

A close-up photograph of a tree trunk with vibrant pink blossoms. The tree trunk is dark brown and textured, with several clusters of bright pink flowers growing from it. The background is a soft-focus green and blue, suggesting a forest or garden setting. The lighting is bright, highlighting the texture of the bark and the color of the blossoms.

**FORTITUDE
AND
TENDERNESS**

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Year of the beatification of the martyrs:

Rosario, Serafina and Francisca

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PRESENTATION

We cannot reach authentic identity if our own history is not known and assumed. To discover the source, know the roots, trace the footsteps, are the valid beginning of the trajectory of the future and hope in the truth. This is the opportunity that particularly invites us, the Capuchin Tertiary Sisters in its present work: "Fortitude and Tenderness" (Testimony of Martyrdom of Rosario, Serafina and Francisca, Capuchin Tertiaries).

With its characteristic language, agile, simple and pleasant, at the same time with great psychological and spiritual penetration, Father Juan Antonio Vives presents to us the incident of faith of the three sisters to whom God, not by casualty, conceded the gifts of martyrdom. But it does not treat solely of his personal testimony. His evangelical way of life in Franciscan poverty and simplicity, his purified faith, his love and generous sacrifice, were forged and nourished in the spiritual school of Luis Amigó and they express the spirit that characterizes our Congregation of the Capuchin Tertiary Sisters.

For this reason, the narration starts with the presentation of the founder, in the person of Luis Amigó, and brings to mind the figures of the other sisters who also arrived at heroism in the giving of their lives: Martyrs of Charity from the beginning of the foundation (1885: attending to those infected with cholera) until the present (1987: Inés Arango in the missions), offering by that the unitarian vision of a history made of love, abnegation and sacrifice, motto of the Congregation. An uninterrupted itinerary of compassion and tenderness, of fortitude and martyrdom.

I. Luis Amigó y Ferrer.

The Founder

Luis Amigó y Ferrer was born in Masamagrell (Valencia, Spain) on the 17th of October, 1854. His parents were Gaspar Amigó Chulvi and Genoveva Ferrer Doset. He was baptized a few hours after his birth and given the name of Jose Maria, a name he would later change to Luis on becoming a religious of the Capuchin.

Since his boyhood, he had already demonstrated an inclination for the priesthood. At the age of twelve, feeling more clearly the call of the Lord, he entered the Seminary of Valencia as an extern student. He then consolidated his Latin classes with his spiritual deepening which the Congregation of Saint Felipe Neri, the School of Christ, and the Third Secular Order of the Franciscans facilitated for him. These associations which helped him to mature in his faith, at the same time, also guided his way to meeting with the marginal people of society. The visits to the hospitals and prisons to share his wellbeing and his liberty with the sick and prisoners, the alphabetization, and catechism of the children in the huts and farm houses of the Valentian Orchard, occupied his free time.

Hardly an adolescent, he suffered the premature death of his parents. This painful experience increased in him the desire for greater perfection. To be able to give himself with more freedom to God and to his neighbors, he then proceeded to Bayona (France), where the Capuchin had their Novitiate, for his Spanish Vocations.

Magdalena in Masamagrell, he dedicated himself with apostolic zeal, which was his characteristic, to diffuse and revitalize throughout the region the secular Franciscan Tertiary Order. In this new activity, he found an effective help from friends and companions, with whom he had previously shared his apostolate in prisons, hospitals, and suburbs.

Quickly, the third Order flourished with renewed spirit and claws. Some Tertiary brothers and sisters contaminated by his enthusiasm and looking for a more radical abandonment to God asked him for a constitution, to be able to dedicate themselves as religious in the exercise of works of mercy in favor of the less fortunate.

On May 11, 1885, he founded the Congregation of the Capuchin Tertiary Sisters of the Holy Family, to attend to the sick, to give refuge and educate orphaned girls, those in need of rehabilitation, and propagate the faith among those who have not received the Gospel.

A few years later, on the 12th of April, 1889, he founded the religious Capuchin Tertiary Fathers and Brothers of Our Lady of Sorrows, and entrusted to them the mission of giving a Christian education to the youths, who deviated from the truth and goodness.

For almost fifty years, Father Amigó accompanied the first steps of his two Congregations, comforting and encouraging them with his nearness and his words.

In 1907 Pope Pius X, named him bishop of Solsona, and in 1913, he transferred to the diocese of Segorbe. In both places, he left a loving memory and the mold of his merciful mode.

The spirit of Father Amigó is synthesized in the motto

II. Following the Footsteps of the Good Shepherd.

All the Religious Institutes which beautify the Church of God - Father Luis Amigó used to write - consecrate themselves in a special way in the practice of charity, although not all execute them in the same manner. Each Congregation has its own spirit according to the mission that God has entrusted to them. The Capuchin Tertiary Sisters, following the spirit and footsteps of Jesus Christ and of his faithful follower St. Francis, serve the Lord in a mix life, surrendering themselves to the sweetness of contemplation, and at other times, dedicating themselves in all solicitude and vigilance to the corporal and spiritual needs of their fellowmen.³

The ideal life of the Capuchin Tertiary, harmoniously woven with contemplation and action goes towards, like all ideal Christians, to personally grow and mature in love together with God and to pour this love to his fellowman in the attitude of donation and service.

It is not possible - Father Amigó used to repeat - to love God without also loving, because of Him, man his masterpiece, nor love man with true love of charity if it is without the love of God. Both loves are like rays emanating from the same light and like flowers from the same stem.⁴

But love does not grow, if egoism does not decrease. It is not possible to resuscitate the world of others without dying in

ence those who have greater need or necessity. **gives** her life, quietly loving anxiously and continually for all with a spirit of total and complete dedication.

In the poor and pleasant atmosphere of Nazareth, she enriches the lesson of love learned together with the Good Shepherd, the attitude of silence and laboriousness of Joseph, and with the tenderness and fortitude of Mary, Virgin of "Fiat" and solicitous mother, who remains standing next to the cross of her Son.

Finally the spirit of Francis, transmitted in word and in example of life by Father Amigó, invites the Tertiary sister to live her offering of self with the attitude of being the least "*in the midst of her brethren as the one who serves*".⁶

III. Testimonies of Love

When on the 11th of May, 1885, Father Amigó was making the canonical foundation of the Capuchin Tertiary Sisters in the Sanctuary of Montiel (Benaguacil, València), and submitted to them the Constitutions, he did not know then, that soon his children would have the opportunity to put into practice the love and sacrifice, as the ideal in life, which he was proposing to them.

Only a few days, after a very solemn and joyous celebration had past, sorrow over shadowed the Spanish society and particularly, the inhabitants of the Valencian region. The Asian Cholera, as the epidemic of '85 was known, began to ravage the city attacking especially the poor and unprotected.

The disease spread rapidly and panic took hold of many, who still healthy, fled terrified from the cities, even abandoning at times, their loved ones already infected by the disease to their fate.

The sisters - who were still mostly novices heard from the hill the shouts of pain that came from the Valley, and leaving their tranquil "Tabor", went down to Benaguacil to attend to the sick whom nobody wanted to attend to. The newspaper "Las Provincias" dated June 4, 1885, made known the actions of the religious:

*Worthy of praise is the conduct being observed
by the Tertiary Sisters at this unfortunate moment,*

era afflicted persons, making it necessary for the Superior to contain their fervour and allowing only some of the sisters to go.

Defying dangers and disregarding their own life for love, resulted in that three of them, the three youngest sisters, died after being contaminated by the disease.

