qualities to God.

Jerónima was a bright child, and benefitted from a good education. She became fluent in Latin, but disappointed her tutor's hopes for her by saying she wished to become a Capuchiness. This was when she was eleven, well below the required age level. She would have to persuade them. On 6 September 1603, she

entered the convent grounds, carrying with her the six volumes of the Latin *Breviary* which she had studied thoroughly, and proceeded to demonstrate her familiarity with them, with the Bible and with the Fathers of the Church. She was admitted as an aspirant and given the name of Mary Angela.

Her confessor, Father Martin García, was helpful and encouraging. Her directress, however, a rigid person, seemed determined to keep her down. She took away Angela's books, saying that they were unsuitable for a beginner. After five years as an aspirant, and being examined by the bishop, Angela was admitted as a novice on 7 September 1608. After a novitiate under her sister, Angela made her first profession of vows a year later.

The Capuchinesses were growing in number and a decision was made to set up a new foundation in Saragossa. Isabella, Angela and four other sisters went there. Within two years, Isabella was dead. Angela was appointed novice mistress, and brought with her an understanding that each novice was different and would grow at a different pace while always moving towards God. In 1624, she was appointed vicar, then abbess in 1627. Since the foundress, Angela Serafina Prat, and Isabella, were both dead, Angela became the *de facto* leader of the Capuchinesses in Spain. She secured approval of the *Constitutions* of the Order from Pope Urban VIII. She was active in every work of the convent, especially in the care of the poor.

Her spirituality was biblical and liturgical. Her favourite book was the *Breviary*, then much larger than it is today, and she became known as “The Mystic of the *Breviary*.” She wrote, ‘When chanting the psalms I always feel that Jesus communicates with me in an inner way. As I chant I can truly say that I express my inner feelings more than just the words of the psalm. The Lord becomes master and guide of what I say and sing, revealing to me the inner truth of scripture.’ She made daily Communion and urged her sisters to do the same.

Angela spent thirty years at Saragossa and the convent grew very much in that time. A new foundation in Murcia was decided upon in 1645, and she was to be its leader. It was a story of setbacks – plague, flood and bad construction work which forced them to abandon the convent twice. They went to live in a house in the mountains belonging to the Jesuits. Then came a greater problem: an accusation of misconduct was made against Angela and the sisters. The bishops sent an investigator, who recommended that they should be deprived of their veils and treated as penitents. However, it then became known that the accusations were false and motivated by malice. The bishop found that the investigation had been badly conducted, so he apologized to the sisters, re-instated them, and punished the investigator. The sisters returned to their convent in peace.

Angela continued as abbess until 1661. Then she retired and spent the rest of her life ‘alone with the Alone,’ dying on 2 December 1665. Her body, which remained incorrupt, was desecrated in 1936 during the civil war, but remains in the convent in Murcia. She was

declared blessed on 23 May 1982, and her writings were published in 1985.

BLESSED MARY MAGDALEN MARTINENGO

Francis Leopold Martinengo and Margaret Secchi, the parents of Blessed Mary Magdalen, were of minor aristocracy. She was born on the feast of Saint Francis, 4 October 1687. At birth she was very frail and not expected to survive. She was baptized on the day of her birth and given her mother's name. Her mother died five months later. Her father re-married, a woman called Elena Palazzi; they had a daughter, Cecilia.

As a child Margaret fell from a horse-drawn carriage, but was uninjured. She always regarded this as a sign of God's protection over her. She said that 'an invisible hand snatched me from danger.' Her first Holy Communion was a troubling experience: somehow or other, the Host fell to the floor. Margaret picked it up with her tongue, but was very worried that people might think her disrespectful, which was not at all the case.

As a girl, she went to school with the Ursuline sisters. She was bright, lively and intelligent. Her father had a good library in the house and she read with delight in Latin as well as Italian. In her *Autobiography* she wrote, 'I am totally content when reading.' At the age of eleven she went to a school run by Augustinian Sisters, among whom were two maternal aunts. They were zealous but dominant women who wanted to control her and make her into the person she thought they ought to be. She was having none of that, and won her father's consent to change to a Benedictine school. But there were two more

maternal aunts there! However, they were of a different kind and let her be herself. But she was not impressed by the religious atmosphere of the school, saying, 'I would not be a religious there for all the gold in the world!'

Among her reading was lives of the saints, and she longed to imitate their penance and solitude. She loved being in the mountains where she found peace in caves. She would gladly have lived there but for roaming packs of wolves. She tried to escape from the school to go there, but a locked door prevented her.

Margaret began to undertake penances, so severe that she damaged her health. The sisters, not knowing the reason, dosed her with medicines which made her worse. At the age of thirteen she made a vow of virginity. But her father had arranged a marriage for her with the son of a Venetian senator, and her brothers gave her romances to read, which captivated her with stories of handsome suitors and beautiful dresses. But she felt that God wanted her to be a Capuchiness, even though, at the time, she knew nothing about them. At the age of seventeen, she made up her mind and, against all advice - even her confessor's - she joined. To dissuade her, her family organized parties and lined up potential husbands. But nothing worked; she was determined.

On 8 September 1705, at the age of eighteen, Margaret was brought to the door of the Capuchiness monastery of Saint Mary of the Snows in Brescia in a procession of carriages. On joining, she was given the name of Mary Magdalen. Although she was frail, she was also healthy, vigorous, lively on her feet and punctual. Her novice

mistress was a strange person and recommended repeatedly to the community that she not be allowed to remain; it was said that she would ruin the convent. Then the novice mistress was changed, and reports on Mary Magdalen were positive from there on. A retreat by a Jansenist preacher who dwelled intensely on God's punishment of sinners almost brought about a collapse in her health. But her own confessor's good advice brought her back to a healthy balance.

Mary Magdalen was in the convent for thirty-two years, during which she worked as cleaner, cook, gardener, baker, laundress, weaver, shoe-maker, tailor, secretary, waitress, security guard, infirmarian, novice mistress and abbess. She inflicted extraordinary bodily penances on herself, but made sure to prevent this becoming known. She wrote, 'I think that a soul becomes holier in proportion to its self-emptying, because in the emptying of itself it will share more fully in the holiness of God.' At times she experienced extreme desolation of spirit, saying, 'My whole life has been a mistake!' Some sisters turned against her and spoke badly about her. Her confessor ordered her writings destroyed as heretical. But she also experienced great joy, saying, 'If I say, "Lord, take my heart as I no longer want it," he accepts this offering and I feel as if he takes my heart and in its place puts his own heart which is ablaze with the fire of love. Unable to endure such intense union I finally collapse, overcome with love.'

Mary Magdalen resigned as abbess in 1737. She knew that death was near, and whispered, 'Lord, I am coming.'

She died at the age of fifty on 21 July 1737. Pope Leo XIII declared her blessed on 3 June 1900.

BLESSED NICHOLAS OF GÉSTURI

Nicholas, known in the world as John Medda, the son of Messa Serra and Priama Cogoni Zedda, was born at Gésturi, in the province of Cagliari, Italy, on 5 August 1882. His parents were of humble social condition, but of exemplary morality and deep piety. On the following day, the new baby, their sixth child, was baptized in the parish church of Saint Teresa of Avila, with the names of John Angelo Salvatore. On 2 June 1886, he received the sacrament of confirmation. Not long afterwards both his parents died. His eldest sister, who was married to a rich man of the village, then took care of him. Having finished his elementary school, he worked on the family farm. He was well-behaved but drew no special attention. However, when, on 18 December 1896, John made his first Holy Communion, his life changed. He began to pray intensely, receiving Holy Communion frequently and doing penance. His love of nature gave him nobility of soul, a sense of spiritual beauty, and good judgment. As well as this, he maintained good relations with family, friends and neighbours.

He had no desire for possessions, handing the administration of his properties to his brothers. Then he put himself at the service of his brother-in-law whom he greatly esteemed. He was content with just a little food and a place to live. His work, which he carried out carefully, did not stop him going to Mass every morning and Eucharistic devotions every evening. He had a strong desire to be a priest, but poverty was an

insurmountable obstacle. He wanted to live a religious vocation and, after he was cured of a rheumatic illness, took the opportunity of satisfying his desire to become a friar.

Accepting the Lord's call, he knocked at the door of the Capuchin friary in Cagliari in March 1911, when he was twenty-nine years old. Highly recommended by his parish priest, he was accepted as a tertiary oblate at the friary dedicated to Saint Anthony. However, on 30 October 1913, John Medda donned the Capuchin religious habit with the name of Nicholas. After novitiate, he made his first profession on 1 November 1914 and his final profession on 16 February 1919. His main work for the next ten years was cooking.

At the Chapter held in Cagliari in January 1924, he was posted to the friary in Cagliari to be a questor. From 1924 to 1958, in all seasons and every day, the people of Cagliari saw him going up and down the uneven and narrow streets of the city. People became increasingly impressed by Nicholas' humble and modest behaviour. With the passage of years, he seemed more and more to become in his example like Saint Ignatius of Láconi, who had lived in the same friary before him. For thirty-four years, Nicholas carried out his duty of questor in and around Cagliari. As he went about knocking on doors for alms, he kept his head bowed down and his eyes lowered. As time went on, he did not have to ask people for anything; it was they who wanted to give to him something. He simply made his rounds in silence and recollection.

He obtained without begging; he received without asking. It has been said that he was not a brother questor but rather a brother quested – people looked to him for help. Not only ordinary people, but also those high in society, both men and women, went to him asking for a prayer, advice, or just to touch his habit or cord, or to slip in his hand an offering which he always accepted with ‘May God reward your charity!’

As soon as they saw him, mothers would send their little ones running towards him, or after him, to give him an offering and receive back from him a smile or a caress which was always considered a blessing. It became customary to call him to the bedside of the sick in hospital or at home. Extraordinary cures took place. It was understood that the hand of God worked through this humble friar. The fame of his holiness and the power to work miracles spread everywhere. He became more the one who gave than the one who received. His life and the way he walked and presented himself were like an invitation to conversion and prayer.

Nicholas was a man given to silence. His silence was his thanksgiving to those who gave to him and his reproach to those who did not give to him when they could have done; silence was his answer to useless questions. It was only to recall the will of God that he broke it. His was a particular silence: it was a way of expressing himself, or being freed of the superfluous, a way to concentrate on essentials without distractions. To Nicholas, silence was a destination, not a departure point.

After forty-five years of a life lived in silence, penance and prayer, Nicholas became seriously ill. Having received the last rites and comforted by his confrères, he died on 8 June 1956, at the age of seventy-six. On 10 June, sixty thousand people accompanied his body to the grave. On 3 October 1999, Pope John Paul II declared him blessed.

SAINT PIO OF PIETRELCINA

Saint Pio's birth name was Francesco Forgione. He was born, the second of six children, in Pietrelcina, a village near Benevento, Italy, on 25 May 1887, to Grazio Forgione and Giuseppa Di Nunzio, and was baptized there in the church of Saint Mary of the Angels.

As a child Francesco worked in the family's fields and tended sheep. His early education was erratic, but the family had a strong life of faith and devotion. He wanted to become a Capuchin, so his father emigrated to the United States to make enough money to pay for a better education. This made it possible for Francesco to be received into the Order, at Morcone, on 22 January 1903 while still only fifteen years of age. He was given the name of Pio, and went on to make final profession of vows on 27 January 1907.

Because of ill-health he was moved from one friary to another and was allowed to spend some of his time, and do some of his studies, at home; he may have suffered from tuberculosis. He ate very little, subsisting on a diet adequate only for an infant. However, despite these obstacles he was ordained priest in Benevento cathedral on 10 August 1910. For a time, he was allowed to remain in his own village, where he helped the parish priest as his health allowed.

It seems that, from about September 1910, he received on his body the stigmata, that is, the marks of the passion

of Jesus in his hands, feet and side - but as yet invisibly. He spent a great deal of time in prayer, sometimes staying overnight in the church.

