

The Servant of God BROTHER ADOLFO

Brother Vice-Postulator

On December 15, 1990 in Zaragoza, Spain (the city of Our Lady of the Pillar), the diocesan process concerning the Servant of God, Brother Adolfo (Leonardo Lanzuela) of the Christian Schools came to a close. His cause is now being considered in the due process of the Sacred Congregation for the Causes of Saints.

It is hoped that Brothers and Lasallians everywhere will appreciate a brief introduction to the life of this Brother. This year also marks the 75th anniversary of his reception of the habit.

BEGINNINGS

It was in Irún (Guipúzcoa) on September 30, 1992, where 20 young men became Brothers of the Christian Schools when they received the religious habit in the La Salle Novitiate. The oldest of the group, Leonardo Lanzuela, received the name of BROTHER ADOLFO.

He was 27 years old. He was born in Cella (Teruel) on November 8, 1894 into a rural Christian family; he was the eighth of ten children. He first studied at the town's primary school and then at the Teruel seminary and finally at the normal school in the same capital where he received his teaching certificate. After military service in Valencia, he took a post as teacher at the St. Philip school in Zaragoza.

His fiancée died. As a result of guidance received from an uncle of his who was a parish priest in Celadas, our Brother Adolfo was put into contact with the Brothers of the Christian Schools in the Montemolín area and after much prayerful reflection he opted to follow the call of God to religious life. His reflection was completed in this regard as of the date noted above.

He pronounced his first vows the following year (October 1). He did a year of further studies at Talence (France, next to Bordeaux), and when he returned, his superiors assigned him to Zaragoza. With the exception of the 1928-1929 academic year, which he spent at Beasain (Guipúzcoa), Brother Adolfo carried out his ministry at the La Salle school in Montemolín day after day during virtually all of his apostolic career: he served as director for three years, sub-director for many more and then as administrator, secretary, guidance counselor...and always as teacher.

TEACHER AND FRIEND

He taught many different subjects, which was the custom for elementary school teachers at that time, but more and more he taught grammar, French, Latin and catechism in the upper grades. He was not brilliant but as an educator he was effective, qualified and superb.

He also excelled in many other things as an educator. He was very generous in his dedication to work, he was fair and honest, he was inclined to be very kind to towards younger children, those who were timid and those most in need...He was a model of balance between firmness and kindness. All the students wanted him for a teacher. His disciples, today parents and grandparents, remember him with deep emotion. He sought an integrated education for his students: books

were complemented with various exercises, music, songs, dramatizations, sports, field trips...He was careful to promote the fostering of good friendships and he also was concerned about the physical well-being of his students.

And as the topping on the cake of these varied talents there was evangelization. Brother Adolfo was a born catechist; he always knew how to present God to his students. To accomplish this he used prayers, the remembrance of being in the holy presence of God, the daily religious reflection. With all these he would begin his classes each morning and some of these materials would spontaneously appear in his many letters that he wrote to relatives, former students and friends.

The daily religion lesson was his daily labor: he prepared it carefully and presented it with enthusiasm. This was the main event of the day for him. He also had certain topics of preference such as God, Jesus, Mary, the Church, the sacraments, Christian commitment...when he retired in Irún, he asked for permission to travel each week to Fuenterrabía to explain the catechism to fourth graders in a school in a sea town. One of his lessons was the last important act of his life.

THE POOR

Brother Adolfo, in true Lasallian fashion, always favored the poor: he helped students from needy families, he welcomed them to the school at no cost or at half price and he even made sure that they were well fed. He also was very careful that no one paid undue notice to this special attention.

Given his long stay at the same school as well as his extraordinary memory and tenacity, Brother Adolfo was the friend of all the former students of the school. Hundreds of them today boast of his discreet guidance, his sensible personal advice, the letter of recommendation that he wrote concerning a career choice, advice to those considering engagement and possible marriage, advice concerning children, a possible move...the list goes on.