Sister Clara del Grau (Encarnacion Del Toro), Sister Francisca de Alcalá de la Jovada (Maria de la Concordia Gisbert Moll), and Sister Serafina de Benaguacil (Rosa Maria Ibáñez), died in Masamagrell together with Sister Maria de los Desamparados de Sueras (Maria Gimeno Moliner), attending to the cholera victims of Benaguacil, constituting the first testimony of the extreme love lived by the Tertiary Capuchin Sisters which they offered to the Church and society.

Their death, like all martyrs death, were the seeds of a new life.

After the epidemic - Father Amigó narrates with words that remind us of the Good Samaritan - it was seen that many children were left without refuge after having lost their parents, and being moved with compassion I thought in that we might be able to gather them, and in effect I inquired from Mother Angela, who was still very weak, if she had the heart to take care of those children and she, being full of zeal and moved by charity, acceded to my request with great pleasure. I presented the case to the Council of the Tertiary Order who approved it with great delight, and without losing time we rented a house in Masamagrell. Later, we went out through the city to gather some furniture which they offered to us, bought some straw beds, linen, blankets and utensils after

IV. Antecedents of the Civil War

To understand the Spanish Civil war of 1936, there is a need to turn back the hands of time of history.

The atmosphere of the French Revolution, so geographically close to Spain, were not able to cross the Pirinies until the entrance of the 19th Century. With the "Cortes de Cadiz" (1812), liberal mentality obtained a total acceptance in Spain and a series of internal struggles started between the Liberals and Conservatives, which were prolonged with violence and tensions, more or less potent, during all of XIX. Together with the birth of this political tension, there also developed a strong anticlerical sentiment.

The succession of Ferdinand VII (1833), ended the flow of violence. With his decision to abolish the "Ley Salica" and naming his daughter Isabel the successor to the throne against the rights of his brother Carlos, Ferdinand VII, left Spain submerged in two fractions completely antagonistic and opposite. The Conservatives enlisted themselves together with D. Carlos, and to defend her throne, Isabel sought help from the Liberals. In the religious aspect, the Conservatives proclaimed themselves fervent Catholics, while the Liberals, faithful to their thoughts had within their midst from people of very consequent Christian faith up to persons with very strong anticlerical sentiments.

The reign of Isabel II was marked by war. During the first Carlista war (1833 - 1839), the "desamortizacion de

Foreseeing, that at the event of any political revolt that would oblige the religious to go out of the convents, the sisters should let their hair grow, have their layman clothes ready and know the house where they can take refuge, and when the time comes, they should be ready to quickly abandon the religious house. Once the community is scattered, each nun shall maintain communication by writing to her superior, without revealing her location and only placing her secular name on the address.¹⁰

In 1923, General Primo de Rivera established a dictatorial government with the consent of the King. So began a period of apparent tranquility and prosperity. But this peace, the fruit of suppressed freedom, did not last for long. The recession of 1929, and the consequent devaluation of the peseta, accelerated the fall of the General.

Finally, the 12th of April 1931, the Administrative election of Spain took place. The Republican Party, favored by the discontented who had left the dictatorship, obtained the majority in the principal cities and although the elections were not legislative, they interpreted their triumph as a No to Monarchy. Alfonso XIII, understanding that he had lost his prestige and image for his support of General Primo de Rivera and wanting to avoid a useless spilling of blood, abandoned Spain and the II Republic was proclaimed.

With the birth of the New Republic, the anticlerical sentiment which nestled in some political officials and in some parts of the city, was made evident with renewed vitality. In only three days hundreds of religious buildings were destroyed, and the fear of what could happen made many religious superiors react. The General Council of the Capuchin Tertiary Sisters, who were residing in the novitiate of Masamagrell, de-

It is certainly not - wrote Father Amigó in 1933, to his daughters from Colombia- times of joy and gladness which we are traversing all over the world and in a special way in this Catholic Nation of Spain, wherein hell seems to have placed all its persistence to unchristianize catholics. It is certain that it will not be able to succeed, for the more persecuted the Catholics are, the more fervent they will be, and I do not doubt that there are a great number of martyrs if ever the persecution would take place.¹²

On the 1st of October, 1934, when Father Amigó died, the events in Spain were already foretelling the worst.

V. THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR

The elections of February 16, 1936, gave victory to a vast coalition formed by socialists, anarchists, republicans, radicals and leftist Catalan separatists, to which the communists were also leaning. The leftists obtained 256 representatives with 165 for the rightists and 52 for the center.

The first months of the Popular Front - as the victorious coalition had designated itself, were lamentable. Strikes proliferated unemployment increased, production lessened, money exchange fell, and the security of the city, threatened by the anarchists and the youths of the triumphant coalition reached its lowest point. From the election of February, to the beginnings of May, 160 churches were burned and 269 basically political assassinations were committed.

The government of the Popular Front, in a desperate move to stop the economic and social degradation, requested and obtained from the Parliament extraordinary powers. The measure however was of no use: as it was already unable to stop the violent revolutionaries coming from their own ranks. The extremists of the right and left wings that had been rising in the five years of the Republic, ended by dividing Spain in two antagonistic and irreconcilable factions.

In the meantime, discontent was also growing among the ranks of the army. The military who showed respect to the Republic but who were worried at the ruining course of the country, felt threatened by a circular directed by the govern-

in the Republican part were plundered and the religious sisters dispersed. In the Valencian part, where the Congregation was first established and where it was more settled, of a total number of nine communities only two - Olleria and Carcagente - were respected and were able to continue its apostolate during the time of the conflict. In Carcagente, in reality after a period of insecurity, the situation changed radically after the sisters treated a wounded military man and attended with care and gentleness to his companions. The next day the chief of the military men himself acknowledged:

*I do not know what those little nuns have: on seeing them they have disarmed us and we did not have the courage to harm them.*¹⁴

From then on, the CNT of Carcagente, against the advice of the local communist party, put them under his protection and asked them to continue attending to the hospital and a house which they opened for the old people. Eventually, the chief of the communists became a major benefactor of the sisters after this dialogue with one of the sisters:

- *Surely you must be furious at me.*
- *No, definitely not. I love you in Christ as a brother and if necessary I would give my life for you.*
- *Nobody has spoken to me as you have... why did you not get married? You could have made a man happy.*
- *That is not enough! I wanted to make many more happy, as you can see I am doing it to these old men and women, day and night, without gaining a centavo, giving my life joyously for them"*¹⁵

But the case of Carcagente, like that of Olleria, was an exception to the rule. The normal thing in the Republican zone,

VI. Violence Breaks Loose in Masamagrell.

Masamagrell, as in all the cities on the part of Valencia, suffered since the beginning of the military uprising, violence unleashed by the military, took the streets by arms and exercised their powers.

On the day of July 18th, there transpired relative tranquility and hope in the Mother House and Novitiate of the Capuchin Tertiary Sisters. The Superiors, confident of the word of the militiamen who had told them that they should remain calm and simply limit themselves to lowering the blinds of the windows and close their doors, were not shattered nor did they decide, as they had done in 1931, to rapidly abandon their house. They thought, that perhaps now, as before, it was just a question of enduring a few more months and that the situation would return to normal.

Nevertheless, on this occasion, the event happened so fast that it did not give them any time to take initiatives. Witnesses narrate to us what occurred:

On the eighteenth or nineteenth of July, the religious had not yet taken their plate of garlic soup for supper that evening when strong banging on the door facing the corridor which faces that of the church was heard. They were militiamen who came to invade the house and throw us out into the street by force. ¹⁸.

and each one looked for a place, wherever she could, to find lodging and work to support herself.²¹

On the day of the 21st of July, the Parish of Masamagrell was burnt down and the images of the Church of the sisters were destroyed.