Then came World War I, and he was conscripted for thirty months into the army medical corps. But, after serving only six months, he was discharged on medical grounds and told to await further orders. He returned to San Giovanni Rotondo where he had been appointed in 1916, but was later arrested there as a deserter. He pointed out that he had done as ordered: he had awaited further orders – which never came. He was acquitted and given an honourable discharge in March 1918, suffering from double pneumonia.

On 20 September 1918, the stigmata became visible and bled profusely. This led to much curiosity, many investigations and physical and moral suffering for him. Between 1921 and 1939, he was confined to the grounds of the friary and ordered not to reply to letters. From 1931 to 1933, he was prohibited from saying Mass in the public church and from hearing confessions.

A medical examination showed that the wounds on his hands went through from one side to the other; there was no sign of infection, and they bled constantly without any congealing. He experienced severe pain, saying, ‘The violence of my pain makes me mute and paralyzes me.’ He did not know what God wanted of him, he felt abandoned, and was hurt by being constantly under suspicion. Eventually he found a way through; he said, ‘I know that the cross is the pledge of love. The cross is the down-payment for pardon. Love that is not nurtured and

sustained by the cross is not true love. It soon turns to ashes.'

In later years, he had two operations in hospital which were entirely normal. Not long before his death, fifty years after receiving the stigmata, the wounds healed completely, leaving no scar tissue or evidence of anything unusual.

The people of the area were convinced that he was a saint and blocked efforts to remove him. When he was allowed to resume public ministry, he spent most of each day hearing confessions, drawing immense numbers of people from all over the world, often startling them by his insight into their lives. He was often blunt in speech and could be brusque with people, both within and without the confessional. A minor seminarian, aged fourteen, who asked him for help with meditation, was startled to be told, 'What! You call yourself a seminarian but you can't meditate. Go home and be a butcher; it's all you're fit for!' But many who came to him, motivated perhaps only by curiosity, found themselves going to confession, perhaps for the first time in years, and experienced real spiritual cleansing and healing.

People claimed to have seen him thousands of kilometres away when he was in San Giovanni; they said he could heal at a distance. He was said to have given sight to a girl born without pupils, and to have reconstructed bone tissue destroyed in a road accident.

Pio experienced great struggles with Satan, the spirit of evil. He attributed his protection from the devil to the intercession of Mary, the mother of Jesus.

In 1940, he began work on building a large hospital in San Giovanni, which became known as the *House for the Relief of Suffering*; it was completed in 1956. Since someone had to be its owner, he was designated as such in civil law, and this required his being dispensed from his vow of poverty.

Pio said his last Mass at 5 a.m. on 22 September 1968. He then tried to go to the confessional as usual, but was unable. He died on the following day, 23 September 1968, and his funeral was attended by a hundred thousand people. In 1999, he was declared blessed by Pope John Paul II who also canonized him on 16 June 2002.

SAINT SERAPHIN OF MONTEGRANARO

Seraphin de Nicola, baptized Felix, was born in 1540. His parents were poor and regarded as of no importance. But the spirit of prayer that his mother had given him was an inheritance of great value. The lessons he learned from his mother caused him to make a firm resolve to remain innocent and to become a saint. He had a loving devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary and occasionally visited her shrine at Loreto, not far from his home.

On the death of his parents, Seraphin had a hard time. His elder brother, a bricklayer, was a man of violent temper. He used to give Seraphin work to do, but no matter how well Seraphin did it, he received nothing but harsh words and blows in return. He bore this cruel treatment with great patience.

Desiring to consecrate himself to the service of God, he entered the Capuchin novitiate at Jesi at the age of eighteen. His good qualities were soon noticed and admired. His humility, penance and self-sacrifice impressed his brothers. Punctual in performing his own duties, he still found time to be of service to others. He used to say, 'I'm fit for nothing but ready for anything.'

He often spent nights in prayer. In the evening he would visit the Blessed Sacrament and remain there for hours absorbed in contemplation. Then he would take a short rest, after which he would get up again to attend

the midnight Office. God seemed to conserve his bodily strength in a marvellous way.

He was constantly transferred from friary to friary, from one end of the province to the other, but was not upset by his constant wandering. His simplicity rendered him unsuited for various friary duties – though he did his best to discharge them – his miraculous gifts attracted the people, disturbed friary life and unsettled the friars. His miracles multiplied, so much so that one Guardian ordered him to stop performing them. He used to say, ‘All I have is the crucifix and my rosary, but with these I hope to be of some use to the friars and to become a saint.’ He would say to preachers, ‘Here is the book you should study if you want to preach to the people fruitfully,’ showing them the crucifix on his rosary.

During a famine he ate only a quarter of his usual food in order to have more to give to the poor. As doorkeeper, charged with providing for the poor, he once went beyond obedience. One day, there were some poor people waiting for food, and, since he had nothing left to give them, he went into the garden and pulled up the vegetables which were growing there and distributed them. When the guardian criticized him for doing this, Seraphin assured him that the community would not suffer in any way and indeed, they did not go hungry, the shortage being made up in other ways.

God blessed the kindness of his servant: it was said that sick people were restored to health when he made the Sign of the Cross over them. Seraphin, for the most part, was a quiet man, withdrawn from the public eye.

When working in the friary he meditated on the passion of Our Lord, and his great wish was to be sent abroad as a missionary, although this was not granted. He used to compose simple prayers of his own, such as the following: -

‘Holy Mother, pierce me through.
In my heart each wound renew
Of my Saviour crucified.’

Seraphin died on 12 October 1604 at the age of sixty-four. Miracles occurred at his grave. Pope Clement XIII canonized him in 1767.

BLESSED THOMAS OF OLERA

Of the time of his birth at the end of 1563 in Olera, a village at the mouth of the Serio river in Italy, and of his childhood, we know little. The child of a family of shepherds known as Acerbis, until the age of seventeen he was himself a shepherd, helping his parents in their work. Illiterate because his village lacked a school, he wanted to become a Capuchin and was received on 12 September 1580 at the friary in Verona, in the Capuchin Province of Venice. There he learned to read and write. Both at school and in the community, his remarkable qualities came to light during his years of formation.

He made his profession of vows on 5 July 1584 and was charged with the task of questing in Verona. In 1605, he was transferred to Vicenza with the same assignment. There he remained until 1612 until being posted to Rovereto until 1617. He was at Padua in 1618 as porter of the friary, and, in 1619, a few months after his arrival, he was sent to be part of the new Province of North Tyrol at the request of Archduke Leopold V of Habsburg. In the same year he reached Innsbruck, where he was again assigned to questing. At the time, Austria was the bridgehead for Catholic reform and above all for the Counter-Reformation in Germany.

Obedience and humility made Thomas a questor for almost fifty years; love for souls made him a tireless apostle in proclaiming the Gospel. With everyone, believer or not, he spoke of the love of God revealed in

Jesus Christ. He taught the faith to all, the little and the great. He asked everyone to commit themselves to love. Many were astounded by him, as it seemed humanly impossible that a barely educated friar should speak as he spoke in such an elevated way about God. Everywhere he spoke of the things of God with such energy and devotion that people were deeply impressed.

At the same time, he invited and urged peace-making and forgiveness. He visited and comforted the sick; he listened to and encouraged the poor; reading consciences, he denounced evil and facilitated conversions. In order to obtain from God what he envisaged for those he met, he stayed awake at night in prayer, scourging his body, imposing fasts and austerities on himself for the salvation of others.

Thomas also promoted vocations to consecrated life. In Vicenza, he sponsored the erection of a monastery of the Capuchin Poor Clares, in 1612-13. At Rovereto he sought from the commissioners of the city a site for a Poor Clare monastery, which was then built in 1642. There he met and guided the thirteen-year-old Bernardina Floriani, who would become the mystic Venerable Giovanna Maria della Croce.

To all he taught the contemplation of the sufferings of Jesus and urged people to find happiness in their sufferings. He was a counsellor to people both high and low, in church and state. In Tyrol, he was the spiritual guide of the poor of the Inn Valley, a catechist, and promoter of the Tridentine decrees for Catholic reform. Starting in 1617, he was friend and spiritual director to the scientist Ippolito Guarinoni of Halle, court physician

in Innsbruck. He was an adviser to the archduchesses Maria Cristina of Habsburg and Eleonora, sister of Leopold V, to the emperor himself and his wife, Claudia de' Medici, personally and by correspondence. He was also spiritual director to Archbishop Paris von Lodron, prince of Salzburg.

While in Vienna from 1620-1621, he drafted what he called "moral concepts against heretics," published posthumously in the *Fire of Love*. He disclosed his source in simple terms, 'I have never read a syllable of books, but I strive to read the suffering Christ.'

Love for Our Lady in his writings recognizes, among other things, her Immaculate Conception and Assumption. He made pilgrimage to the Holy House of Loreto three times (1623, 1625, 1629), recalling that 'arriving at that Holy House, I seemed to be in paradise.' To his friend Ippolito Guarinoni he pointed out a site at the Volders bridge on the Inn river, where a church dedicated to the Immaculate Conception could be built. In 1620, the foundations were laid and, despite many criticisms and difficulties, the church was completed in 1654. It was the first church on German-speaking land dedicated to the Immaculate Conception and to Saint Charles Borromeo. Today it is considered an Austrian national monument.

Thomas died on 3 May 1631, and was buried in the crypt of the chapel of Our Lady in the Capuchin church in Innsbruck. The Capuchin order had entrusted questing to Thomas; grace transformed him into a much sought-after adviser and a learned teacher. He lived in a

complex and troubled time, full of anger, hatred and violence. But the grace of God at work in him enabled him to give light and hope to many. Thomas of Olera was declared blessed on 21 September 2013 in Bergamo, Italy, by Pope Francis.

SAINT VERONICA GIULIANI

Ursula Giuliani was born in Mercatello, Italy, on 27 December 1660. Her mother, Benedetta, had seven daughters, of whom five survived. She was a very religious woman and consecrated each of these daughters to a different wound of the passion of Jesus, Ursula to the wound in his heart. Benedetta died at the age of forty, when Ursula was just seven years old.

From the age of Ursula wished to join a convent. Her father, Francesco, was happy for any of his daughters to join, except Ursula; he simply would not hear of it. He arranged for visits to the family home by prospective husbands but all this efforts came to nothing. This led to a strained relationship between her and her father, and to health problems for Ursula which ceased only when her he relented.

Friends described her as beautiful, intelligent, lively, loveable, dynamic, generous, and sensitive. She led an active social life, playing cards and dice, even learning to use a sword. At the same time, she also had an intense, if unusual, religious life. She loved talking to “holy pictures” and said that the figures in them spoke with her. She would speak to Jesus, saying, ‘I am yours and you are all mine.’ When she was just two years old she was taken to Mass for the first time; she wanted to run to the altar to meet Jesus, but her mother held her back. When her mother and sisters made Holy Communion,

she used to say that their faces looked more beautiful, but her mother used to wonder if she were insane.

Ursula made her first Communion on 2 February 1670 when she was nine. She said of that day, 'I was beside myself. When I swallowed the Host a great heat enveloped me. My heart was burning and I could not get back into myself.' (The word *ecstasy* means to stand outside oneself.)

Ursula wanted to join the Capuchinesses and, when she was seventeen, her father relented. She entered the novitiate on 28 October 1677 and was given the name of Veronica. She wrote, 'I made my request, I was questioned and accepted. The forms were signed on the spot. I went to thank Jesus in the tabernacle and went into ecstasy.'

Veronica's love of the passion of Jesus, which she had had since her childhood, led her to unusual penitential practices. She inflicted suffering on herself, such as taking red hot coals in her hands. But she soon found that the life she had chosen brought its own sufferings. Another novice constantly presented her in a bad light to the novice mistress. She was troubled by visions which she believed were diabolical in origin. Worse still, she experienced great emptiness in prayer, coming to doubt even if God existed. She went to confession four or five times a day and found help there. She wrote, 'It is there I find peace, joy, re-birth and increased love of God. My soul begins again to exude love of God.'