AN APOSTLE IN MONTEMOLÍN

Someone aptly named him "the apostle of Montemolín" since he never shirked his normal teaching duties while at the same time reaching out to the neighborhood, indeed the entire city, with his long arm of charity, efficient and quiet service.

More than 2,000 persons can attest to how he influenced their first job placement. Many recall his appropriate and fortunate interventions in terms of relatives, the sick, immigrants, close acquaintances who were poor, even prisoners and delinquents.

Dozens of people talk about his encouraging visit when they were ill. Families and parish priests recall his visits to those who were near death.

Countless numbers of people went to see him in his tiny room in the school in search of a word, some advice, a prayer or a promise. And they left consoled if not transformed. This happened after conversations that were not very long, but only thanks to some brief, but inspired sentences from the highly esteemed Brother Adolfo.

THE TRANSPARENCE OF GOD

How can I explain this? Brother Adolfo was deeply immersed in the divine presence and people saw this in him, this clarity of God. This was the secret spring that many experienced or sought after.

With regard to this point the Brothers in his community are the best witnesses of his virtue and they saw this clarity very clearly. Brother Adolfo lived the spirit of faith in a profound way: "to see everything with the eyes of faith, not to do anything except with one's glance on God", according to the teaching of Saint John Baptist de La Salle, the Founder of his order.

And so is this how he approached life, nature, sickness, death, successes and setbacks. He greatly valued the world of grace: baptism, that one day would open the doors of union

with Christ for him; the sacraments, that furthered his own journey towards God; the hereafter, which he believed in with son-like trust.

He manifested an intense and robust concern for things spiritual and a true relish for hearing about religious topics. Brother Adolfo greatly valued the grace of his religious vocation. *"The religious is an act of love from God"*, he wrote. He later added, *"Religious follow Christ not to proclaim the Gospel, but rather they proclaim the Gospel because they follow Christ"*.

As a man of God he was very prayerful: *"You have to go to prayer with a yearning for God, with a hunger for Him, with the affection of children: speaking to him simply, earnestly asking him with words from your heart!"*. This is how he thought and this is how he acted. *"When I think of prayer, profound prayer, I always think of Brother Adolfo"*, not a few witnesses have testified.

He was very faithful to prayer times as indicated in the constitutions of that era. And many remember how, in the morning, during the half hour of personal prayer, of conversation with the Lord, he would always be kneeling, not moving yet without any type of rigidity, with a book in front of him, absorbed as he was in God.

Some students managed to observe him in the chapel at odd hours and all of them saw him there when he accompanied his classes or took them there for confession; again the image presented was that he seemed *"lost in the presence of God"*.

Two devotions were his mainstays in his own life: Jesus Christ, especially in his human presence in the Eucharist and the Blessed Virgin Mary. Even the Immaculate Conception sisters from the nearby convent remember him at their community masses: *"his presence alone serves as an example for us"*, they would say. In Irún, during his last three years on earth, he used to sleep *"four steps away from the chapel"*: in several of his letters he mentioned how happy this fact made him.

He would assiduously read whatever he could concerning the Virgin Mary. In litanies he would add the invocation *"Virgin of the sacred pillar"*. For many years he participated in the *"Crystal Rosary"* processions (October 13) as well as the *"Rosary devotions"* on the first Saturday of May. His visits to the sanctuary were frequent and he never missed the January 2 midnight mass (anniversary of the apparition) nor the remembrance of the August 3rd bombing. The last work done by Brother Adolfo in Zaragoza was the offering of the entire Lasallian Family to the Virgin of Pilar which was done on May 5, 1973.

In the religious community Brother Adolfo showed traces of pure charity. The Brother in charge of finances allowed him to serve his Brothers in ways that required great detail and that demanded dedication, selflessness and sacrifice. He did these things under great pressure: he provided clothing, shoes, food and always in a timely manner. Brother Adolfo was happy to end up with used goods for himself and even then with only the minimum necessary.