From where she was staying - a witness narrates - the vandalism that was being done in the Church could be seen. They started by throwing out the sacred images from their niches and pedestals. Every time that they would throw an image that would crash with a deafening sound, the militiamen would shout in festive voices and ring the bell.

In our chapel, when they opened the niche where the Holy Family was placed, they first threw out the image of St. Joseph followed by that of the Blessed Virgin. Then they tried to throw the Child Jesus from the pedestal in the niche, but they could not, as it was strongly attached to the pedestal and so the militiamen said:

"This snivelly young boy we cannot throw out!" The acolyte, a seven year old boy, and today a priest, cried upon seeing what the militiamen were doing to the images and when he heard them insulting the Baby Jesus by calling him snivelly."

Having finished their profane acts on the images and our church, they made a pantomime procession with the ornaments that were then gathered by Father Founder. I myself saw this through a crack of a window. One of the militiamen went about wearing the mitre of Father Founder, the first mitre which the



Sister **ROSARIO** DE **SOANO**, TC

VII. Rosario de Soano. The gypsy of Jesus

Sister Rosario, the eldest of four brothers, was born on the 13th of May, 1866, in the small town of Soano (Santander). She was the daughter of Antonio Quintana and Luisa Argos. Two days after her birth, she was baptized with the name of Petra Maria, but her father, who inscribed her at the civil register gave her the name of Victoria, with which she was known until she became a nun.

Her parents who were an exemplar Christian couple, educated their children with care and fidelity to the precepts and teachings of the Religion.

The childhood of Victoria passed in tranquility and happiness, helping her mother in household chores. She did not have the opportunity to receive any instruction as the small school in that town was only for boys.

Victoria was thirteen years old, when in the second day of Christmas of 1879, she attended a high Mass with some of her friends in honor of the Blessed Virgin, Patron of the Town. On that day, there reigned a special expectation among the people. The preacher was to be a priest who had recently been ordained from the neighboring Capuchin Convent of Montehano. The expectation was not in vain. The preacher was so good that an old lady, unable to contain her emotion, exclaimed going towards the priest: "*Blessed is the womb that*

All these circumstances provoked in Victoria a deep crisis, work did not matter to her, but it pained her to see the situation of her younger brothers whom she could not help even with the fruit of her sweat. At times, in the middle of her work and difficulties she would exclaim: "*and all this to nourish the children of another*".²⁹

Looking for spiritual peace and tranquility, she directed herself anew to the convent of Montehano where she finds out that Father Amigó, the young Capuchin who had made a great impact on her, had just founded a Congregation of sisters to attend, among other things, to orphaned and abandoned boys in Valencia. This goal moved her profoundly, as she herself was also suffering the consequences of being orphaned. From then on, the idea of becoming a religious which she had nursed since a young girl was becoming stronger.

She continued to visit the Capuchin Fathers in search of solace and asked God, with more persistence, to enlighten her for her decision. She did not hurry, neither did she defer when she felt more clearly the call of the Lord. At the beginning of May 1889, full of courage, she escaped from the house and went to Montiel (Benaguacil - Valencia), where on the 8th of the same month she entered as a postulant in the Congregation of the Capuchin Tertiary Sisters. A few days later, one of her brothers sent by her father, came to fetch her trying to convince her with all kinds of arguments to return home; but she had already made the decision to stay. Her conscience was at peace, her brothers had already grown up and she felt free to dedicate herself to God and to her neighbor. Her brother went home without accomplishing his purpose, and when with sadness he informed his other brothers they exclaimed: "*We have lost our little mother*"³⁰

On the 14th of May of 1890, Victoria received the reli-

from house to house. Sister Rosario, who was raised without rings on her fingers and educated since childhood in the hardships of manual labor, was one of the most assiduous in this humble mission.

When the house of Alhama (Murcia), was established towards 1899, Sister Rosario again found herself in the group of founders, but this time as Superior of the Community. The purpose now, was to direct a primary school in the town. Poverty was so extreme that the sisters had to join teaching with the asking of alms. To this latter work, Mother Superior especially dedicated herself.

In 1902, after being reelected General Counselor, Sister Rosario is named Superior of Olleria. Remembering her trip to her new destination, she would jokingly narrate:

The religious sent a laborer with a donkey to the railroad station of Jativa, so as for me to ride on for my trip to Olleria. The farmer wanted to enjoy himself at my expense and told me that such was the misery of the town of Olleria, that in some houses of the town, they would cook the same piece of bacon and when this was completely scoured they would give it to the hospital, directed by the sisters, so that they could prepare the soup³³.

The story of the farmer may not have been totally true, but as what at times could happen, may have had some truth in it. Poverty - present in all the initial foundations of the Capuchin Tertiaries - also reigned in that of Olleria, and neither here was Sister Rosario free from having to beg again.

She was a solicitous Mother, self-denying and loving for the poor old people and the sick in the

laugh and tell her:

- *It is only hunger, eat! eat!*³⁷

*This was the time in which the poor nun was so thin that Father Jose himself would tell her: Sister, you look like a "cane of the doctrine".*³⁸

At the end of her three years term as Mistress of Novices, Sister Rosario was again reelected as General Counselor and again stayed for three years in Altura as superior of the community. During these years, Don Jose Piqueras who had helped the sisters in the Foundations of Colombia and who was now in Segorbe, gave her private lessons with the aim of helping her strengthen her instruction and culture.

On April 25, 1914, the V General Chapter of the Congregation was celebrated and Sister Rosario, who was ending her second term in Olleria, was elected General Superior. With her protective and courageous character she infused in the sisters great optimism. In her circulars she used to sign: Mother and servant in Christ.

Anticipating changes in the times, she used methods of responsible dialogue. During the six years of her term as General Superior, seven foundations between Spain and Colombia were made.³⁹

In 1919, accepting the petition of the religious of Colombia, who were persistently asking for her to visit them; Sister Rosario, began her trip towards America, arriving at Barranquilla (Colombia), on the 27th of December. The situation among the religious of Colombia, who in the few years had increased and greatly extended itself was tense. The older Superiors, residents of Spain, could not understand nor listen

and she continued her visits to the houses of the Congregation among the Guajiro Indians.

The discomforts and roughness of the trips did not stop her insistence to visit and live with her spiritual daughters.⁴³

After her return to Colombia, the VI General Chapter took place on the 30th of November, 1920, in which Sister Rosario was again reelected General Superior. Her first reaction was to cry while saying:

But I am useless! I am not useful for that.⁴⁴

The sisters nevertheless, knew whom they had elected. The strengthening of her second mandate was in line with the first. In this term of six years, seven foundations were also made. She was interested for that the religious sisters should form themselves adequately and obtain the proper titles to perform their apostolate, and she continued to encourage the sisters with her words and example:

Be humble! She would usually repeat. Have always the presence of God when doing your work. Have preeminence for charity. Do not look at the defects of your sisters, instead, look at their virtues. Each sister is the image of God. If you want to be saints you will be made one by your own house. Time is gold it is priceless. Be more enthusiastic each time by the spirit of denial and sacrifice, so that you will be able to fill the beautiful mission of your religious vocation, gaining many souls for Jesus Christ⁴⁵.

She had especial details and loving words for those sisters who were performing the most humble work or beginning their

The town prepared a grand reception for Sister Rosario. They made a big banner with flowers of different colors for her welcome. They placed it beautifully at the entrance of the town. She came in a horse carriage accompanied by two sisters. The whole town went out to receive her. She alighted from the carriage to greet every one at the entrance of the town. Her father, who was almost eighty years old, kneeled at her feet as to ask for forgiveness. But Sister Rosario, filled with emotion immediately raised him to his feet and said: No. No. It is I who should be kneeling at your feet. Emotion took hold of all present to see such a scene between father and daughter. ⁴⁹

In 1926, ending her second term, Sister Rosario convened anew the General Chapter and Father Amigó took the opportunity of the occasion to send his Spiritual Testament to all his sons and daughters.