All those trials were, seemingly, a preparation for what was to come. On Good Friday, 5 April 1697, she received the *stigmata*, that is, the marks of the passion of Jesus in her hands and feet and side. (Greek, *stigma*, a mark; plural, *stigmata*) She said, ‘I saw five shining rays issuing from his wounds and coming towards me. I watched as they turned into flames. Four of them contained nails and in one of them there was a lance, golden and all aflame as it pierced my heart. The nails pierced my hands and feet.’

Veronica responded with greater penance: she used to walk in the garden carrying a heavy cross; she cut the name Jesus on her flesh and lived on bread and water for three years. She loved suffering, seeing it as the way to union with God.

On Christmas Day 1698, these external penances ended, but her internal purification continued. While she continued with her daily work as novice mistress and other duties, she came under scrutiny by the Holy Office and the Inquisition. She was tested, questioned, segregated and humiliated. It was eighteen years before the Holy Office cleared her of suspicion and removed its veto on her being abbess. With Florida Cevoli (later declared blessed) as her vicar, she was an active and practical leader of the community, arranging for piped water to the rooms of the older sisters. Vocations increased, and a new wing was built to accommodate them. Under orders, she wrote her *Diary*, running to some twenty thousand pages!

From about 1700 on, there was a shift of emphasis in her spirituality, with a greater focus on Mary. She felt that Mary was leading her to Jesus and to the Trinity. She wrote, 'My heart and soul seemed one with Mary.'

In 1727, her health began to decline. She wrote in her *Diary* on the feast of the Annunciation, 'It is time to call a halt.' On 6 June, as she made Holy Communion, she suffered a stroke. Thirty-three days of severe trials – physical, moral and spiritual – followed. She died on 9 July, at the age of sixty-six, saying, 'Love has let himself be found.'

Veronica was beatified in 1804 and canonized in 1839. Recently, efforts have been made to have her declared a doctor of the church, but nothing has yet come of this.

BLESSED YAKUB OF GHAZIR

Khalil Haddad was born in the town of Ghazir, Lebanon, in 1875. He was the third child in a family of five; his parents were a tailor and a dress-maker. As a boy he went to the local school, followed by secondary education at La Sagesse College in Beirut. He qualified as a teacher of Arabic, and taught for a while in a Christian Brothers school in Alexandria, Egypt.

But Khalil's real vocation lay elsewhere, and he joined the Capuchins, where he was given the name of Yakub. He was ordained in Beirut on 1 November 1901. On his way home for his first Mass, the horse-drawn carriage in which he was travelling went off the road and into a ravine. His two fellow-passengers were killed, and he was seriously injured. This seems to have affected him and led him to commit himself even more fully to God's service.

He spent his life as an itinerant preacher, walking all over Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, Iraq and Turkey. He was sometimes threatened by people hostile to his mission, and, on occasion, attacked. He coped with that by travelling at night. The constant themes of his spiritual life, and that of his preaching, were the cross and the eucharist. Like Blessed Agathangelus, he became known as "the Apostle of Lebanon."

In 1920, to help the sick and poor whom he met on his travels, and to care for children orphaned by World War

I, Abuna Yakub founded the Franciscan Sisters of the Holy Cross of Lebanon. In 1933 and 1948, he opened houses for the chronically ill. In 1949, he opened Saint Joseph's Hospital in Beirut, and, the following year, Saint Anthony's House for those living on the streets. These were followed by many schools and an orphanage for girls. He saw the Secular Franciscan Order (then known as the Third Order of Saint Francis) as a way to help laypeople live a more communitarian Christian life. He encouraged people to practise meditation and silent prayer.

Here are some extracts from his writings: -
'If you want to be loved, start by loving.'
'The human race is one family.'
'Our neighbour is a child of God, an image of God, the beloved of God.'
'We never love our neighbour if our charity stops short at certain people and excludes them.'

Yakub suffered a lot from various illnesses, including leukaemia. Towards the end of his life he was almost completely blind. He died on 26 June 1954, and was declared blessed in Beirut in 2008.

FRENCH CAPUCHIN MARTYRS OF THE REVOLUTION

During the *Reign of Terror* which began in France in 1793 in the aftermath of the Revolution of 1789, a severe persecution of the church and everything Christian began in France. The *Civil Constitution for the Clergy* aimed at creating a national church subject to state control; priests were required to swear loyalty to it. Those who refused were imprisoned, exiled or killed. In 1794, eight hundred and twenty-nine priests and religious were taken from prison and marched to the port of Bordeaux and embarked on two ships in the harbour. These were never intended to sail anywhere; they were prison ships, or, more truly, “coffin” ships. Years later, the captain of one of them, one René Laly, was charged with inhumane conduct, but defended himself, saying, ‘I was told to kill them off quietly in the silence of the ocean, and that is what I did.’

The prisoners were packed so that each person had an allocation of space measuring a hundred and fifty centimetres by seventy-five by thirty. They were kept there from 25 January 1794 to 7 February 1795. By then, death had reduced their number to two hundred and seventy-eight. These were released on condition that they remain silent about their experience and do nothing to embarrass the government. The rest died due to epidemics of cholera, caused by filthy living conditions, such as unwashed toilet buckets being used to bring their food. Sometimes tar was poured on the prisoners in the

hold, or sailors urinated on them, while at the same time mocking them. The *Rocheport Martyrs*, as they are called, numbered five hundred and forty-seven.

Of these, twenty-three were Capuchins – three lay-brothers, one deacon and nineteen priests. However, verifiable records remain for only three: Jean-Louis of Besançon, Protase of Sees, and Sebastian of Nancy.

Blessed Jean-Louis Loir

Jean-Baptiste Xavier Loir came from a wealthy family; his father had been manager of the Royal Mint in Lyons. But Jean-Baptiste surrendered his right to his inheritance when he entered the Capuchins at the age of twenty, about the year 1740, where he was given the name of Jean-Louis. He was described as noble, patient and peace-loving. His main work was as a confessor and spiritual guide. He was about seventy-four years old when he died on board ship on 19 May 1794.

Blessed Protase of Sees

Jean Bourdon joined the Capuchins at the age of twenty and was given the name of Protase. He came from Normandy, and was an imposing figure physically, morally and intellectually. After his ordination to the priesthood at the age of twenty-eight, he became a preacher, provincial secretary and also served at a shrine to Our Lady of Grace.

In 1791, he put in writing his refusal to take the oath required under the *Civil Constitution*. Two years later, on 10 April 1793, he was arrested for celebrating Mass without a permit. He was sentenced to deportation to French Guyana. After being marched in chains for thirty-four days, he was put on board one of the ships. As with all the other prisoners, he was searched before embarking and every religious item or symbol was removed. Protase died of typhus on board ship about the month of July 1794.

Blessed Sebastian of Nancy

François was the Christian name of the third martyr who was known in the Order as Sebastian of Nancy. He came from Lorraine and entered the Capuchins at nineteen years of age. Details of his life are incomplete, but it is known that he was guardian of the friary at Lyons in 1767, and was also there in 1790 when it was ordered shut.

On 9 November 1793, he went voluntarily to the so-called *Committee for Public Safety* and there declared his intention of not taking the required oath. He was sent to Rochefort and embarked on one of the ships. Survivors spoke of how he had comforted many other prisoners and prayed and sang constantly. An eye-witness wrote, 'One morning we saw him kneeling, his arms crossed, his eyes raised to heaven and his mouth wide open. At first we did not pay any attention because we were used to seeing him pray like that, even when he was ill. Half an hour passed and we amazed to see him still in such an

uncomfortable position, which was hard to maintain at that moment because the sea was rough and the ship was rolling heavily. At first we thought he was in ecstasy, and, drew near to observe him more closely, but, after touching his face and hands, we realized that he had actually rendered his soul to God while in that position.

We then summoned the ship's crew who were unable to contain their cries of admiration and their tears at such a sight. It was then that their faith was re-awakened in their hearts, many of them baring their arms, displaying to the assembled company the image of the cross, branded into their flesh with hot stone, and they made the resolve to return to the religion of their childhood.'

Sebastian's body was buried on the island of Aix.

POLISH CAPUCHIN MARTYRS OF THE NAZI OCCUPATION

Blessed Anicet Koplinski

He was born at Debrzno, in Western Pomerania, where two cultures, the Slav and the Germanic, and two religions, Catholic and Lutheran, met. Born on 30 July 1875, his parents were Lorenz (Wawrzyniec), of Polish background, and Berta Moldenhau, of German Lutheran background. At his baptism, on 8 August 1875, the child received the name Albert Anthony.

His first name was changed to Adalbert. He had four siblings. He attended elementary schools in his hometown of Debrzno. At the age of eighteen, on 23 November 1893, he entered the Capuchin Order at Sigolsheim. After a year's novitiate, he made his first profession on 24 November 1894. In the Order he received the name of Anicet. After finishing his secondary schooling, he began his studies in the seminary, wishing to become a priest. On 25 November 1897, he made his perpetual profession. He was ordained priest on the feast of the Assumption of Mary, 15 August 1900.

Following ordination, he ministered in various friaries of the civil province of Westphalia, gaining a reputation as an excellent preacher. Although missionary work was close to his heart, he was not destined for mission lands. Instead, his superiors entrusted him with the ministry of

serving Polish immigrants in the Rhineland and Westphalia. In 1916, he became a prison chaplain and also served as a chaplain to military veterans.

On 20 March 1918, he moved to Warsaw. Whether it was his Polish roots calling him back, or whether he was sent there for language studies to enable him to minister more effectively to Poles, is unclear. In any case, that year proved to be the turning point in Anicet's life. He would henceforth remain in Poland. In 1922, his father returned to Poland, residing at Nowe Miasto, where he eventually died. Around 1930, Anicet changed his nationality from German to Polish, although he would forever remain a member of the Capuchin Province of Rhineland-Westphalia. He learned enough Polish to be able to communicate, but not enough to retain his former fame as a preacher.

In Warsaw he became famous as a charismatic confessor. Lay people and clergy alike sought him out. He was confessor to the apostolic nuncios Achille Ratti (later Pope Pius XI) and Laurenti Lauri (later legate to the Eucharistic Congress in Ireland in 1932). The archbishops of Gniezno and Warsaw, Cardinals Alexander Kakowski, Stanislaus Gall and Joseph Gawlina, all went to him for confession. People were attracted by his approach to morals, which was to the point, dependable, and perfectly fitted to each individual, one that always encouraged people to greater goodness. He was a real comfort to the sick, even to those who, facing death, chose not to go to confession. He was instrumental in converting and reconciling many to God.

Many people were impressed by the way in which he would celebrate the Eucharist, which they found to be both solemn and inspirational. He celebrated in a lingering, deliberate style so that the reality of the Eucharistic mystery seemed to come alive.

In Warsaw he became well known as a questor and advocate of the poor. In the twenty years he lived there, Anicet spent the great part of his time working on behalf of the poor, the homeless and the unemployed. His every focus and energy was spent in their service. Much of his time was spent in the Annopol district of the city, on the right bank of the River Vistula. Due to the initiative of the Warsaw Capuchins there was a huge meal programme, capable of serving 8,000 meals a day. By his begging, Anicet was able to provide much of the food, as well as the financial backing that sustained the programme. He was also instrumental in finding jobs for the unemployed, and found time to tutor students. Anyone in need could count on him.

He created a special system for gathering donations. He managed to find a good number of donors who would give a certain amount either weekly or monthly to support the poor. Besides money offerings, he also requested for food supplies: flour, semolina, fat, sugar, bread etc. He targeted the better off. He was not unmindful, however, of the needs of the larger society. In gathering alms, he was the object of various insults and humiliations, including even physical attacks. Despite his choleric temperament, he managed to put up with everything calmly, to the amazement of those around him.

He was a poet and quite fluent in Latin. He often composed in Latin, in an acrostic style, and would then recite his poems in honour of various high-society personalities in order to get money from them for the poor. His poetry was put at the service of Christian charity.

He became very popular in the city. There was never an important ceremony taking place in Warsaw to which he was not invited. Conductors on the buses and trams knew him well and often stopped their vehicles specifically to pick up the famous begging Capuchin.