He was attentive to the newcomer, the new teacher, the forgotten soldier, the refugee fleeing from the republican area during the Spanish civil war. He was able to soothe someone who was upset, he took the place of those who needed to go to the university for exams, he cared for the sick, he attended to the needs of a missionary who was passing through...

"He was never heard to speak ill of anyone in his lifetime. When he heard a conversation that was unfavorable to the Brothers, he moved his head so as to register his reproach, but that would be it". And in the matter of speaking well, he was inexhaustible. Even those who left the Institute remember him as a great source of encouragement, an irreplaceable link that maintained in them a certain fervor for Christian life.

Brother Adolfo himself explains his total surrender to the Lord: *"Only one Person gives meaning and consistency to virginity. We have to continually renew our thoughts, purify our senses, clean our heart in order to keep it free and to-*

tally open and available. We should joyfully express our unconditional surrender to God and to mankind; that is, proclaim the strong power of the Risen Christ".

No one thought of him as, or having the appearance of, someone who was excessively pious. He was perhaps a bit austere in appearance and a serious person, but Brother Adolfo's personality was a remarkable study in clearness and common sense, on the one hand, and a grateful simplicity on the other. He had a special type of cheerfulness which was expressed through popular songs, funny stories, and a certain flexibility all of which served to envelope his whole character.

HIS FINAL YEARS

In 1973 he humbly retired in San Asensio, also spending some time in Irún; he wanted to devote some quality time to prepare for meeting his maker. He returned to Zaragoza on four separate occasions. His former students honored him with medals and other insignia; they awarded him with trophies, homages, paintings, things they had made...they even named a street in his honor. He tried to avoid all this but in the end he subjected himself to the decisions made by others and he forwarded all honors received to his religious institute.

It was on March 14, 1976, when he returned to Zaragoza for the last time in order to receive the silver Medal for Achievement and, since he was already there, to officially inaugurate the new La Salle-Montemolín school that had opened four years previously. He never arrived to receive the medallion. Early that very morning, the nurse found him dead in his room at the La Salle-Gran Via school. The body was still warm. All of Zaragoza joined in mourning the passing of Brother Adolfo.

He was buried the following day in the Lasallian cemetery of San Asensio (La Rioja). His reputation for sanctity grew day after day and his veneration increased. Many told stories of favors received through his intercession. Some of the stories were indeed remarkable.

Brother Adolfo's did not leave any important writings. Neither was Brother Adolfo a great fan of writing. Aside from some accounts, messages, lectures and brief notes, we have preserved seven booklets with spiritual notes and 366 letters to 104 different addressees. The writings have been officially examined as prescribed and they have been judged to be highly edifying and it is said that *"they create a climate that is supernatural and at the same time one of Gospel simplicity"*.

A few years later (1980) his remains were returned to Zaragoza. They now rest in the chapel of the La Salle of Montemolín school. The diocesan process was begun in March, 1987 and it ended just as this article was begun. The commemoration of the centenary of his birth and baptism was held in Cella, his native village and it was an event that was filled with hope and joy (November, 1994), and it was also an occasion for the exhibition of the *Positio* of his cause.

Every Wednesday, the students of the school, along with other devout persons, celebrate a memorial mass near his tomb. And three times yearly, there is a special Eucharist commemorating three special events in his life (death, transfer of his remains, birth).

The future is in the hands of God and in the faith of his fervent followers.

All communication regarding favors received or to send donations, seek information, biographies or obtain printed information should be addressed to:

Brother Vice-Postulator of the Cause of Brother Adolfo
Colegio La Salle-Montemolín. c/José Galiay, 11 – 50008 - Zaragoza.

Available:

- A biographical sketch of Brother Adolfo, 136 pages, 1977.
- Brother Adolfo, or the Transparency of God, 420 pages, 1986.
- Brother Adolfo: Centennial (1894-1994), 32 pages, 1996.

In addition there are tri-fold brochures, stamps, portraits, novena prayers, a video and other types of souvenirs.

Five times yearly the Information Bulletin for the Cause is printed in order to foster devotion to the Servant of God.