According to the Constitution of the Congregation, Sister Rosario could no longer be reelected as General Superior, but the sisters did not want to be denied the richness of her personality and experience and so elected her Vicar General. Days after, the Council named her the Superior of the house in Meliana where, as usual, she arrived with her luggage filled with illusion and ready to serve.

Whenever there was somebody sick in Meliana, Sister Rosario would tell the one in charge: "Do not worry. I will be the nurse", and she would do the most lowly work that was necessary. ⁵⁰

After completing her three years in Meliana, she was named Mother Superior of the Mother house in Masamagrell. She was to substitute Sister Serafina de Ochovi, her compan-

in January, 1936.

The first months of 1936, when the chaotic situation of Spain was foretelling the worst, Sister Rosario in her conversations with the other sisters would repeat:

Let us not be cowards. First of all give your lives for our Lord. Let us not be cowards. He will help us. We are religious and we have to be faithful to him until the end, and she would add with humility! I would like to be a martyr.⁵³

Sister Rosario, of good presence of mind, tall and beautiful, possessed the gift of winning people by her happy, charming and accepting character. Her happiness tried to contaminate the sisters so that they would live happy in the Lord.

When it was time for recreation, if she noticed that one of the religious was sad, she would make her happy with her natural graciousness. She would speak very well to the sisters, and if she had to correct someone, she would do it in a gracious manner. She was very artful. She knew how to manage all very well. Even Mother Serafina herself, who would usually become sad and not able to avoid or disguise it, Sister Rosario would say: Serafina why are you like that? why are you sad?⁵⁴

The goodness of her character was complemented with the integrity of her mortified spirit and her purified life of prayer. A woman of deep spiritual life, contemplative and enterprising like Therese of Jesus, she also felt the Franciscan devotion for the mystery of the Passion of the Lord, and following the example of Father Amigó, would meditate each day on the Way of the Cross.⁵⁵ She also felt a great devotion



Sister SERAFINA DE OCHOVI, TC

VIII. Serafina de Ochovi a Firm Woman

Sister Serafina was born in Ochovi (Navarra), on August 6, 1872. She was the second to the last of eight children born to the couple Don Hilarion Fernandez and Doña Juana Francisca Ibero. The day after her birth, she was baptized and given the name of Manuela Justa.

The parents of Serafina were working people with a small farm and few cows.⁵⁹ The parents, together with their children, constituted a typical patriarchal family of Navarra of that period: good Christians, pious, and willing to receive from God all the children that He would send them. Life in the home was run according to the precepts of the Law of God. The family would pray together the morning and evening prayers, and assist in the parish to participate in the Eucharist and pray the Rosary.

Life in the parish of Ochovi favored the Christian atmosphere being lived in the family.

Life in the small town was dominated by the church bell. The sound of the bells in the morning was an invitation to all for the morning prayer. Then would follow the ringing of the bells to announce the celebration of the Mass. At noontime, the bells would again ring for the praying of the Angelus and the same thing in the afternoon for the praying of the Rosary. We, the young boys and girls, would gather in the

trip to obtain vocations for the newly born Congregation. Talking with Father Bernardo de Ochovi, he inquired from him if he knew of some young women who could be Capuchin Tertiary Sisters.⁶² Subsequently, Father Bernardo spoke about it to his sisters and Manuela Justa, who was fourteen years of age, and feeling the call of the Lord, went to Valencia at the beginning of May, 1887. Some time later, her sister Petra Estefania followed her footsteps.

Manuela Justa, had to wait for three years before she could wear the religious habit. Nevertheless, her stay in Montiel as an aspirant were not lost years. Dedicated to humble manual house work, immersed in the climate of piety which was being breathed, and in the fraternal co-existence with the first Capuchin Tertiary Sisters, she had the great opportunity to slowly assimilate the genuine spirit of the Congregation, learning by experience love, self-denial and sacrifice.

On May 14, 1890, she entered the Novitiate and changed her name to Serafina. The Novitiate organization, with its time harmoniously distributed between prayer and work, effectively contributed in fortifying the spirit of Sr. Serafina in the virtues of humility, simplicity, laboriousness, mortification, poverty and obedience which distinguished her life. At the end of this year, she made her first religious profession on May 14, 1891, and exactly five years later, she made her final vows.

In 1899, in spite of her youth, the superiors who appreciated the good spirit that inspired Sister Serafina, named her Superior of the house in Segorbe. The charge was not a reward. The economic difficulties in supporting the intern girls were great. It then fell on Sister Serafina to go from door to door to beg for alms in the name of God, as what Sister Rosario had to do a year before.

dence of God anew in which Father Amigó had always noticed in her. Here, as what had happened one day in the foundation of the first apostolic work of the Capuchin Tertiary Sisters, the generosity of God, who even *maintains the birds in the sky*,⁶⁵ again became apparent:

Once- a sister narrates - I went to tell her that we had no bread in the house. She said to me " Go to the tabernacle and tell the Lord: "Lord, we have no bread". And I went to the foot of the Tabernacle to tell our Lord that we had no bread, as Sister Serafina had asked me to do, who on her part, was equally praying to the Lord trusting in his Providence.

At the same time, those in-charge of the bread in San Antonio, had made bread with the money from the charity box of the Saint and said to each other: "where are we going to bring this?" And suddenly they thought of bringing it to the hospital of Olleria. In this manner, the Lord provided for us to the great happiness of Sister Serafina and my admiration.

Again at another time, I said to her: "Mother Serafina, we have no clothes nor shirts". She answered me: "Go to the tabernacle and tell the Lord what we lack". I went to the tabernacle to again repeat the petition, and being in this situation, two men called at the door of the hospital bringing with them two rolls of cloth as a gift. And we made of it the shirts that we needed urgently. The pass-word of Sister Serafina was always, "Go to the tabernacle", as her recourse to a sure refuge.⁶⁶

In 1911, ending the third term for which she was named Superior, Sister Serafina left the house of Olleria in the hands

1923, when she was assigned to Masamagrell, the house where she would already spend the rest of her life, except for a short stay in the Seminary of Valencia, (1931 - 1932).

In Masamagrell, as she had done in the other houses, she directed the community with that great motherly love that she had and which at times hid behind a serious and dry face. The advice she gave to the cooks is a good synthesis of tenderness and gentleness.

*In the kitchen there should be cleanliness in everything. Prepare the food of the sisters well, considering that they are the spouses of Jesus Christ. Sisters, do it all for the love of God.*⁶⁹

When the Novitiate was transferred anew to Masamagrell in 1927, Sister Serafina continued to be the Superior of the community and by her words and especially by her example, she notably influenced the formation of the young girls according to the spirit of the Congregation.

*She was - narrates a sister - very good and very observant. She was the first at work, particularly in the laundry area. Washing during those days was always by hand. The postulants and novices would do the wash and she would be at the head of them. She would encourage us to wash by her words, but above all by her example.*⁷⁰

*Sister Serafina - another sister would add - would notice how we washed and how much soap we would use. She would usually say: "Child, don't put so much soap, rub! rub!". Sometimes, she would be a little angry and invariably say: "Children of God, why do you do this? Children of God why do you do this?"*⁷¹

On a certain occasion, there were some left over oranges as dessert from lunch. Sister Serafina directed that the oranges be given to us novices, who were at recess. It was distributed as in a game "a la replega", as they say in Valencia, which means throwing them in the air for each one to catch what she could. There was great jollity. Then the one who brought the oranges transmitted to us the message of Sister Serafina: "do not mortify yourselves in the dessert; mortify yourselves in your temper".⁷⁴

Nevertheless, at times, the temper of Sister Serafina would get the better of her, like what happened in these cases.