Anicet was gifted by nature, and placed all his talents at the service of others. He radiated serenity of spirit and inner joy. In him, everyone found a friend, a person full of goodness, empathy and human solidarity. He embodied a human goodness that attracted others and drew them instinctively to God. The personal attributes that led people to call him “the Father of the Poor” and “the Beggar of Warsaw” helps one appreciate the social dimension of this man, and, at the same time, his evident holiness.

When World War II broke out with the German invasion of Poland on 1 September 1939, Anicet remained in Warsaw. He found himself in the midst of a conflict that involved both his nations - the German, in which he was raised, and the Polish, which he had claimed for himself. Although in fact German, his spirit was more universal; emotionally, he felt Polish.

Following the surrender of Warsaw, Anicet remained at the friary in the city. Despite the difficulties, he continued to provide help for the poor and needy whose numbers had ballooned. His knowledge of German was of great help to him in this task. In the spring of 1940, the underground resistance newsletters put the figure of the unemployed and of those dying of hunger at 90% of the population. Anicet, to the limit of his capabilities and energy, gave a hand to everyone, including the Jewish people, the most persecuted of all.

In June 1940, Anicet and Innocent Hanski, guardian of the friary, were summoned to Gestapo headquarters for interrogation. When asked if anyone at the friary read the underground resistance newsletters, Anicet admitted the truth. He told the Gestapo how ashamed he was of being German.

During the night of 26-27 June 1941, the Gestapo surrounded the friary in Warsaw. After a search that lasted a few hours, twenty-two friars were taken away under arrest, among them Anicet. They were held temporarily in the prison of Pawiak where they were interrogated. While there, the friars were the objects of scorn to many of the guards. They were subjected to the abuse of the so-called “gymnastic exercises.” The guards took particular aim at Anicet who was advanced in years. They stripped him of his habit, leaving him a shirt and underwear; only after a few days did they give him some outer clothing.

On 4 September, Anicet was transferred with the other friars to the concentration camp at Auschwitz. He was

mistreated while getting off the train; during the march, he was again beaten because, on account of his age, he could not keep up with the others. Besides the other abuse he was bitten by one of the SS dogs. At the camp he received the identification number 30376. No one knows the direct cause of his death, whether due to homicide or to the inhuman living conditions. The fact remains that he lasted a month and a half at the camp and died a martyr's death. The story of the martyrdom of Anicet found strong resonance. Numerous publications dedicated to his memory and martyrdom witness to how the faithful entrust themselves to his intercession.

Blessed Fidelis Sprusinski

Born at Lodz on the feast of All Saints in 1906, the last of the six children of Waclaw and Leokadia Sprusinski, he was baptized on 4 November 1906 with the name of Jerome.

His family, who were members of Holy Cross parish, provided him with a solid religious education. When he had finished school, he entered a military academy, but, having completed his studies, could not find employment. Thanks to the help of relatives, he worked for a year in the Institute of Social Insurance. Later he found work at the Central Post Office in Warsaw where he was regarded as a trustworthy employee. In the meantime, together with his uncle, Father Stanislaus Sprusinski, he was active in the administration of *Catholic Action*.

He was vigorously engaged in the anti-alcohol campaign and he himself refrained from alcoholic drink. Through his work in Catholic Action he discovered a desire to deepen his interior life. He joined the Secular Franciscan Order at the Capuchin church in Warsaw. His admirable personal qualities won him the respect of others. He was instrumental in reconciling people who had been in conflict. During this period his friendship with Blessed Anicet Koplinski, the famous “Beggar of Warsaw”, began. His ongoing contact with Capuchins developed in him a religious vocation.

On 27 August 1933, he was invested at Nowe Miasto, in the civil province of Pilica, receiving the Capuchin habit and the name of Fidelis. Despite his twenty-seven years and his life experience, he remained approachable and simple, relating well to everyone. During his novitiate year he set about studying the principles of the spiritual life and intensely desired to strive for holiness. He was devoted to the Blessed Virgin.

Fidelis made first profession on 28 August 1934, and left for Zakroczym to begin his study of philosophy. There, with the consent of his superiors, he founded a Club for Intellectual Collaboration. He continued focussing on alcoholism, and founded an organization for those desiring to remain sober. He continued to work in close conjunction with the Secular Franciscan Order.

At the beginning of 1937, he passed his final examinations in philosophy with high grades. He then began his theological studies at the friary in Lublin. At the outbreak of World War II he was in his third year of

theology. In a letter to his uncle, Father Stanislaus Sprusinski, dated 18 December 1939, he expressed discouragement at not being able to live and study in a normal fashion. On 25 January 1940 he was arrested and held in the fortress of Lublin. In spite of the harsh prison conditions - the lack of mobility, space and air - he remained calm and even in good spirits.

After five months, on 18 June 1940, he was moved to the concentration camp at Sachsenhausen, on the outskirts of Berlin. It was a "model" camp - bearing a firm Prussian imprint - strictly tuned in discipline and order, concentrating on the annihilation of the individual. The inhumane treatment of prisoners shocked him, causing him to become depressed.

On 14 December 1940, with a convoy of other priests and religious, he was transferred to the concentration camp at Dachau, near Munich in Bavaria, where his personal condition worsened. The identification number, 22,473, was tattooed on his arm. Constant news of German war victories stripped the prisoners of any hope of getting out alive. Hunger, overwork and mistreatment became increasingly burdensome. They lost all reason to live, all hope of a way out. Hunger, lack of proper clothing and being forced to work beyond his energy caused Fidelis to come down with a serious pulmonary disease.

One winter morning in 1942, while he and a fellow prisoner were transporting a heavy load of coffee from the kitchen, he slipped, spilling the boiling coffee, and burning himself. The punishment inflicted on him by the

head of the block weakened his spirit even more. Bro. Kajetan Ambrozkiwicz, a fellow-prisoner in the camps, talked about Fidelis in these terms, 'I will never forget that Sunday afternoon in the summer of 1942 when Fidelis left our barracks, No.28, for the invalids' block. Strangely enough, he seemed relieved and preoccupied; you could already see in his eyes a glimmer of peace not of this world. He kissed each one of us, bidding us farewell, saying, 'Praised be Jesus Christ. We'll see each other in heaven.'

Shortly afterwards, on 9 July 1942, Fidelis died in the camp hospital; his remains were burnt in the crematorium.

Blessed Florian Stepniak

Joseph Stepniak was born at Zdzary, near Nowe Miasto, in the civil province of Pilica, on 3 January 1912, to Paul Stepniak and Anna Misztal. He was baptized the following day.

When he completed his primary education in Zdzary, Joseph expressed a desire to join the Capuchins. Thanks to the friars in Nowe Miasto he completed his secondary education, and then, in 1927, completed his studies at the Capuchin college in Lomza. A fellow student, Kajetan Ambrozkiwicz, described him as 'A holy soul, solid, frank, happy, with his head in the clouds - a bit different from the rest of us kids who were always joking around.'

He joined the Secular Franciscan Order while at secondary school. Subsequently, he received the habit in the Capuchin novitiate at Nowe Miasto on 14 August 1931 and was given the name of Florian. He made temporary profession of vows on 15 August 1932. Having completed the philosophy course, he made perpetual profession on 15 August 1935. He continued his theological studies in Lublin, and was ordained priest on 24 June 1938. He was then sent for further study in scripture at the Catholic University of Lublin.

At the outbreak of the Second World War, on 1 September 1939, he was living in Lublin. During those trying times, like the other friars, he never considered abandoning the friary, but courageously remained there, continuing to hear confessions. Many clergy went into hiding because of the persecutions that had begun, leaving no one to bury the dead. Florian's work in Lublin was short-lived. On 25 January 1940, together with all the other friars in Lublin, he was arrested by the Gestapo and imprisoned in the Fortress of Lublin. On 18 June 1940, he was moved to Sachsenhausen concentration camp near Berlin. On 14 December 1940, he was moved to Dachau, where he was given the prisoner identification number, 22,738.

Bitterly cold temperatures undermined his health. He had been a husky and robust man and thus required solid nourishment. Weakened by deprivation, disease soon ensued. In the summer of 1942, he became ill and had to be admitted to the camp hospital. After a few weeks, due to improved rations and the stay in hospital, he was judged well enough to be discharged.

But he was not taken back to the block. As a convalescent, he was transferred to the invalids' block (No.29). A fellow prisoner in the camp, Br. Kajetan Ambrozkiwicz recalls his behaviour, 'A few priest friends who managed to escape from the invalids' block recounted how Florian was able to bring light to those gloomy barracks. The men held there were destined to die. They died of various causes, countless of them simply being taken away to who knows where. Only afterward did we come to know that they had been exterminated in the gas chambers on the outskirts of Munich.'

Those who never experienced life in the camps have no idea what it was like for those prisoners in the invalids' block - there was nothing left of them but skin and bones, they were submerged in a world of death, not to hear even a small word of comfort. What it meant for them to see a smile on the face of a Capuchin facing the same terrible end as themselves!

Despite the fact that his health had improved sufficiently for him to return to work, when the roll call reached those with surnames beginning with 'S', Florian was led away. He was killed in the gas chamber on 12 August 1942. In all probability his remains were cremated in the camp's ovens. The camp authorities returned his habit to his parents in Zdżary, reporting to them that their son had died of angina.

Blessed Henry Krzysztofik

Henry was born on 22 March 1908, the son of Joseph Krzysztofik and Frances Franaszczyk, in the village of Zachorzew. He was baptized on 9 April 1908, at the parish of Slawno, in the diocese of Sandomierz, Poland, and given the name Joseph. He completed his elementary education in 1925, and entered the Capuchin College of Saint Fidelis at Lomza. He then applied for entrance into the Capuchin Commissariat of Warsaw.

On 4 August 1927, at the friary of Nowe Miasto in the civil province of Pilica, he was invested with the Capuchin habit and took the religious name Henry. One year later, on 15 August 1928, he made his temporary profession of religious vows. Subsequently, he was sent to Holland, to the Capuchin friary of Breust-Eysden, staffed by the Province of Paris. After two years of philosophical studies, he was sent to Rome to study theology. There he made his perpetual profession of religious vows on 15 August 1931, and was ordained to the presbyterate on 30 July 1933. At the request of his superiors, he went for further theological studies at the Gregorian University in Rome, while residing at the Capuchin International College of Saint Lawrence. In 1935, he earned a licentiate in theology.

On his return to Poland he was assigned to the friary in Lublin where he taught dogmatic theology at the local Capuchin seminary. Shortly thereafter he was named rector of the same house and vicar of the local fraternity. He often ministered at the local Capuchin church where he would preach with great spiritual passion and

personal fervour. On 1 September 1939, in the midst of this activity, World War II broke out with the invasion of Poland from the west by Germany and the east by the Soviet Union.

The guardian of the Lublin friary, Gesualdo Wilem of the Netherlands - at that time the Polish Capuchins were aided by Capuchins from Holland - was forced to resign his office and leave Poland. Henry was then named guardian of the friary. Holding both the office of guardian and, simultaneously, rector of the seminary, Henry found himself in a difficult position. Due to the war, the start of classes at the seminary for the academic year 1939-40 had been delayed. The mood was very tense and unsettled. German troops were savage and arrests followed without interruption. In this atmosphere, Henry sought to reassure his seminarians.

On 25 January 1940, the Gestapo arrested twenty-three friars of Lublin friary, Henry among them. They were held first at the Fortress of Lublin while awaiting room in the prison.

Henry saw to it that the Eucharist would be celebrated. On 18 June 1940, he and the other friars were moved to the concentration camp at Sachsenhausen near Berlin. He addressed the friars, 'Brothers, while we are still in a position to do so, let us make a firm and honorable resolve: that whatever happens to us in the future, each of us will offer ourselves as a sacrifice to God.'

