



CURIA GENERALIZIA DELLA COMPAGNIA DI GESÙ

Beatification of Fr. Juan Antonio Solinas, S.J.

2022/04

TO THE WHOLE SOCIETY

Dear Brothers:

On 2 July Pope Francis will proclaim blessed our Jesuit companion Juan Antonio Solinas together with the diocesan priest Pedro Ortiz de Zárate, both martyrs.

Fr Juan Antonio Solinas was born on 15 February 1643 in the village of Oliena, on the island of Sardinia, now part of Italy. On 12 June 1663 he entered the Society of Jesus in Cagliari. Having completed his theological studies, and after his ordination in Seville in 1673, the following year, together with three other Sardinian Jesuits, he was sent to the old Province of Paraguay (which then corresponded to what is now Paraguay, south-eastern Bolivia, northern Argentina, southern Brazil and Uruguay). After his tertianship in Santa Fe, he was first sent to the Guaraní reduction of Santa Ana and then to Itapúa.

Fr. Ortiz de Zárate was born in San Salvador de Jujuy (northwest Argentina) on 29 June 1626. He married and had two children. In 1654, after the sudden death of his wife, he took the road to the priesthood in the diocese of Tucumán. He studied at the Jesuit College in Córdoba (Argentina) and was ordained in 1657. After several postings, he was appointed parish priest of Jujuy. In a letter addressed to the King of Spain in 1682, referring to him, Bishop Nicolás de Ulloa reported that in Jujuy he had found "a venerable and elderly priest, a great priest, very zealous for the honour of God, a great lover of the Indians and their benefactor".

Moved by their desire to evangelize, the Jesuits had set out to find a way to link the villages of Chiquitania (in Bolivia) to their other missions, extending as far as the borders of Patagonia. But the Chaco region, known as the "green desert", which stretches from southern Bolivia to north-western Argentina, became a greater apostolic challenge. A group of native peoples populated that region where Solinas preached and confessed in Guaraní, evangelizing Indians and Spanish settlers in several provinces of northern Argentina. The Chaco Gualamba, south of the Pilcomayo River, was also a place of injustice and ambition, fierce indigenous resistance and armed repression. In the same area, in 1639, the Jesuit fathers Gaspar Osorio Valderrábano and Antonio Ripari had been murdered; and a few years earlier, in 1628, a little further away, in what is now Brazilian territory, the saints of the Guaraní Reductions, Roque González de Santa Cruz, Alonso Rodríguez and Juan del Castillo, had been martyred. By 1763, more than twenty Jesuits had lost their lives violently in those missions.



Juan A. Solinas had stated that he was willing to evangelize these groups and stay with them, not abandoning them, giving them "the necessary food and all other possible assistance". Indeed, according to the testimony of a contemporary, Solinas, who was self-effacing, accustomed to suffering, docile and gentle in character and much loved by his companions, "was a help to the poor, to whom he provided sustenance and clothing; a doctor for the sick, whom he cured with great gentleness; and a universal remedy for all the ills of the body. For this reason the Indians venerated him with the affection of sons". The Sardinian Jesuit ended his letter: "May God take care of us".

The missionary expedition organised in 1683 by Fr. Ortiz de Zárate tried to establish peace with the indigenous groups that had ravaged the borders of Jujuy and to bring about reconciliation between the Creoles and the native peoples. Three Jesuits were part of the expedition that crossed the Zenta Valley (present-day Orán), east of Jujuy: Fathers Juan Antonio Solinas and Diego Ruiz and Bro Pedro de Aguilar. In October, Fathers Ortiz de Zárate and Solinas pitched their tents near the chapel of Our Lady of Jujuy, about five leagues from Fort San Rafael. With them, in a group of two Spaniards and sixteen natives, were a mulatto, a black man, an indigenous woman and two girls.

While they were celebrating the peace, some five hundred Toba, Mocoví and Mataguayo Indians appeared, along with several caciques. For several days they surrounded and threatened them. On the morning of 27 October 1683, the priests prayed and celebrated the Eucharist. Afterwards, they spoke of God with their besiegers in a friendly tone. In the afternoon, apparently spurred on by sorcerers from their clans, the attackers charged with arrows, spears, clubs and sticks against the missionaries and all their companions, cruelly murdering them. As an aboriginal from the mission who was able to escape on horseback tells us, when Spanish troops arrived from Salta ready to carry out justice, Fr. Diego Ruiz prevented them from doing so: "We have come to convert infidels, not to kill them".

With the death of these martyrs we are celebrating a mission in which members of the diocesan clergy worked closely together with the Society of Jesus in a joint and ambitious ecclesial project, which unfortunately unravelled. There was so much to do that Ortiz de Zárate and Solinas had asked the Provincial for one more Jesuit, with the following profile: "First, he must be totally detached from the world and resolved to face dangers and difficulties; secondly, his charity must be supreme, not at all fearful, with a cheerful face, a big heart..." The missionaries were well aware of the difficulties, but, at the same time, they lived their vocation with enthusiasm, devoted to the natives, as is shown by the fact that a good number of these - whose names are unknown - were killed at the same time. We can see, then, how the faith transmitted by the missionaries had permeated the lives of these 18 lay people: men, women and children, Indians and Spaniards.

Solinas's European origins remind us of how the Society has always favoured the most urgent missions at any given time, putting at its service the varied origins of the Jesuits who were sent, regardless of the great distance – physical and in terms of customs and habits - that separated them from their destination. Their detachment from habits acquired in their homeland and their inculturation whether here or there allowed for a communication of the Gospel that responded to the needs and circumstances of those who received it. This required of the missionary - as we have seen with this Zenta mission - attributes and virtues that characterized, among others, Juan Antonio Solinas. Particular qualities that can in no way be improvised, but



are generated and cultivated in the daily concern for the love of God and one's neighbour, right from the childhood and formation of the Jesuit.

The faithfulness of these martyrs in persevering in their commitment to reconciliation between different groups in the area, going so far as to be willing to give their lives for this and to forgive their assailants, allows us to see their hierarchy of Christian values. On the other hand, the attention given to the person on the part of Solinas and his companions - as doctors of body and soul - makes it clear how spreading the gospel, directed by the grace of God, aims to respond to the yearnings of every human being, communicating to them the complete life offered by Jesus Christ.

I ask Our Lord, through Mary, Mother of the Society of Jesus, to continue to send us vocations throughout the world to be able to attend to missions such as those to which the new Blessed gave themselves with generosity and joy.

Yours fraternally in Christ,

Arturo Sosa, S.J.
Superior General

Rome, 24 June 2022
Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus

(Original: Spanish)