There was in the community of Masamagrell a sister named Sister Margarita, who was an example of blind obedience, and this Sister, taking a walk through the garden on a certain occasion, saw the first ripe tomatoes in the orchard. She picked them and brought them to Sister Serafina in an inopportune time. Sister Serafina told her dryly: "eat them in a salad" a thing that Sister Margarita complied with literally.⁷⁵

On another occasion, she met with another very embittered religious sister to whom she simply said: "Take this handkerchief to dry your tears".⁷⁶

When in 1929, the house of Albarracin was opened, the sisters assigned for the foundation went to Masamagrell to bid goodbye to the General Council, and Sister Serafina, who was still the Superior of the house, with her sober and profound style which was her characteristic gave them this advice:

Have a day for the monthly retreat and always

proceeded anew to the nomination of new superiors. The most delicate position was that of the house of Masamagrell. The General Counselor who was proposed for the position did not feel to have the strength to accept and therefore, Sister Serafina was again designated, who on knowing the result exclaimed tearfully:

*Finally to me! Finally to me!*⁸⁰

The new and last stage as the one responsible for the house in Masamagrell, Sister Serafina followed her usual strengthening medicine of being first at work and of being an example to all the sisters, especially to the novices. Nevertheless, circumstances had changed and at times, community conversation would gird towards the political situation, this, Sister Serafina did not allow and she would cut it short.

When at the eve of the civil war, some sisters were complaining of the persecution that the church was suffering and of the profanation which was being committed on chalices and other sacred vessels, Sister Serafina would tell us, that the Lord, speaking to St. Gertrudis, who was also always complaining on similar things, said to her: "Your complaining displeases me more than they doing the wrong."⁸¹

What Sister Serafina really liked to communicate very often then, is the thought which years since had disquieted her.

*I understand! She would begin to say. They say that our Lord has no preferences. St. Therese, who donned the habit on the same day as I, was a saint at the age of twenty-four and to me, already old, He still has me here so far from her. I could be so close!*⁸²

to immediately ask for pardon from whoever she would have offended.

When she would have exceeded in words, she would kneel before the sisters and ask for their forgiveness.⁸⁹

"It is because I have this temper! I am like this, I am like this".⁹⁰ She would say. At times, she herself would laugh, after having given a "sharp reproof" to a sister, having allowed herself to be carried away by her temper for which she would humbly acknowledge her quick temperament.⁹¹

In her life of piety, she was devoted to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, to the Blessed Virgin, particularly in her avocation to the Immaculate Conception and to our Mother of Sorrows, St. Joseph and to St. Francis,⁹² and in its observance she would not permit concessions.

She was very observant and did not want any exception in her favor. For example, at meals, she would not allow to be served an extra egg, if the same were not done for the other sisters.⁹³

She also distinguished herself for her Franciscan love of poverty.

She was a religious for those who have none, nor looking for them with an oil lamp. A true Franciscan for her love of poverty and for her dedication to work.⁹⁴

On a certain occasion, at the end of the semester, we did our accounting. She took the box, emptied



Sister FRANCISCA JAVIER DE RAFELBUÑOL, TC

IX. Francisca de Rafelbuñol A Sympathetic Brunette

Sister Francisca was born in Rafelbuñol (Valencia), on the 24th of May, 1901. She was baptized the following day and given the name of Maria. Her parents, Jose Fenollosa and Maria Rosa Alcaina had twelve children, two of whom died when they were still young. The other ten, five boys and five girls, grew up together. Maria was the eldest.

The family Fenollosa - Alcaina was poor. D. Jose, after cultivating the little land he possessed, would go as a day-labourer to work on other fields to help supplement the needs of the family. Dña. Maria Rosa, besides attending to her own housework and in the education of her children, engaged in the gathering or sacking of fruits and vegetables so as to strengthen their deficient financial condition. Notwithstanding, D. Jose and Dña. Maria Rosa two fervent Catholics, educated their children in accordance to the law of God and to the teachings of the Church. The family prayed together the Rosary each day, and "on Sundays all the children would attend the High Mass of the Parish accompanied by their parents".⁹⁹

Moreover, this family conserved certain traditions that was conferred with a certain patriarchal air.

Once - narrates another religious sister- I accompanied Sister Francisca to her house and I contemplated a scene full of meaningful respect and gener-

For Maria, learning was easy. She was at the head of her class. Nevertheless, difficulties in the family were many and as soon as she was old enough to help her mother in housework, she stopped going to school to learn on brooms and pots.

Since a little girl, Maria used to help my mother in the upbringing of her many brothers and in the work in the house. Her attitude was such, that she would not notice the absence of her mother who would go to the field to work with my father. Everything was on time, in order, and clean. We would obey her as though she was our little mother. She would teach and educate us.¹⁰²

When she became a little older, Maria also had to leave the house to earn her keep with the sweat of her brow. She first worked in some stores choosing and sacking oranges and onions in Rafaelbuñol itself or in towns that were more or less near. Sometimes, when the distance was great, she would leave on Monday and return on Saturday, sleeping in the same stores or houses where she would be working. Other times, she would leave very early in the morning to go to work and would walk for an hour or two to reach her destination. Her conduct at this period was that of an accomplished Christian:

The norm of her conduct was to do good, She made it possible to hear mass each day in the town where we were and pray the rosary. If she could not make it to the church, she would say to her companions: "Girls, let us pray the rosary", and those who wanted to pray, joined her.¹⁰³

⁴ She was about seventeen years of age, when she found a job that fascinated her.

Maria felt really bad then. She was stunned. Intelligent as she was, she did not succeed. On a certain day, she was not able to prepare the food for her parents and brothers.¹⁰⁸ As days passed, she overcame this crisis and got the idea that she had to wait. She then took advantage of the time to expand her little educational attainment. She always wanted to learn more and so decided to supplement her education, which she was not able to attain in school, in the house.

*She did this by corresponding with her brother Jose, who was at the Seminary of Valencia. I preserved the letters which her brother used to send her, in the same manner with many other lessons, so she could learn from them.*¹⁰⁹

During this same period, a gentleman opened a small factory for toys in Rafelbuñol and Maria worked in it. It was a way of her being useful again in the economy of the family while waiting for her to reach the age of maturity. Her experience in this factory was very positive for Maria. Her open communicative and happy character, also helped her here to demonstrate her faith and religious principles in a normal manner:

*There was a man in the toy factory, who, for nothing, cursed. Maria, with her affable and attractive manner said to him: "Why do you want to offend God? Offend me instead". The man answered, "but you have not done anything to me" and she added: "and God, has he done something to you?" Then the man confused concluded: "Because of you, I will not offend God! Because of you".*¹¹⁰

Also in this factory, there appeared a suitor. He was a young lathesman who took a fancy to Maria's beauty and the

On May 11, 1922, she donned the habit of the Congregation and changed her name to Francisca Javier. During the two years required then as a novitiate, she had the good fortune of being able to greet and listen to Father Amigó many times, who was then the bishop of Segorbe, and who in some afternoons would go out for a walk up to the neighboring Novitiate. From his lips she heard the advice which he gave them:

Be good and observant! Have devotion to Our Father Saint Francis, imitating him. Have devotion to Our Lady of Sorrows, to have compassion on her and obtain her special protection in the hour of death. Call her: "Our Mother of Sorrows". I enjoin you to remember that the young girls in the Reformatories are abandoned sisters, daughters, to whom you should treat with all affection. They have perhaps nobody and you have to correct and educate them in a Christian way and prepare them so that they will not be illiterate persons in life.¹¹³

In the Novitiate, Sister Francisca had also the occasion to experience the truth that surrounds this wise words of Father Amigó:

You will have to suffer much of one another due to the differences of character, temperament, education and nationality, they serve for our mortification and sanctity. The Lord wants us religious to be martyrs, with the slow martyrdom that we give one another, ordinarily without wanting or thinking of it.¹¹⁴

She suffered much. She was a dreamer, spontaneous, sentimental and idealist, and persons who are like this normally receive many beatings in life. At times, adults like to play being mature, like the children, and they confuse maturity

what she liked best and for which she had a true vocation, was the caring for and education of the intern children. With the closeness of her affection and the wisdom of her advice, she helped them to grow in a human and Christian way and left them an indelible remembrance.