There, in the words of Bro. Ambrose Jastrzebski - a fellow prisoner - 'in conditions far worse than before,

Henry was mindful of us all.' In the autumn of 1940, when he received some money for the first time, he went to the camp store and bought two loaves which he divided into twenty-five portions - the number of friars who were there - and said, 'Get up, brothers, let us partake of the Lord's gifts; eat until it's all gone.' Ambrose described that fraternal gesture in these words, 'A noble gesture! Only someone who has experienced life in a concentration camp could really appreciate how much self-denial was involved - a heroic amount - to give away to others two loaves when you yourself were starving and could have devoured them all by yourself!'

On 14 December 1940, Henry and the other friars were transferred to Dachau, where he received his identification number: 22,637. In the difficult life of the camp he never put his own interests before those of others. Although weak and unsteady on his legs, he assisted others who were in a more weakened state, especially the elderly. He survived in the concentration camp only until the summer of 1941.

In July 1941, completely spent and unable to walk unaided, he was consigned to the camp hospital - the equivalent of a death sentence. From there he was able to slip out a message to the seminarians, memorized by one of them, Kajetan Ambrozkiwicz, 'Dear brothers! I am in the ward of Block 7. I have lost a huge amount of weight due to dehydration. I weigh only 35 kilos. All my bones ache. I lie on my bed as if I were on the cross with Christ. And I am grateful to be able to suffer with him. I pray for all of you and I offer to God all my sufferings for you.'

He died on 4 August 1942, aged thirty-four, and was cremated in Camp 12.

Blessed Maria Teresa Kowalska

Mieczysława Kowalska was born in Warsaw, Poland, in 1902. Little is known about her parents or family. At the age of twenty-one, she sensed a call to religious life, entering the convent of the Capuchin Poor Clares at Przasnysz on 23 January 1923, with the intention of making reparation for her family, who had become atheists.

She received the habit on 12 August 1923 and took as her religious name Maria Teresa of the Child Jesus. She made her first profession on 15 August 1924, and perpetual profession on 26 July 1928. She was a somewhat delicate and frail person, but open to everything and everyone. She served God in the convent with devotion and care. 'Her way of doing things won the trust of everyone', said one of her sisters. She served in various capacities: doorkeeper, sacristan, librarian, novice mistress and councillor. Sr. Teresa led a religious life in silence, dedicated to God and zealous in her work.

One day this service to God was put to the ultimate test. On 2 April 1941, German soldiers burst into the cloister and arrested all the sisters, including Maria Teresa, who was ill with TB at the time. They were brought to the concentration camp at Działdowo. All thirty-six were imprisoned in an enclosed space under living conditions that were an insult to human dignity: a

filthy environment, severe hunger and constant terror. The sisters were well aware that, in the camp, others - such as Bishops Anton Nowowiejski and Leon Wetmanski of Plock, and many other priests - were being tortured.

After spending a month under those living conditions, even the sisters who had been healthy began to get sick. Sr. Maria Teresa's condition worsened all the time, until she became unable to stand. Her lungs had begun haemorrhaging. Not only was she not given any medical care, but not even water was provided for drinking or for the demands of hygiene.

She endured her trials courageously, and, as long as possible, prayed with the other nuns as well as by herself. In great pain, and knowing that death was imminent, she said to her sisters, 'I will not leave here alive; I offer my life in sacrifice so that the sisters may return to the convent.' Feverish and unable to rise from her bunk, she devoted herself to prayer. Every so often she would ask the abbess, 'Mother, will it be much longer? Will the end come soon?' She died during the night of 25 July 1941. Her body was removed and no one knows what became of it.

Her death became a focal point of reflection for the other nuns. They were convinced that Sr. Maria Teresa had died a holy death and had been welcomed to the glory of the blessed, so they held her in special veneration. In keeping with what she had told them, the sisters were freed from the camp two weeks later, on 7 August 1941.

That liberation was interpreted as a grace received from God through the intercession of Sr. Maria Teresa. It was an altogether singular occurrence, since the Nazis generally did not leave behind survivors from their camps. Although the sisters were unable to return to their convent at Przasnysz, they were, nonetheless, free.

Following their return to the convent at Przasnysz in 1945, the sisters kept alive the holy memory of the life and death of Sr. Maria Teresa. Notes were made in the convent's *Book of the Dead*. In addition, accounts of Sr. Maria Teresa were communicated to the convent's new candidates. Due to conditions imposed under communist rule, nothing was published about her until her beatification.

Blessed Symforian Ducki

Symforian was born in Warsaw on 10 May 1888, the son of Julian Casper Ducki and Marianna Lenardt. He was baptized on 27 May, receiving the name Felix. He attended primary schools in his hometown. In 1918, when the Capuchins were returning to the Warsaw friary following their expulsion during the Czarist suppression of the 1864 uprising, Felix joined the friars as an aspirant, during which time he helped in the restoration of the Warsaw friary, and then, in June 1918, becoming a postulant.

After two years, on 19 May 1920, he began his novitiate at Nowe Miasto in the civil province of Pilica, taking Symforian as his religious name. He made

temporary profession on 20 May 1921. Between the end of novitiate and perpetual profession on 22 May 1925 he served in friaries in Warsaw, Łomża, and again in Warsaw from 1924.

In Warsaw, his first assignment was as questor, primarily seeking donations for the construction of Saint Fidelis Minor Seminary. Then, for a number of years, he was companion to the provincial minister.

A likeable, simple, courteous and friendly character, Symforian easily won the hearts of people and made new friends for the Order. Despite his very active life among the people, he never lost the spirit of prayer and devotion, distinguishing himself for his fervent and zealous prayer. He was known to, and esteemed by, the people of Warsaw who called him “Father” although he was not ordained.

From the outset of World War II, he tried his best to obtain the basic necessities of life, both for the friars and for those in need, until 27 June 1941, when the Gestapo arrested all twenty-two Capuchins of the Warsaw friary. Initially, Symforian was held at the prison of Pawiak, and then, on 3 September, was moved to the concentration camp at Auschwitz-Birkenau. Being of a robust nature, he suffered more than most from hunger and mistreatment, but he bore everything in silence. The miserly rations provided by the Germans were grossly insufficient to sustain an individual of even average build. After seven months, his death was a certainty.

One night, for “sport”, German soldiers decided to kill prisoners by smashing their skulls with batons. Symforian confronted them by tracing the sign of the cross in their direction. An eyewitness and fellow-prisoner, Czesław Ostańkiewicz, recalled that, at first, there was a moment of dismay, followed by the order to beat him. Symforian was bludgeoned on the head. He slumped to the floor at the feet of the Germans, his body creating a barrier between them and the other prisoners. He managed to get up again and made the sign of the cross. Then they killed him; it was 11 April 1942. Symforian’s death halted the barbarous slaughter the Germans had intended for that evening. So, thanks to Symforian’s intervention the lives of some fifteen other prisoners were spared. The prisoners treated Symforian’s body with great respect as they placed it on the wagon bearing other dead to the crematorium ovens.

Symforian’s martyrdom evidenced profound heroism; he professed his faith in the Trinity and, at the same time, saved the lives of many of the other camp prisoners.

SPANISH CAPUCHIN MARTYRS OF THE CIVIL WAR

The Martyrs of Madrid and Cataluña

‘In our own century the martyrs have returned, many of them nameless, "unknown soldiers" as it were, of God's great cause. As far as possible, their witness should not be lost to the Church’ wrote Pope John Paul II in *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*. (n.37)

On 1 July 1937, the bishops of Spain wrote a letter to the whole church, describing the sufferings inflicted on the church in Spain during the civil war in the years 1936-37: *On the War in Spain*, (The America Press, New York, 1937.) They saw the war as the outcome of an ideological struggle between two irreconcilable forces, Christianity and communism. It appeared clear to them from the beginning that communists were aiming at the abolition of the Catholic religion in Spain. (p.5) They said that anti-Catholic legislation and practice began in 1931 with the new government, but that, despite this, the bishops remained loyal to the constitutional order. (pp. 6, 3-4) While acknowledging that Nationalists were also guilty of excesses (p.23), they spelled out the crimes committed by forces of the Republican government.

They estimated the number of laymen killed, mostly for religious reasons, as being in excess of 300,000. In

Madrid, in the first three months of the war, more than 22,000 were murdered. (p.15) Murdered priests, numbering about 6,000, constituted about forty per cent of affected dioceses. (p.14) Ten bishops were killed. (p.25) Although the figures were incomplete at the time of writing, they calculated that about 20,000 churches and chapels were totally plundered or destroyed. So great was the devastation wrought that they quoted the delegate of the Spanish Popular Front as saying at the Congress of the Godless in Moscow, 'Spain has surpassed in a great degree the work of the Soviets, as the Church in Spain has been completely annihilated.' (p.16)

The bishops went on to say, 'We are asked from abroad today whether it is true that the Church in Spain owned one-third of the national territory and that the people have revolted in order to free themselves from her oppression. It is an absurd accusation. The Church did not possess more than a few and insignificant portions of land, presbyteries and schools, and even of this the State had recently taken possession.' (p.21)

Similarly, it was said that the war was one of classes, and that the Church had put itself on the side of the rich: 'Those who know its causes and its nature can observe that this is not so.... It is precisely in Spain that a great part of the poorer regions have been spared the horrors of war, which have been fiercest where the standard of prosperity and popular well-being has been highest.... Witness the prosperity of the undamaged regions and the misery which took possession of those which have fallen under Communist domination. (p.21) They rejected the

claim that clergy were recruited from the upper classes, saying that of 7,401 seminarians in 1935, 7,280 were poor. (p.24)

Among thirty-three Capuchins killed in hatred of the faith (*in odium fidei*) by the Popular Front, Andrew of Palazuelo was the first. Along with another four hundred priests, seminarians and religious, these brothers of the Capuchin provinces of Madrid and Cataluña were beatified on 13 October 2013 in Tarragona, Spain. Their names and the dates of their death are: -

Br. Andrew of Palazuelo, 31 July 1936
Br. Luis of Valencina, 3 August 1936
Br. Ángel of Cañete La Real, 6 August 1936
Br. Gil of Puerto de Santa Maria, 6 August 1936
Br. Ignatius of Galdácano, 6 August 1936
Br. José of Chauchina, 6 August 1936
Br. Crispín of Cuevas Alta, 6 August 1936
Br. Pacíficus of Ronda, 7 August 1936
Br. Ferdinand of Santiago, 12 August 1936
Br. Bernard of Visantoña, 14 August 1936
Br. Arcángel of Valdavida, 14 August 1936
Br. Ildefonso of Armellada, 14 August 1936
Br. Domitilo of Ayoó, 14 August 1936
Br. Alejo of Terradillos, 14 August 1936
Br. Eusebius of Saludes, 14 August 1936
Br. Eustace of Villalquite, 14 August 1936
Br. Alexander of Sobradillo, 16 August 1936
Br. José Maria of Manila, 17 August 1936
Br. Aurelius of Ocejó, 17 August 1936
Br. Gabriel of Aróstegui, 23 August 1936
Br. Carmel of Colomé, 25 August 1936

Br. Saturninus of Bilbao, 26 August 1936
 Br. Gregorio of la Mata, 27 August 1936
 Br. Norbert Cembronos of Villalquite, 23 September
 1936
 Br. Eloy of Orihuela, 7 November 1936
 Br. Ramirus of Sobradillo, 27 November 1936
 Br. Honorius of Orihuela, 2 December 1936
 Br. John Chrysostom of Gata de Gorgos, 25
 December 1936
 Br. Ambrosio of Santibáñez, 27 December 1936
 Br. Miguel of Grajal, 29/30 December 1936
 Br. Diego of Guadilla 29/30
 December 1936
 Br. Carlos of Alcubilla, 15 January 1937
 Br. Primitivo of Villamizar, 20 May 1937.

All of them, from the oldest to the youngest, remained steadfast in the faith and faced martyrdom with courage. In their living and dying they expressed what Saint Francis wrote in his *Letter to the Entire Order*, ‘Hold back nothing of yourselves for yourselves, that he who gives himself totally to you may receive you totally.’ They bore witness that God’s plan of salvation for humanity is fulfilled even when circumstances are unfavourable. They were able to remain faithful even unto death. They were killed because they were represented the Christian faith which some wanted to eliminate. Their memory is a reminder and encouragement to remain steadfast in faith, especially where it is challenged as it is in secular societies today. May the intercession of our blessed brothers sustain us in our struggle to be faithful.

