

FROM THE SERVANT GENERAL
ON MARY, MISSION AND MARTYRDOM

September 8, 2008

Today we celebrate the birthday of our Mother Mary. And today we commemorate the 11th death anniversary of our brothers Ben Donato and Jun Frias. Ben and Jun died in a car accident while on mission in Vanuatu. They gave their lives for the sake of the call. A definition of “martyr” is one who sacrifices something of great value and especially life itself for the sake of principle. Ben and Jun were our first martyrs on mission. To be a martyr is to be a witness. Ben and Jun truly witnessed to the love and way of Christ.

Today we look at life and death, at rejoicing and at grieving, at being amazed and being troubled. There will be many times when the two seemingly opposed aspects come together in a package. Mary was greatly troubled at what the angel Gabriel told her, but burst out with joyful exuberant praise in her *Magnificat*. Mary would have been overjoyed as she and Joseph were amazed at the words of Simeon when Jesus was presented at the temple, while at the same time would have been troubled when told that she would be pierced by a sword (Lk 2:33-35). We grieve at the deaths of Ben and Jun, but we rejoice in their new life in heaven.

We look at our own lives in Christ. There are ups and downs, joys and sorrows, victories and seeming defeats. Accepting Jesus as Savior and Lord does not translate to a life of ease and comfort. On the contrary. Even as we have accepted Jesus as our Savior and Lord, or perhaps precisely because we have accepted him as such and are now serving him, we will face difficulties in life. The enemy opposes and oppresses God’s people, especially those who do mission for Him. We may even be called on to give our very lives for the cause of Christ. Though we may be troubled by such a possibility, we must rejoice at such a privilege. In speaking about himself and his love for us, Jesus says he tells us these things so that his joy might be in us and that our joy might be complete (Jn 15:11). Jesus then gives us the commandment of love, and says: “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” (Jn 15:13).

Today I honor our brothers Ben and Jun, who gave their lives for the cause of Christ in pursuance of his mission. They walked the way of Jesus, who himself showed the way to true love by giving his life for us all. Let us never forget the supreme sacrifice of our brothers, and let us be inspired by their total commitment to mission.

Joy and sorrow. Life and death. Whatever happens, we must never be robbed of our joy in Christ. Even as Jesus told his disciples that he would be leaving them and they themselves would be scattered, he told them that they should have peace in him. Such is possible, given the reality of Christ in our lives. “In the world you will have trouble, but take courage, I have conquered the world.” (Jn 16:33).

When Ben and Jun were retrieved from their car that had plunged into a pool of water by the road, Ben was seen clutching a rosary in his hand. They had been praying the rosary. That should be the way to go—being on the Father’s mission, anointed by the Spirit, praying to Mary, rejoicing in Christ.

I do not know why God allowed the lives of two good men to be taken that day. I cannot fully understand the inscrutable mind of God. But what I do know is that today we have two intercessors before the throne room of God, praying for our mission. What I do know is that our two brothers have gone on ahead of us, to the place where we ourselves all long to be. What I do know is that they are in the loving embrace of our Mother Mary. And what I do know is that now we are very much more aware that as we go on mission, we might be called upon to make the ultimate sacrifice, giving our lives for the cause of Christ.

Things may not work out according to our desires and designs. But if we remain in Christ, all things work for our good. “Amen, amen, I say to you, you will weep and mourn, while the world rejoices; you will grieve, but your grief will become joy.” (Jn 16:20). Grief and joy. Weeping and rejoicing. They often come together. But if we remain in him, Jesus himself assures us: “your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy away from you.” (Jn 16:22). Our hearts, like Mary, may be pierced, but our joy in Christ remains.

Our Mother Mary was born to life. Our brothers Ben and Jun died, and were born to eternal life. Mary then gave birth to Jesus, who became the Savior of the world. Our brothers Ben and Jun have given birth to greater fruit in our mission to proclaim Jesus to the world, thus bringing new life in Christ to many others. “Amen, amen, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit.” (Jn 12:24). Let us honor the sacrifice of our martyrs Ben and Jun by giving even more of ourselves for our mission of evangelization.

We are greatly privileged to be missionaries, Marian, and martyrs. Let us move on with exultant joy.

God bless you all.

Frank Padilla