Sister Francisca was extremely affectionate with all the students. She taught us the songs. She would not be impatient when we did not learn them quickly, instead, she would say to us: "Would you like me to sing it first for you and for you to catch the intonation better?" At times, allowing us to be carried away because we loved her so much, we would say to her: "Sister, what beautiful eyes you have and how well groomed always. You would be so elegant in the outside world. Your wimple is always well ironed, and your shoes so shiny", and she would answer us: "Look, we, the espouses of Jesus should always be well groomed because He deserves it"

She would also tell us always how we should love the Blessed Virgin and tell her all our little thoughts and she would ask us with a smile on her lips: "You love your mothers very much, is it not true? Well, to the Blessed Virgin, Mother of Jesus and our mother you should love more".

In the reunions and games she would repeat to us: "forgive one another, as you are all children of God. Do not try to be always the first in the games, as in imitating St. Francis, you should also give the preference to your little friends in the games".

One day, talking about what was happening in Mexico she said to us: "Look, little ones, our true

rior, the same person with whom she was not able to sympathize with, when both were in Altura. *"This sister had character and in certain occasions, as they would say, she would bang the table with her fist."*¹²⁰

Sister Francisca, got to like her as she was and ended by knowing how to deal with her temper. When Sister Francisca would see her carried away by her passion, Sister Francisca would limit herself to a smile and the poor Superior subdued would exclaim *"for her, everything is the same"*.¹²¹ In time, she began to trust Sister Francisca, and in some delicate cases would say to her: *"Sister go and fix it the way you know how"*¹²²

We do not know for certain when Sister Francisca left Meliana. What is certain is that in May, 1931, when the burning of the convents took place, she was in Masamagrell and when the superiors decided that the religious sisters abandon their houses and find refuge with their families as precaution, Sister Francisca went to Rafelbuñol with a group of novices of the North.

*They were about thirty. They occupied the porch of the house which was large, and slept there. In the same manner, they ate with everybody in the family until they left for their own homes. This lasted for several days.*¹²³

Sister Francisca, remained in the house of her parents up to the end of September. While she was here "she wore secular clothes, attended to house work and complied regularly with her duties of piety as a religious".¹²⁴ Nevertheless, she was not happy.

- *I see you sad! Why? What is the matter? Her mother would say to her.*

*ironed and taught how to iron the veils. In short she taught and helped the novices.*¹²⁷

*I can still see her on the terrace of the Novitiate, during the evening recreation in summer, always looking and wishing for heaven. She would exclaim with simplicity: "How will we be over there? What will heaven be like?" and would add: "Ah! When we will be in heaven, we will sing the song of the Blessed Virgin Mary".*¹²⁸

The subject of death and of martyrdom preoccupied her in a special manner during the last months of her stay in Masamagrell.

*One day during rehearsal, she said: "we are not worthy to be martyrs"¹²⁹ ... "On another occasion, preoccupied by the thought of what could happen to her if the war broke out, she confided to her companion at the laundry room: "Do you know what I will do? I will leave the clothes that I am washing unfinished and go to the chapel and commend myself to God so that he will give me the strength if the occasion arises".*¹³⁰

But when in July of 1936, the novices had to leave hurriedly from the Novitiate and seek refuge for the night in the house of "Mr. Chuan", Sister Francisca, who accompanied them, once again showed her happy and spontaneous character in the midst of a moment of tragedy.

We were in darkness, lying down on the mattresses which they had brought from the convent, when Sister Francisca, dressed in the habit and head-dress of the night, with a candle in her hand appeared ex-

was always, active and enthusiastic in everything.

Her piety, born in the bosom of a family profoundly catholic, also continued to increase, thanks to her continued desire to overcome:

The Christian formation that she received from her parents, and the influence of her brother Jose - narrates her confessor - contributed greatly to the good spirit that she had. Following the way of the Lord, she wanted more and better, as a chosen soul. She was docile and continued to perfect herself. Once a religious, she truly lived her consecration. Already professed, she tried to improve and exerted herself to attain Christian perfection within the state which she had embraced voluntarily and willingly.¹³⁶

X. Rosario, Serafina and Francisca Martyrs of the Faith

It is very simple to pretend to be able to distinguish a “party of the good” and a “party of the bad” that were facing each other in the civil war between the two Spains. On both sides, there were people being moved by ideals of altruism, and people who acted due to egoistic interests more or less feigned or disguised.

But limiting ourselves to the deeds and without entering into the appraisal and passing judgement, there is an undeniable fact: the persecution suffered by the Church from the Republican Party has been the most ferocious and bloody which Christianity remembers in its almost two thousand years of existence.

This persecution is not justifiable by excusing themselves, as some pretend, with reasons of social resentment against the clergy for their alleged secular alliance to the powerful classes. It is certain that in Spain, there nestled a certain anticlerical sentiment which had been increasing since the previous century. But the persecution of the Church in 1936, a true human slaughter, was more the result of the manner of delivery of some politicians.

Marx spoke of religion as the “opium of the people”, but this does not necessarily suppose the physical extermination of religious persons in his ideology.

then took refuge in the house of another poor widow who actually lived in San Juan Street. Nobody except Sister Serafina knew where she was staying.

From her new refuge, Sister Rosario wrote to the sisters of Olleria, who were able to continue over there their apostolate.

If they kill me, attribute it to my sins. I am where I cannot see the sun, absent from my espouse, and separated from my daughters. ¹³⁹

Meanwhile, Sister Serafina continued to receive the other religious, who disoriented, would come to ask advice:

In the house of Carmen dels Mudets, we saw Sister Serafina. We would embrace and exchange impressions. She said to us: "Where are you going? Where are you going? Do you need money? No, we do not need, we answer: "Poor little cherubs! - continued Sister Serafina - Oh! Where are you going? We will see what God wants". ¹⁴⁰

After some time, when the committee of Puzol found out that the Superiors of the house of Masamagrell were hidden in the house of Madam Filomena, they came armed with guns, pistols, and machine guns for a search. They brutally insulted the poor widow, her two daughters and deafmute son. It was the 20th of August of 1936.

On searching the house, they found Sister Serafina and Sister Benjamina of Gama, who, not being able to leave for Santander, had also taken refuge in the same house hiding in the upper floor. On not finding Sister Rosario, the militiamen began to threaten the family, and Sister Serafina, fearing that

on a cushion on the floor. The three of us prayed and prepared ourselves for death.

They brought us supper and told us that as it was already late in the evening they would judge us the next day. They told me to transfer to another room. I do not know how, but without saying a word I went. In the room, there were two militiamen on a bed and on a cushion on the floor was Asuncion of Masamagrell whom I knew, and they told me to lie down beside her. She was a good person and she immediately told me to take off my ring because it would compromise me.