The Martyrs of Valencia

On 11 March 2001, Pope John Paul II beatified a group of two hundred and forty martyrs. Among them were seventeen Capuchins: twelve friars and five Capuchin Poor Clares. They are Blessed Aurelio of Vinalesa and his companions from the Capuchin province of Valencia, Spain. Each biography has been enriched by statements from witnesses who knew the martyrs personally and themselves experienced the same historical events.

The fruitfulness of the martyrs is rooted not so much in their violent death as such, but rather in the fact that they shared as fully as they could in love for Christ. Saint Francis, on hearing the news of the martyrdom of five of his companions in Morocco, could not refrain from exclaiming, ‘Now I can say I have five true lesser brothers!’

History must not be forgotten, because, without memory, there is no future and no peace.

Blessed Aurelio of Vinalesa

José Ample Alcaide was born on 3 February 1896 in Vinalesa, Valencia, Spain, to Vicente Ample and Manuela Alcaide, the third of their seven children. He was baptised the day after his birth in the parish of Saint Honoratus, and was confirmed on 21 April 1899.

His first years of study were spent in the seraphic seminary at Massamagrell, Valencia. Clothed in the Capuchin habit in 1912 with the name of Aurelio, he made temporary profession on 10 August 1913 and perpetual profession on 18 December 1917. He was later sent to Rome to complete his studies and was ordained on 26 March 1921.

On his return to Spain he was appointed director of the Capuchin philosophical and theological study house at Orihuela, Alicante, an office he exercised to general satisfaction until his death.

‘Among the faithful he enjoyed a reputation for sanctity,’ was the opinion of Don Pascual Ortells, a diocesan priest. He faithfully observed the obligations of the Franciscan Rule, and gave himself wholeheartedly to the task of helping his young charges become good religious.’

During the revolution of 1936, the friars of the Orihuela friary were dispersed on 13 July. Aurelio took refuge in his parents’ home at Vinalesa, where, on 28 August, he was captured by members of the militia and taken to the place of his death. Before being shot he exhorted his companions to die well. He gave them absolution, and then added: ‘Shout out loud, “Long live Christ the King!”’

He was buried in the cemetery at Foyos, Valencia, not far from where he was shot. After the civil war, his remains were exhumed and taken to the cemetery of Vinalesa on 17 September 1937. At present, they are

interred in the martyrs' chapel in the friary of the Magdalena at Massamagrell.

From the moment of his capture until his death, Aurelio remained inwardly unperturbed and totally faithful to Christ. 'He kept his composure until the end,' said Rafael Rodrigo, one of the witnesses of his martyrdom, 'encouraging all of us who were about to die. When everything was ready for the execution he urged us to recite the act of contrition, which we did, and as the Servant of God was reciting the formula of absolution one of the militia men slapped him twice. One militia-man told his comrade not to hit him any more as it was not worth it, since we had such a short time to live. The Servant of God remained unflinching in face of the insults and continued the absolution to the end. As soon as he had finished his duty a volley of shots rang out and we all fell to the ground, repeating with him the cry, 'Long live Christ the King!'

Blessed Ambrose of Benaguacil

Luis Valls Matamales was born the son of Don Valentín Valls and Doña Mariana Matamale on 3 May 1870 at Benaguacil, Valencia, Spain and baptised on 4 May 1870 in the parish of Our Lady of the Assumption at Benaguacil. He was confirmed in the parish of Liria, Valencia. He received the Capuchin habit on 28 May 1890, and was given the religious name of Ambrose. He made temporary profession on 28 May 1891, and perpetual profession on 30 May 1894. Ordained priest on

22 September 1894, he celebrated his first Mass in the Capuchin friary at Sanlúcar de Barrameda, Cadiz.

‘He was a very modest religious,’ said Sister Maria Amparo Ortells, ‘and always looked recollected. He was humble. You could see that he had a great spirit of prayer. He was extremely devoted to Our Lady.’ Among his fellow friars he was considered a good religious, faithful in his observance of the Franciscan *Rule* and very devoted to Saint Francis. He worked in the apostolates of preaching, the ministry of confession and spiritual direction. His preference was to work as a confessor and as director of the Third Order of Saint Francis. In the Capuchin Province of Valencia he was reckoned one of the best preachers. His transparent devotion to Our Lady pervades a small work of his dedicated to Our Lady of Montiel, entitled *Stories, Novenas, Favours and Anecdotes of Our Lady of Montiel, venerated in her hermitage at Benaguacil*, which reached its third edition in 1934.

Religious persecution broke out in Spain in 1936 while Ambrose was living in the friary at Massamagrell, Valencia. He took refuge in the house of Doña Maria Orts Lloris at Vinalesa. From his hiding place he desired to die for Christ in the Catholic Church. ‘He had no reaction against martyrdom,’ said Doña Maria Orts. ‘In fact, on the contrary, he ardently longed to die for Christ. His reaction to the danger he was facing was one of great serenity and courage. “They will probably kill me,” he would say, “but nothing will happen to you,” and that is how it was.’

He was arrested at Vinalesa on the night of 2 August 1936, taken by car to Valencia and killed that same night. At that moment, as Doña Maria tells it, ‘The Servant of God asked us to pray that he would not turn back on his course. The militia men were armed with shotguns and machine guns. Brother Ambrose was taken from our house for interrogation by the committee of Vinalesa. An hour later they led him to the place of martyrdom. I know that on the way they insulted him and maltreated him, accusing him of the crime of preaching a sermon against communism at Benaguacil, to which the Servant of God replied, “I preached only God’s teaching and the Gospel.”’”

Blessed Peter of Benisa

Alejandro Mas Ginestar was born at Benisa, Alicante, Spain, on 3 February 1876, the last of the four children born to Francisco Mas and Vicenta Ginestar. He was baptised on 12 December 1876 in the parish of the *Purísima Xiqueta* of Benisa. He joined the Capuchin Order, being clothed with the habit on 1 August 1893 in the friary of Santa Maria Magdalena at Massamagrell, and given the name of Peter. He made temporary profession on 3 August 1894, and professed his perpetual vows on 8 August 1897.

On completion of his studies he was ordained priest at Ollería on 22 December 1900. From that time he exercised his apostolic ministry in various houses of the Province, devoting himself in particular to the youth apostolate and catechesis. He was always outstanding for

his fidelity to the *Rule*. ‘He was a faithful observer of the Rule and Constitutions,’ said Don Francisco Barre, ‘to the extent that he would leave the young people a few moments before the bell rang for any community function, so that he could be sure to arrive on time. Everyone knew that he had a temper, but he knew how to control himself and he came across as being full of kindness.’ ‘He was a good religious,’ says Doña Josefa Moreno, ‘and, being as kind as he was, on more than one occasion he intervened with his relatives to resolve difficult family situations, reconciling hearts and always proceeding with the utmost prudence.’ ‘While he was in hiding, says Mercedes Lloris, ‘he always showed great serenity. He prayed a great deal, and we always prayed the rosary as a family at his invitation.’

After 18 July 1936, he, too, was obliged to leave the friary and take refuge in the house of some friends, and then in the house of one of his sisters, at Vergel, Alicante. Mr. Barres Ferrer recalled that ‘During this time he appeared calm and never complained or asked how God could permit such things. He showed patience and recited the Divine Office.’ ‘He was perfectly aware,’ said Maria Jansarás, ‘of the danger that he and all of us were in, and he would often say so to my father. He exhorted us to pray a great deal and always to be ready to abandon ourselves into God’s hands. During the time he was in hiding, each time we visited him he showed resignation and often repeated that “We should not cry because, since God permitted it, it was good for us.” He prayed constantly.’

He was taken by the militia on 26 August 1936 and killed at the Denia reservoir. He was later buried in the cemetery at Denia. On 30 July 1939, his remains were exhumed. His skull was totally smashed. He had been hit by more than fourteen bursts of gunfire. His remains now rest in the martyrs' chapel in the friary of the Magdalena at Massamagrell. Peter's feelings in the face of death are summed up in an expression he often repeated to his sister, 'If they come for me, I am ready.'

Blessed Joachim of Albocácer

José Ferrer Adell was born on 23 April 1879 in Albocácer in the civil province of Castellón de la Plana. The only son of José Ferrer and Antonia Adell, he was baptised on the day of his birth.

After completing his first studies in the Capuchin minor seminary he was clothed in the habit at Massamagrell on 1 January 1896, with the name of Joachim. He made profession of vows on 3 January 1897. He studied philosophy at Totana, Murcia, and theology at Orihuela, Alicante. He was ordained priest on 19 December 1903.

In 1913, he set out as a missionary to Colombia, where, in 1925, he was appointed Regular Superior of the Custody of Bogotá. On completion of his term of office, he returned to Spain and was appointed director of the minor seminary at Massamagrell. As director, he tried to instil a missionary spirit into the young aspirants to the religious life. 'In the friary of Massamagrell,' said

Don José Piquer, ‘Father Joachim, as seminary director, devoted himself to teaching the seminarians. He was tireless in teaching, and treated them like a good father.’ Don Antonio Sales says of him, ‘He was a mystic, very gentle in his dealings with everybody.’ He founded the magazine *Eucharistic Life*; perpetual adoration, holy hours, and the “Eucharistic Thursdays”, were initiatives to which he devoted himself.

When religious persecution broke out, he first thought about getting his seminarians to safety, before taking refuge in the Piquer household at Rafelbuñol, Valencia. From there he kept an eye on his seminarians, spending the time in prayer with complete trust in divine providence. It was there that he was captured by militia on 30 August and taken to Albocácer with his family. He was then brought before the president of the committee of Rafelbuñol at 10 in the morning. By 4 p.m. of the same afternoon he was driven in the same car four kms. along the Puebla Tornos road to Villafamés, where he was killed and then buried in the cemetery in that village. It has not been possible to identify his remains.

During the few hours he spent in prison Joachim tried to encourage his companions. Witnesses said that ‘When he was captured, his attitude was one of the greatest humility and compliance,’ and, after greeting his family, he said to them, ‘If we don’t meet again in this world, we’ll meet in glory.’

Blessed Modestus of Albocácer

Modesto García Martí was born at Albocácer, in the civil province of Castellón de la Plana, Spain, on 18 January 1880. He was the third in a family of seven children, his parents being Don Francisco García and Doña Joaquina Martí. He was baptised on 19 January 1880 in the parish of Our Lady of the Assumption in Albocácer.

As a boy he entered the Capuchin seminary of the Valencia Province at Massamagrell, and was clothed in the habit in the same friary on 1 January 1896 with his own name of Modestus. He made first profession on 3 January 1897, and perpetual profession on 6 January 1900. He completed his study of philosophy at Orihuela and of theology at Massamagrell, and was ordained priest on 19 December 1903. The major part of his apostolic ministry was conducted as a missionary in the Custody of Bogotá in Colombia. On his return to Valencia he was appointed Guardian and held the post for several years.

Those who knew him speak of him as devoted to preaching, and giving retreats and spiritual direction. They were among his favourite occupations. In the words of those who lived with him, ‘His favourite apostolate,’ says Pilar Beltrán, ‘was preaching, spiritual exercises and the direction of souls. I never heard any criticisms about the way he acted.’ He enjoyed a reputation for holiness both inside the friary and among the faithful. ‘He was peaceful by temperament. His most notable quality, observed Daniel García, ‘was his

friendliness. He had a good reputation among his fellow friars and among the faithful. He faithfully observed the Franciscan *Rule* and *Constitutions*.’

At the time of the revolution he was Guardian of the friary at Ollería, Valencia, where ‘the community was violently dissolved, the friary and church were destroyed by flames, the pine grove belonging to the friary was cut down, the surrounding walls destroyed, so that everything was reduced to nothing.’ (Art. 84-8). When communications were restored, Modestus went to his village and took refuge in the home of his sister Teresa, together with his priest brother, Mosén Miguel, parish priest of Torrembesora. For greater safety they fled to the La Masá farmhouse, but he was captured by armed militiamen. Modestus ‘gave himself up calmly, humbly and without any protest,’ said Arturo Madel. ‘His attitude during this period,’ said Pilar Beltrán, ‘was one of total abandonment to the Lord. His way of life was exemplary.’

