

THE PASTOR'S CORNER

HIS VALENTINE

Bartolomé Blanco Márquez was one of thousands of men and women who were brutally murdered in Spain during the Spanish Civil War from 1936 to 1939 for merely professing the Catholic Faith. Among the nearly 8,000 people martyred were 6,382 priests and religious. He was beatified in 2007. The following is a translation of a letter from the 21-year-old Blessed Bartolomé to his girlfriend which may give us, in light of today's celebration of Valentine's Day, a different perspective on love. It was written the day before his execution. (Reprinted by permission of ZENIT from its website at <http://zenit.org>.)

With Lent beginning this Ash Wednesday, we are invited through our penances and sacrifices to imitate the pure and genuine love of Jesus on the cross that was so evident in Bartolomé's love for his girlfriend.

Written in the Provincial prison of Jaen, Oct. 1, 1936.

My dearest Maruja:
Your memory will remain with me to the grave and, as long as the slightest throb stirs my heart, it will beat for love of you. God has deemed fit to sublimate these worldly affections, ennobling them when we love each other in him. Though in my final days, God is my light and what I long for, this does not mean that the recollection of the one dearest to me will not accompany me until the hour of my death.

I am assisted by many priests who -- what a sweet comfort -- pour out the treasures of grace into my soul, strengthening it. I look death in the eye and, believe my words, it does not daunt me or make me afraid.

My sentence before the court of mankind will be my soundest defense before God's court; in their effort to revile me, they have ennobled me; in trying to sentence me, they have absolved me, and by attempting to lose me, they have saved me. Do you see what I mean? Why, of course! Because in killing me, they grant me true life and in condemning me for always upholding the highest ideals of religion, country and family, they swing open before me the doors of heaven.

My body will be buried in a grave in this cemetery of Jaen; while I am left with only a few hours before that definitive repose, allow me to ask but one thing of you: that in memory of the love we shared, which at this moment is enhanced, that you would take on as your primary objective the salvation of your soul. In that way, we will procure our reuniting in heaven for all eternity, where nothing will separate us.

Goodbye, until that moment, then, dearest Maruja! Do not forget that I am looking at you from heaven, and try to be a model Christian woman, since, in the end, worldly goods and delights are of no avail if we do not manage to save our souls.

My thoughts of gratitude to all your family and, for you, all my love, sublimated in the hours of death. Do not forget me, my Maruja, and let my memory always remind you there is a better life, and that attaining it should constitute our highest aspiration.

Be strong and make a new life; you are young and kind, and you will have God's help, which I will implore upon you from his kingdom. Goodbye, until eternity, then, when we shall continue to love each other for life everlasting.