The next day, they made her and the sisters work quickly. Me, they called me at about nine for breakfast. I went to a room where Sisters Rosario and Serafina were sitted at a table with a militiaman on each side. There was much disorder. The things that they had inspected were scattered on the floor. For me, I could not speak to them since the night before. They did not want to drink the coffee with milk, which I imagined could have had cognac or something to inebriate them or make them tipsy, as they wanted for them to declare where the money was. Somebody told me that during the night they were heard screaming and saying, "kill us". I think they wanted to do harm to the sisters.

The militiamen treated the sisters very badly. They had their hands burnt due to cleaning mattresses and scrubbing. A young man told me that he pitied very much to see how, while one of the sisters was sweeping the stairs a militiaman who was passing by gave her a push with the butt of a gun and said to her: "you

Colombia, on receiving the telegram announcing the deaths of martyrdom of Sisters Rosario and Serafina, immediately went to the chapel with her secretary and fervently prayed together the *Te Deum* and the *Magnificat*.

*The intense pain that she felt was mitigated with joy on considering that two of her General Counselors had received the palm of martyrdom. They had offered their lives for Christ.*¹⁴⁸

The war having ended, the young man who received the ring from Sister Rosario and who was so emotionally moved by her gesture, presented himself to Sister Benjamina and showed her the ring, and when the Sister asked him how he could have had such anger to do the things that he did, he answered:

*We had no other alternative left.*¹⁴⁹

Francisca the Martyr of Rafelbuñol

After spending the first night out of the convent in the house of "Mr. Chuan", Sister Francisca went to Rafelbuñol together with her mother, who had come to fetch her in Masamagrell.

The first days of her stay in her natal town were tranquil:

*At the start of the war, things went well in Rafelbuñol. Nothing abnormal was happening in the lives of the people. Priests and the religious enjoyed the freedom of movement. No one was bothering them in the least. The committee that was formed and made to take charge of the town did not want that what was happening in other towns should happen in their own town.*¹⁵⁰

always together whether in going to work or just taking a walk in the town. It was only then that her mother consented." You can now go to the Americas. I give you my blessing. Go".¹⁵²

We do not know if she was able to arrange her papers, what is certain is that she was not able to leave Rafelbuñol.

By the end of August, the local committee, fearing that people from other towns could come and impose their law of terror and outrage, decided to gather and hide the priests and the religious, sons of the town, in the vault of the parochial church.¹⁵³ While they were in the vault, the families took charge of punctually bringing them food and attending to their necessities.

Nevertheless, they stayed in this kind of "prison like refuge" for a few days. Rumors had reached the town that the anarchists were coming to "execute what had to be done to the priests and religious."¹⁵⁴ On such rumors, the committee of Rafelbuñol were scared, they set free those whom they had gathered and placed under their protective custody in the church, and abandoned them to their fate.

Hence, the woman who years back had Sister Francisca as a nurse maid to her children, offered to hide her in her house. But this was also not for long, since the "committee of the F.A.I. issued a proclamation which mandated that the priests and religious that were in the town should be presented to the See, otherwise their families would be detained."¹⁵⁵

Sister Francisca, then returned to her paternal home and her true Calvary began. Every day at dawn, she had to present herself, together with her brother Jose, priest, to the local committee.

having by her side a strong and courageous mother who comforted her:

- *Oh mother, they will kill me! Mother, they are going to kill me! I do not want them to kill me! I am afraid!*
- *Do not be afraid - her mother would tell her - The Lord will help you when the occasion comes. My daughter, do not deny Jesus-Christ who wants you a martyr.*¹⁶⁰

And so, comforted by the faith of her mother, Sister Francisca was able to overcome her weakness and even achieved a moment in which she would make fun of what could happen to her.

*One day - a sister of hers remembers - she caught me by the neck, bit me on one side and said to me "it is here that they will shoot you and to heaven!" She would say this, referring to herself.*¹⁶¹

In the middle of September, the situation became worst. On two different occasions, the militiamen, already late in the evening, went to look for Sister Francisca and her brother Jose to take them to the committee. On both occasions, the family, anguished and keeping vigil, thought they would not see them again. But their time had not yet come:

On one occasion the militiamen commented:

- *We will finish with the religion!*
- *You will kill us - D. Jose answered - but religion will triumph.*¹⁶²

On fetching her from her house, they made Sister Francisca walk through the streets of the town accompanied by two militiamen. One of them was a previous suitor. She went along saying goodbye to all the persons she knew who came out of their houses terrified. The women on seeing her, said to themselves: "They are going to kill her." On passing by in front of a house, a woman approached her, kissed her and said to her: "good-bye my dear child" and going back into her house, this good woman began to cry while repeating: "Poor Maria!, poor Maria!".¹⁶⁷

The moments that preceded her death were very tense:

With Sister Francisca, they had also detained some young men. The militiamen said to her and to them: "If you sin we will set you free. But neither she nor they wanted to commit something offensive in the eyes of God."

The militiamen then proceeded to molest and insult Sister Francisca obscenely, so much so, that her brother priest shouted at them: "Leave her alone or kill her once and for all".¹⁶⁸

At dawn the next day, September 28, she was brought to the cemetery of Gilet with other companions for martyrdom. Her brother, sacrificed the same day was killed in a different manner. The last wish of Sister Francisca was that they kill her outside of the cemetery, but this last request was not granted. A militiawoman who assisted in the killing by musketry later confessed that Sister Francisca Javier died saying:

May God forgive you as I forgive you.¹⁶⁹

Sister Aurelia, the religious name of the fourth martyr, was born in Valencia, August 7, 1884, to Mr. Roberto Casanova and Madam Salvadora Ferrer. She was baptized on August 10, and given the name of Maria Angeles, but was lovingly called Angelina by her family.

Her parents, people of means and committed Christians gave Angelina a good human and religious formation.

When her family left Valencia, due to the work of her father, who was a lawyer, Angelina was left as an intern in the College of the Franciscan Sisters in the Capital of Turia.

Her parents having died prematurely, Angelina, as well as her only sister Maria, opted for the religious life. Maria, joined the Agustinan Recolect Sisters and Angelina, who got to know the Capuchin Tertiary Sisters in Olleria, and who was impressed with the affection and vigilance with which they attended the sick and aged, joined them.

On October 8, 1910, she took the habit in Altura and changed her name to Aurelia. Two years later, also on the 8th of October, she made her first profession and five years later, in 1917, her perpetual vows.

As a religious, she did her apostolate by teaching letters and needlework. She had a special gift for embroidery. But she distinguished herself above all, for her predisposition to do the most humble services in the house and for asking alms.

In Albalat de la Ribera, as well as in Meliana, where she stayed in the community, she left an affectionate remembrance among the sisters, as well as the students, whose hearts she won by her human sensibility as well as her dedication.

*but in doing little things with pureness of intentions
and supernaturalizing everything".¹⁷⁶*

Simple and humble in life, the Lord also conceded to her a death in which almost no news is preserved by us. Aurelia will not be officially declared martyr, but her martyrial wake will always shine in the live tradition of the Capuchin Tertiary Sisters.

most needy, of generosity and cleanliness of intentions, and of a great interior and exterior peace.

This message of the truth as love, and of love, in reality is notwithstanding, prophetic by its nature and creates divisions and struggles that are more strong and violent, a society that is founded more in destroying itself, in the desire for power, in legalized injustices, or in other multiplied forms of personal selfishness as well as structural.