He was killed at four p.m. on 13 August, near the farmhouse, on the road from it to the village. After the liberation of Albocácer, Modestus’ remains were exhumed; his skull was found pierced by a large nail. His remains were buried in a common pit in the village cemetery, and now rest in a niche in the same cemetery.

Blessed Germán of Carcagente

José-Maria Garrigues Hernández was born at Carcagente, Valencia, Spain, on 12 February 1895. He

was baptised on the day of his birth, in the parish of Our Lady of the Assumption in Carcagente, and received confirmation on 22 July 1912. Eight children were born to the family of Don Juan Bautista Garrigues and Doña Maria Ana Hernández. Three of them became Capuchins.

He began his studies at the Capuchin seminary at Monforte del Cid and joined the Capuchin Order on 13 August 1911 with the name of Germane. He made temporary profession on 15 August 1912 and made perpetual vows on 18 December 1917. He was ordained priest at Orihuela on 9 February 1919. His superiors had earmarked him for formation and teaching. The Capuchin Domingo Garrigues said that Modestus ‘held the office of deputy novice-master and teacher in the primary school at Alcira. He was particularly involved in the apostolate of the confessional, the sick, and school catechesis.’

Many of those who knew him speak of him as faithful to his vocation, fervent in prayer, and very charitable. His sister Mercedes Garrigues says of him, ‘He was very well thought of among the faithful and among his confrères, because of his jovial character, his charity and artless simplicity. They used to say, “He’s an angel.” I heard the friars say that he was very observant of the Capuchin Franciscan *Rule* and *Constitutions*.’ ‘His most remarkable qualities,’ according to his brother, Don Francisco Pascual Garrigues, ‘were his deep piety and the attraction he exerted on the young. You couldn’t find any fault in him.’ Enrique Albelda, an inhabitant of Carcagente, recalls that ‘His temperament was simple and convivial. I must also stress as one of his notable

characteristics his charity and his readiness to give alms. He was a virtuous man, outstanding for his boundless patience. He was serene, humble, joyful and modest.’

When persecution broke out he too, like his brothers, was forced to take refuge in his parents’ house, and there he led a life devoted to prayer. He was taken by the militia on 19 August 1936 to Communist Party headquarters. From there, at midnight, he was taken to the iron railway bridge over the river Júcar, where he was killed. ‘If God wants me as a martyr,’ he had said during his time in hiding, ‘he will give me the strength to endure martyrdom.’ ‘When he reached the place of martyrdom,’ said Clemente Abelda, ‘Br. Germán, having kissed the hands of his executioners and forgiven them, knelt down.’

Germán’s body was buried in Carcagente cemetery on 15 December 1940. His remains were identified and transferred to the new cemetery at Carcagente. They are now at rest in the Capuchin martyrs’ chapel in the friary of the Magdalena at Massamagrell.

Blessed Bonaventure of Puzol

Julio Esteve Flors was born on 9 October 1897 at Puzol, Valencia, Spain, and baptised on 10 October in the parish of Saint John of Puzol. He was the son of Vicente Esteve and Josefa Flors, who had nine children.

The young Julio began his studies in the Capuchin seminary and was clothed in the Capuchin habit on 15

September 1913 with the name of Bonaventure. He made temporary profession on 17 September 1914 and perpetual profession on 18 September 1918.

He was sent to Rome to complete his studies, obtaining a doctorate in philosophy from the Gregorian University. In Rome, he was ordained on 26 March 1921. On his return to Spain he was appointed lector of philosophy in the theological study house at Orihuela. He distinguished himself as a preacher, lecturer and spiritual director, but above all as a man of God, as is confirmed by Juan F. Escir, ‘He devoted himself to study and preaching. His was a peaceful temperament. Besides this, he was a very astute and intelligent person, extremely well-mannered and polite. He was edifying to the faithful, a genuine man of God.’ This is confirmed also by Vicente Aguilar, an inhabitant of Puzol: ‘His special apostolate was preaching the word of God. His most notable qualities were great kindness and intelligence. He was humble and penitential.’

At the onset of the religious persecution he was obliged to leave the friary. ‘During the period he spent in hiding,’ says Vicente Aguilar, ‘he never complained that God should allow such things, despite having the premonition that this was to be a time of martyrdom and persecution for the Church, as he would often say to those who came to see him and speak with him. Despite this he was serene in his life of constant prayer.’ He had taken refuge in his parents’ home in Carcagente, where he was captured on 24 September 1936 by the Puzol Committee who wanted him to make statements. On the night of 26 September, together with other detainees, he

was taken to the cemetery of Gilet, Valencia, where he was killed at 2 a.m. Before he died, Bonaventure had declared, 'I am preparing for the palm of martyrdom.' Before being killed he said to his executioners, 'The measure you are giving now will be the measure you will receive yourselves.' Those words were remembered by his executioners when they fell into the hands of the law. 'Now that friar's words are coming true for us,' they recalled.

Señora Vicenta Esteve Flores, sister of Br. Bonaventure, remembers that her brother 'bore himself in those last moments as serenely as he ever did, and before he was shot gave absolution to about thirteen prisoners who had been transported in a truck. Among them were also his brother and father.'

He was buried in the cemetery of Gilet, in a common pit. After the civil war, his remains were exhumed, identified by his sister Vicenta and transferred to the Martyrs' mausoleum in the cemetery at Puzol. At present, they are interred in the martyrs' chapel in the friary of the Magdalena at Massamagrell.

Blessed James of Rafelbuñol

Santiago Mestre Iborra was born at Rafelbuñol, Valencia, Spain, on 10 April 1909 and baptised on 12th in the parish of Saint Anthony at Rafelbuñol. His parents were Onofre Mestre and Mercedes Iborra, who had nine children. James was the seventh. All of them died together as victims of the same religious persecution.

James stood out even as a boy for his piety. His neighbours recall that he was a model boy, exemplary in everything. He joined the Capuchins at the age of fifteen, being received on 6 June 1924 at Ollería, Valencia. He made temporary profession on 7 June 1925 and perpetual profession in Rome on 21 April 1930. He was ordained priest there on 26 March 1932.

After receiving a doctorate in theology from the Gregorian University, he returned to Spain and was appointed vice-rector of the Capuchin seminary at Massamagrell. During his short life he was distinguished by his devotion to the Blessed Virgin, his simplicity, obedience and humility, and as a man with a profound interior life. 'He had a kind character and a lively temperament... the faithful considered him an exemplary religious... in spite of his gifts of learning and virtue he always appeared humble and simple... he was always busy with the apostolates proper to a religious,' was the verdict of his fellow religious.

When persecution began, James tried to ensure the safety of the seminarians entrusted to his care, and then sought refuge in his home village of Rafelbuñol. There the local committee set him to work as a labourer, removing rubble from the parish church, and so he was able to live a normal life. One day he was told that his brothers had been detained by the committee, and he said, 'I'll go to the committee and see whether they will take me prisoner instead and free my brothers.' When he went before the committee he was arrested with his brothers on 26 September 1936. In prison, he heard the

confessions of all the prisoners. On the night of 28-29 September all were taken to Massamagrell cemetery. As they passed the church of their patron, Our Lady of the Miracle, they saluted the Blessed Virgin, and once they had reached the cemetery they were shot with the cry, 'Long live Christ the King!' on their lips.

James was buried with his brothers in the cemetery of Massamagrell in a common pit. His remains were exhumed and identified, and transferred to the martyrs' mausoleum in the cemetery at Rafelbuñol. They are now interred in the martyrs' chapel in the friary of the Magdalena at Massamagrell.

Blessed Henry of Almazora

Enrique García Beltrán was born, the son of Vicente García and Concepción Beltrán, at Almazora, in the civil province of Castellón de la Plana, Spain, on 16 March 1913. He was baptised on the same day in the parish church.

He grew up in a deeply religious atmosphere. His uncle, Don Vicente Beltrán, said of him, 'As a child he was what you would call an angel. He was always in the church. His time was spent either there, or at school, or at home.' At fourteen he entered the Capuchin seminary at Massamagrell and was clothed in the Capuchin habit on 13 August 1928 at the hands of Br. Eloy of Orihuela, Guardian, Definitor and Novice-master at the friary of Massamagrell, taking the name of Henry. He made

temporary profession on 1 September 1929 at Ollería, and perpetual vows on 17 September 1935.

The Revolution occurred while he was still a deacon preparing for priestly ordination. 'He was cheerful and docile by temperament.' Among his companions, 'He enjoyed a reputation as a devout man. He had a deep interior life and a great devotion to Saint Joseph. He loved the liturgy. He applied himself to the study of sacred music with the aim of adding splendour to divine worship. In choir, he was distinguished for his devotion to the chanting of the canonical hours. He showed moderation and self-denial at meals. In everything else he was very humble and noteworthy for his conduct and his meekness...' He is still remembered as one who 'faithfully complied with the practices of the *Rule* and *Constitutions*, by day and by night.'

When the Revolution broke out, he took refuge in his parents' house, calmly and courageously preparing by prayer and study for martyrdom. One day in August 1936 two militia men called at the house, arrested him and took him to the Civil Guard post which was used as a jail. Don Miguel Pesudo says that 'He lived with Br. Henry as his companion in prison, and observed how he always kept a cheerful and joyful character, and he was totally at one with God's will.' On 16 August 1936, he was taken from the jail with a group of lay prisoners, to a place on the road from Castellón de la Plana to Benicasim. There they were killed, while shouting, 'Long live Christ the King!'

After the war, his remains were identified and taken to Almazora cemetery.

Blessed Fidelis of Puzol

Mariano Climent Sanchís was born in Puzol in the diocese of Valencia, Spain, on 18 January 1856. He grew up in a devout family, the son of Mariano Climent and Mariana Sanchís. He soon lost both his parents and was cared for by his maternal aunt, Josefa Sanchís, who gave him a Christian education.

He did his military service, taking part in the Carlist war. After the war he joined the Capuchins, with the name of Fidelis, making temporary profession on 14 June 1881 and perpetual profession on 17 June 1884.

Fidelis was reminiscent of the saintly Capuchin brothers: tireless workers, spending years as porters, questors, gardeners, sacristans and cooks, all jobs that require a certain physical robustness. Moreover they were men of faith and deep prayer, devoted to Our Lady, obedient and submissive, silent, penitential and austere. Fidelis, throughout his religious life, did the rounds of the friaries of Barcelona, Tortana, Orihuela, Massamagrell and Valencia, working as porter, cook, assistant in the seminary and companion to the Provincial.

Here is a portrait of how he is remembered by the friars: 'He was quiet and peace-loving by temperament. He would never be troubled by anything and would

always have a smile on his face. Both the friars and the faithful held him in high regard and spoke well of him. He was a faithful observer of the *Rule* and *Constitutions*. He was a man of God, constantly at prayer, who always had his rosary in his hand and obviously had great devotion to Our Lady. He had a reputation for sanctity.'

When the Valencia friary was closed, Fidelis sought refuge in Puzol in the house of his relatives. Once there, given his advanced age of eighty-two and his poor eyesight, he never went out of the house, but stayed there peacefully occupied in prayer. It was there, at dusk on 27 September, that he was arrested by members of the local committee under the pretext that they were taking him to the rest-home run by the Little Sisters of the Poor. Instead they took him along the main road to Barcelona as far as the Sagunto municipality, where, at the entrance to the farm known as *Laval de Jesús*, he was assassinated. It was the owner who noticed a body at the entrance, which had lain there unburied for two days. It turned out to be that of Fidelis.

He was buried in the cemetery at Sagunto along with other bodies, but his remains could not be identified.