Christ, conscious of this reality, declares that he came "to bring wars and fire" and calls the attention of his disciples during the "talk in the mountain" of the risks they assume upon receiving this message. Freedom has always a price, and the price to pay for evangelical freedom, for the truth and justice over man and society, is persecution. The eighth beatitude, summary and conclusion of the other seven others, is very clear:

"Blessed are the persecuted for justice sake because theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Yes, blessed will you be when they will injure you, persecute you and say all kinds of evil lies against you because of me. Be happy and rejoice because your reward will be great in heaven, that of the same manner they persecuted the prophets before you"¹⁷⁷

There, where the Church is coherent with its message, it is rejected and persecuted, and it is more rejected or persecuted when its coherence is greater. The forms of persecution are nevertheless, many and diversified.

There are persecutions that are cloaked, and because of it not less harmful, with the intention of gaining the silence of the Church with offers and rewards. Those who act in such a

opened wide this door to his daughters.

The Lord sent him a sign, and he, a man of faith knew how to interpret it at that moment. In 1903, without anybody knowing, a young Colombian girl belonging to a well to do family, and who had to escape from her house to follow the call of the Lord to enter the Congregation of the Capuchin Tertiary Sisters, arrived in Masamagrell. This deed, together with the petition which the Capuchin Fathers of Guajira were making of the sisters for them to go there, was sufficient enough for the Congregation, inspired by their founder, to decide to journey throughout the world to preach Christ where he was not yet known. In 1905, the first missionaries left for Colombia.

Years later, the Congregation established a house in Venezuela. In 1929, the Capuchin Tertiary Sisters initiated their mission to China. Circumstances of this trip bestowed on them shades of a true adventure. The sisters chosen among the volunteers were "*healthy and robust of body, constant and strong in faith*"¹⁷⁹ as what Father Amigó wanted them to be, and who had great spirit of love, abnegation and sacrifice, but were going to a country not knowing the idiosyncrasis, culture and language of the land. A country sank in poverty, in banditry and social chaos, and in which a real guerrilla war between the established power and the communists had already began.

On November 3, 1929, the first selected sisters left Masamagrell. They went to the poorest mission of China situated in the Province of Kansu, the most extensive and occidental of the country. As what was being done by the missionaries in those days, they bade good-bye in a "*till heaven*" manner. Father Amigó who was already old, could not suppress his tears. He knew that he would not be able to see them again. In the five years that he still lived, he always had a special affec-

render and the sacrifice of the Capuchin Tertiary Sisters. Three nuns died there, and their bodies fructify the earth of China as a hope for future missionary expeditions of the Congregation to those exotic lands. The people with whom they worked with, Christians and non-Christians, recognized and appreciated their commitment and generosity. The text that is transcribed here, taken from the "pancartas" which a pagan mandarin official sent to the funeral of one of the sisters, are eloquent testimonies of this recognition:

Since her youth, she had sworn to observe perpetual chastity until death and preserve childhood innocence renouncing herself. Full of mercy and charity, she deserved to return to her Savior.

The examples of her virtues will remain forever. Her voice and her figure, separated for always from us, remain deeply engraved in our minds. Her soul, pure as snow, has already deserved to enter paradise.¹⁸¹

Since 1940, a part of the territory in which the missions were being attended to by the Capuchin Tertiary Sisters already became definitely under communist control. At the end of 1948, the victory of the communists in the country was already an established fact. Little by little, things were becoming more difficult for the Christian missionaries.

At the beginning, things continued as they were. The four Capuchin Tertiary Sisters who remained in China, concentrated in Sifengchen. They attended to the reds to cure them, as well as the rest of the people. But insecurity increased. In order to be able to go out of the town to attend to the sick, they had to provide themselves with a safe-conduct pass. Penury in the

lish their Congregation there with the only condition that *"they should be saints"*.

In 1985, the school of the Holy Family had already reached its true maturity. Without adding excessively to the number of students, without losing the "air of familiarity" which characterized it since its beginnings, had been extending its educational and its evangelizing action farther from its classrooms, entering into the familiar surroundings of their students, and inserting itself in pastoral work connected to that of the Parish.

The sisters, who managed the school, had received with special joy that year of 1985. It was the first centenary of the foundation of the Congregation. The people of Armero, as like so many others in the geographical world gathered joyfully at the jubilee celebration of their beloved sisters.

A short period after the start of the year, evil foreboding began to sift over the town. The snowfall of Ruiz, *"the dormant lion"* for many years, began to show signs of awakening from its lethargy. Armero like other towns in its environs, began to live a long nightmare.

When the Provincial Superior visited the sisters in the Month of April, the situation was already a problem. The volcano continually spewed ashes which covered the houses and streets of the town with a sad mantle, and which obliged the inhabitants to protect themselves with handkerchiefs to cover their mouths when going out. The Provincial, seeing the danger which the sisters were facing asked them:

*Don't you know that you are in danger of death?
What do you intend to do?*

about by the avalanche.

As in 1885, the year of the foundation of the Congregation, also now, in the celebration of the first centenary, three sisters also sealed with blood their testimonies of love for God in brotherhood.

But the case of Armero, is not the last of the testimonies of extreme love which the recent account of the Capuchin Tertiary Sisters offer. Two years had barely past since the catastrophe, when the Congregation is again tinted with blood in the person of Sister Inés Arango.

Born in Medellin (Colombia) on April 6, 1937, Inés Arango Velasquez, took the habit of the Capuchin Tertiary Sisters at the age of seventeen. Her greatest dream since childhood, was to be a missionary in Africa or in Asia. She would have wanted to go to the missions after her vows, but God's will showed that it was not her time to do so. She would have to wait twenty years and spend the first epoch of her religious life, dedicated to teaching in her natal country.

In 1977, her dream as a missionary was finally realized. The Capuchin Tertiary Sisters had accepted missionary work in a jungle of Aguarico (Ecuador), and Sister Inés went with the group of founders. It was then March 9, of 1977. Her first destination, Shushufindi. Here, nevertheless, her stay was only for a short time. In August of the same year, she left in-charge of a mission in Rocafuerte, which would be for her from then on, the referential center of all her missionary work among the native tribes of the surrounding. Here, she met the Capuchin priest Alejandro Labaka, with whom she felt identified from the beginning and joined in a sincere and profound friendship. They were spiritual twins. He, an accustomed missionary who had preached the Gospel in China, years before, she,

ously arranged, was instead realized the following day, July 21, 1987. The weather was not good. The sky was grayish, but Alejandro and Inés insisted on going at all cost. Already late, the helicopter left and dropped them in the place chosen for their descent in the middle of the jungle, and left to refuel.

When the helicopter returned, the pilot was not able to locate the hut. He had lost his way. The following day, July 22, the helicopter returned and the crew were horrified to see Father Alejandro stretched naked next to the hut. They did not however, find the body of Inés. They left to get reinforcement and on returning to the place, they found Alejandro and Inés nailed to the ground with spikes of three meters and a half in length. Alejandro was naked and pierced with fifteen lances. Inés, dressed in her simple tunic was pierced with three lances. The bodies were furthermore, totally perforated on appearance by many smaller lances.

The missionaries, and those who came to assist, recovered the bodies of Alejandro and Inés, but their spirits remained with their beloved Tagaeri. They had generously given their lives to make Christ known.

Rosario, Serafina and Francisca, towards the altars

On March 5, 1991, the process for the canonization of the Sisters Rosario de Soano, Serafina de Ochovi and Francisca Javier de Rafelbuñol as martyrs, was opened in Valencia. Two years later, on the 23rd of March of 1993, the period of its investigation was completed and the records of the proceedings deposited in the Roman Congregation for the Causes of the Saints. Its study will be undertaken jointly with the martyrial testimonies offered by the church of Valencia during the Spanish civil war. A testimony in which, aside from the Capuchin Tertiary Sisters, Priests, Laity, Religious Sisters and Brothers