Blessed Bernard of Lugar Nuevo de Fenollet

José Bleda Grau was born at Lugar Nuevo de Fenollet, Valencia, Spain, on 23 July 1867, and was baptised in the parish of San Diego de Alcalá in Lugar Nuevo by the parish priest, Don Antonio Donat. He was the eldest of

three children born to José Bleda Flores and Rosario Antonia Grau Más.

In his village, people remember that ‘He was very pious, ever since childhood. In his house they still keep a stone on which, as everyone says, he used to kneel to say his prayers. He belonged to a very religious family. Even as a child he felt called to a religious vocation, but because his brother was doing military service in Cuba and he had to look after his parents, he postponed his entry into the Capuchin Order until his brother’s return.’

He entered the Order with the name of Bernard at the age of thirty-two on 2 February 1900. He made temporary profession on 2 February 1901 and perpetual vows on 14 February 1904. The friars say of him that ‘He was a son of obedience... he was extraordinarily peaceful by temperament, and his most outstanding quality was his abandonment to the will of God... he faithfully kept the *Rule* and *Constitutions*. Bernard was a holy man. He never dared to raise his eyes to look at anything... he was an exemplary religious. He perfectly fulfilled the tasks given him by his superiors. He was loved by all who knew him.’

After profession he was assigned to the friary of Orihuela, Alicante, where he spent his life as questor and tailor in the community. His exemplary life edified the townspeople whenever he went out collecting alms. The friars of his community were also edified by his kindness, humility and holiness of life.

When the friary was closed because of the persecution of 1936, Bernard took refuge in his home village living with relatives, devoting himself to prayer and works of charity, at all times displaying patience and resignation. He was almost completely blind. On the night of 30 August 1936 he was taken prisoner by members of the local committee, under the pretext that he had to make certain statements. They put him in a car and drove him towards Beniganim, in the municipality of Genovés, Valencia, where he was killed. In the civil registry the date of his death is given as 4 September 1936.

Francisco Cháfer, a neighbour, recalled how he discovered Bernard's body, 'It was a very hot day at the end of August and I was with my father on my way to the neighbouring village of Beniganim. In the ditch at the side of the road I saw the body of an old man. My father said we should walk on, but I, a boy of thirteen, overcome with curiosity, went over to the body and saw that it had been shot in one eye and was bleeding profusely. His body was buried in a pit in the cemetery of Genovés. His remains could not be identified.

Blessed Pacificus of Valencia

Pedro Salcedo Puchades was born in Castellar, Valencia, Spain, on 24 February 1874, the second of five children born to Matias Salcedo and Elena Puchades. He was baptised a day later in his home parish. The family environment was poor but deeply Christian and pious, and this was reflected in his childhood. Every Sunday,

before he entered the Order, he would attend the Capuchin residence at Massamagrell.

In his village he is remembered as ‘A good boy from an honest, God-fearing family.’ ‘He was very peaceful,’ said a neighbour, ‘and his outstanding quality was his piety, so much so that whenever we prayed the rosary at home he did not like us doing any jobs that might distract us.’ It is also said that ‘He entered the religious life moved by great love of penance.’

He joined the Capuchins at Massamagrell on 21 July 1899, and given the name of Pacificus. He made temporary profession at the age of 26 on 21 June 1900 and took perpetual vows on 21 February 1903.

He was appointed to the friary of Massamagrell, and for thirty-seven years exercised the office of questor. The friars were loud in their praise of him, ‘He was simple and tranquil by temperament. He had a very good reputation among the faithful and among his fellow friars and was a very observant religious... He was a virtuous man. Above all he was humble and fulfilled his religious vows.... He had a good-natured temperament, was devoted to the Blessed Virgin, and he consecrated his life to living austerity and poverty to an eminent degree. He was self-sacrificing, and his bed was strewn with stones and pieces of broken pottery, for greater mortification.’ He was much appreciated by everyone, both inside and outside the friary.

When the friary of Massamagrell was closed in July 1936 because of religious persecution, Pacificus took

refuge in his brother's house, where he stayed for four months, devoting himself to prayer. It was here that, on the night of 12 October, he was taken prisoner by the militia who took him, amid shoves and blows with rifle butts, in the direction of Monteolivete, as far as El Azud. He, all the while, was praying the rosary. Reaching a spot by the river, they killed him.

Next day, some nephews of his on the way to the market in Valencia discovered the body. He was tightly grasping a crucifix with his left hand, holding it against his chest. His remains were buried in Valencia cemetery, but they could not be identified.

Blessed Maria Felicidad Masía Farragut

She was born on 28 August 1890 in Algemesí, Valencia, Spain. She was clothed in the monastery of the Capuchinesses at Agullent, Valencia, on 17 April 1909. She made simple profession of vows on 20 April 1910 and took perpetual vows on 16 April 1913.

The three sisters, Felicidad, Jesús and Veronica were born in the same village. Their parents were Don Vicente Maciá and Doña Teresa Ferragut, who had seven children, of whom five entered the cloister as Capuchin nuns, and the only boy became a Capuchin.

According to their sister, Purificación, even in their youth 'They received the sacraments and daily communion. They were never seen in public or crowded

places. My mother brought up my sisters well in the holy fear of God.'

Blessed María Jesús Masía Farragut

Maria was born on 12 January 1882 in Algemesí, Valencia, Spain, and baptised on the same day. She was confirmed on 19 May 1899.

She was clothed in the monastery of the Capuchinesses at Agullent, Valencia, on 13 December 1900 and made profession two years later on 16 January.

Blessed María Veronica Masía Farragut

She was born on 15 June 1883 in Algemesí, Valencia, Spain, and baptised on the 16 June. She was confirmed on 19 May 1899.

She entered the monastery of the Capuchinesses at Agullent, Valencia, and was clothed on 18 January 1903. She made simple profession on 26 January 1904 and took perpetual vows on 10 April 1907.

All three were killed with their mother, Doña Teresa Ferragut, at Alcira, Valencia, in the place called *Cruz Cubierta* on 25 October 1936.

The religious life of the three sisters ran parallel with each other. 'While they were in the convent,' says their sister Purificación, 'the other sisters were amazed at their

religious observance, so exemplary were they in their conduct. Despite being sisters, there was no distinction among themselves or in relation to the others. The three sisters were highly esteemed in the community. Each had a solid, stable piety instilled into them by our dear mother. They loved sacrifice and were very attached to the observance of silence and of the *Rule* and *Constitutions*.’

Sister Bienvenida Amorós, a religious of the same convent, describes their religious life in these terms, ‘I never heard any criticism of what these sisters did. Their piety was sound. They were particularly given to prayer and the presence of God was visible in them. They were humble and always ready to sacrifice themselves for the other sisters. They were extremely devoted to the Eucharist and to the Blessed Virgin and, in an extraordinary way, to the Passion of Our Lord.’

With the proclamation of the Republic in 1931, they left the convent and stayed at home for about two months, at the end of which they returned without having suffered any harassment. When the revolution began in 1936, they again took refuge in the family home at Algemesí, where they remained until 16 October of that same year, seeing to the housework, living community life, and completely devoted to prayer.

They were arrested at four p.m. on 19 October by two militiamen, together with an Augustinian sister from the convent of Beniganim. Their mother refused to leave them and went with them. They were imprisoned in the convent of Fons Salutis, which was being used as a

prison. There they remained for eight days, serene and resigned to their fate. At the end they all shared the same final fate.

On the night of 28 October, which was a Sunday and the feast of Christ the King, the militiamen led them to their death. They wanted to leave their mother, Doña Teresa Ferragut, but she refused and asked to accompany her daughters and to be shot last. She saw her daughters fall one by one, and she encouraged them, saying, ‘My daughters, be faithful to your heavenly Bridegroom, and do not give in or consent to the flattery of these men.’ They were taken by truck to a place called *Cruz Cubierta*, on the way to Alcira, and there they were martyred.

The remains of the five martyrs were buried in Alcira, and now rest in the parish church of Algemesí.

Blessed Isabel Calduch Rovira

Josefina Calduch Rivera was born at Alcalá de Chivert, in the diocese of Tortosa and the civil province of Castellón de la Plana, Spain, on 9 May 1882. Her parents were Francisco Calduch and Amparo Rovira Martí. They had five children, of whom Isabel was the last.

Her neighbours said that ‘She was brought up in a religious atmosphere, and even as a child would practice charity to the poor. She and a friend would go to take food to an old lady and help her keep the house clean.’ In her youth she became friendly with a religious young

man of the locality but, with her parents' consent, she broke off the relationship in order to embrace monastic life.

She entered the Capuchiness monastery at Castellón de la Plana and was clothed in 1900, with the name of Isabel. Her brother José says that 'His sister's motive in entering religious life was purely and simply that she had a vocation.' She made simple profession on 28 April 1901 and took perpetual vows on 30 May 1904. The sisters said, 'She had a peaceful, kindly temperament and was always cheerful. She was an exemplary religious, always content, very observant of the *Rule* and *Constitutions*. She practised custody of the eyes, prudence in her speech and great penance, especially at meals. She was greatly appreciated by the community. She led an intense interior life, was very devoted to the Blessed Sacrament, to Our Lady, and to Saint John the Baptist.'

In the monastery she held the office of novice-mistress, 'performing her duties with great zeal so that we would be observant religious, never making distinctions between novices, a Sister Micaela said of her. She was re-elected for a further triennium, which she never completed because of the outbreak of the revolution.

When it came, Sister Isabel left for Alcalá de Chivert, Castellón, where she had a brother, Mosén Mauel, a priest who was eventually murdered. While staying in her village she devoted herself to seclusion and prayer. She was arrested on 13 April 1937 by a group of militia, together with Father Manuel Geli, a Franciscan. Both

were taken before the local committee at Alcalá de Chivert where they were harassed and insulted. She was killed in the district of Cuevas de Vinroá, Castellón, and was buried in the cemetery there.

Blessed Milagros Ortells Gimeno

She was born in Zaragoza Street, Valencia, Spain, on 29 November 1882, the third and last daughter of Enrique Ortells and Dolores Gimeno. She was baptised on 30 November 1882 in the parish church of Saint John the Baptist.

Throughout her childhood she was very devout, having been brought up in an eminently religious household. Her neighbours recall that ‘Her piety was extraordinary, and her love for penance remarkable. In church, instead of sitting on the bench, she would sit on the floor...’

Sister Virtudes, a Capuchiness, recalls that Sister Milagros ‘joined this Capuchin Order moved by her desire for greater perfection. Her mother suggested that she should join the Reparation convent, but she declined, preferring instead the greater strictness of the Capuchin life.’ She entered the Capuchin monastery on 9 October 1902. There they recall that ‘When she joined she did so with great enthusiasm.’ In the convent she held the offices of infirmarian, refectorian, portress, sacristan and novice-mistress, exercising all of them with fidelity.

Her personality is described by her fellow religious in these terms: ‘She was very charitable, and would always

offer to do any service at all for her sisters. You could see that she was always in a state of interior recollection. After the midnight office she used to stay on in choir a little longer, in a spirit of greater penance. Among her sisters she enjoyed a reputation for sanctity, to the point that they would constantly exclaim, “She’s a saint....” Her piety was sound, her most outstanding characteristic being her love for the Eucharist and the Immaculate Conception. Her penance was extraordinary; she used disciplines, hair-shirts, etc. She was highly esteemed by all the sisters and observed the *Rule* faithfully. Prayer and the presence of God were palpably present in her. Her humility was clearly evident, in that she thought herself unworthy of any office, and even unworthy of receiving the Eucharist.’

With the outbreak of the revolution, she had to flee to the house of her sister Maria, in Valencia, and there she led a life of prayer and recollection. She later took refuge in a house in Maestro Chapí Street, also in Valencia, where there were also some other sisters of the Congregation of Christian Doctrine. There she was arrested by a group of militia on 20 November 1936, and killed alongside seventeen other sisters of the Christian Doctrine Congregation, in the place known as *Picadero de Paterna*. She was buried in Valencia cemetery. On 30 April 1940, her remains were exhumed and transferred to the Capuchiness monastery in Valencia, which is their present resting place.