



Spiritual Reflection of the Postulator General of the Premonstratensian Order at the General Chapter 2012

The Life of Bl. Peter-Adrian Toulorge

Mysterium incarnationis



Bl. Peter-Adrian Toulorge, help us
to live spiritually as humans and humanly as priests.

Mysterium redemptionis



Bl. Peter-Adrian Toulorge, help us
to live as Easter people from the strength of the cross.

Mysterium missionis



Bl. Peter-Adrian Toulorge help us
to live filled with the Spirit with and for the people.

The Bl. Peter-Adrian received his life and strength from the hands of God as witness for the truth; he announced the message of the cross and resurrection under the protective hands of God and at the end of his earthly journey gave his life back into the hands of God.

*a manibus - sub manibus - in manus
from his hands - under his hands - into his hands*

Original picture for the Beatification by Oxana Dvornikova-Sanson



Video Sequences

Supplemental: Marteria “Report of the Postulator General” (overview)

*Trips - Visits/Lectures/Sermons -
Internet site - Glass windows in the Roman Generalate*

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Abbot General, dear confreres and sisters,
Filled with joy and gratitude for the Beatification of Peter-Adrian Toulorge on April 29, 2012 in Coutances (F) I would like to point out to you today in a spiritual way a few aspects of his life.

The Life of Bl. Peter-Adrian Toulorge

Peter-Adrian Toulorge was born on May 4, 1757, in Muneville-le-Bingard. After his academic formation and the years spent in the seminary he was ordained a priest, and, in December of 1782, at the age of 25 he became a chaplain in Denville. It was there that became acquainted with the great zeal of the Premonstratensian priest, Jacques-François Le Canut, a pastor of 618 faithful in the parish there, most of whom were poor. In the homilies of Peter-Adrian that still exist, he exalts the merciful goodness of God, but at the same time underlines the Lord's firm justice with regard to the obdurate sinner. During the years spent at Denville, together with his pastor he would occasionally visit the nearby Premonstratensian abbey of Blanchelande. Taken up by the ideal of St. Norbert, in 1786 Peter-Adrian entered the monastery at Blanchelande, and in 1788 pronounced his solemn vows.

After the Civil Constitution of the Clergy was passed, Father Toulorge continued to exercise his ministry in the nearby parishes. A law promulgated on August 26, 1792, called for the deportation of all priests who were exercising a public ministry without having pledged loyalty to the constitution of the revolution. Toulorge, believing erroneously that this also applied to him, decided to emigrate to the English island of Jersey. Only when he arrived in Jersey did he realize that the deportation law did not apply to him and that he could have stayed in France without being investigated. At his first opportunity he returned to France, but he hid himself in a densely wooded area, fearing a law promulgated in October 23, 1792, which forbade the return of any emigrants under pain of death. One year later, on September 3, 1793, Fr. Peter-Adrian was arrested. On October 3, 1793, out of fear he categorically denied having gone to Jersey. He suffered much, however, because of the lie, which he considered to be a grave sin. He prayed, and after five days decided to admit having gone for a brief time to Jersey - a confession which led him to the guillotine. October 12-13, 1793, the court at Coutances, convinced of his brief stay in Jersey but having no proof of the matter, gave him the possibility to deny that he had emigrated. Knowing, however, that as a Catholic priest he would be persecuted anyway, Toulorge refused the offer and again admitted leaving the country. The "martyr of truth" was therefore condemned to death.

The night before his execution he made his confession and, while the other clerics in the prison were sleeping, wrote three moving letters: one to his brother, one to a friend of his, and the third to an unknown person. In this last letter, in the last lines, he wrote the following words: *"May God bless you. October 12, 1793, the vigil of my martyrdom."*

The following day - it was Sunday - he rose in good spirits, ate breakfast as usual, prayed his breviary and asked his companions to comb their hair and shave. Finally, he asked his confreres to sing vespers together with him; they fell on their knees in front of him and asked for a blessing. As he blessed them, his face was radiant with a divine peace. An eye witness relates that the guillotine was located in Croûte Square, in Coutances. The crowd was stunned silent with emotion at seeing this young priest go to meet death with such serenity and peace. Lead to the foot of the scaffold, Fr. Peter-Adrian Toulorge said only: *“My God, into Your hands I commend my life! I pray You, restore and protect Your Holy Church. Forgive me my sins.”*

In our relativistic world of today, Peter-Adrian Toulorge stands as a true witness of faith, one who can encourage a coherent and authentic Christian discipleship, and not just for those in religious life. In our times, when we are often tempted to conform ourselves to the lifestyle that surrounds us, the “martyr of truth” reminds us that the love of God, with an heart undivided and entirely consecrated to the Lord, can change one’s whole life and render it fruitful, bearing witness that God is faithful and will never break His promises. Fr. Peter-Adrian remained faithful to his beliefs, to his vows, and to his priestly mission. Thus, his white habit stands as a testimony of faith, his declaration before the judges as a profession of faith, and his death as a proof of his faith.

Dear Confreres and Sisters,

It is the duty of Premonstratensians as it is of all Christians to make the redemptive event visible through their lives but applied with their own emphasis. Through the first celebration of profession on Christmas Day 1121 the mystery of the Incarnation in a special way was placed in the crèche; through the white habit and many of our own liturgical traditions we should be witnesses of the resurrection and be messengers of the Holy Spirit by means of the Order’s particular task of proclamation (keyword: *communio*). In the following I will attempt to point out these three points in the life of Bl. Peter-Adrian Toulorge.

Mysterium incarnationis

A number of Premonstratensian churches could be described as Christmas churches. This is true of Windberg where all the ceiling paintings in the nave apply to Christmas and where the foundation of the Order on Christmas Day is expressly mentioned: *Nativitas Christi - Nativitas Ordinis*. Even if we no longer make our profession “at the crèche”, this date symbolically chosen by St. Norbert still remains a commission for us in our work as Christian religious, as sisters and brothers, as deacons and priests.

In the glass window of the Roman Generalate made in 2005, Bl. Peter-Adrian, who is standing in the midst of the people of God, is holding the Bible in his hand. It is the basis of preaching: the Word of God made man that moves, encourages and strengthens.



From the strength of a firm faith Peter-Adrian Toulorge, faithful throughout his life to his ordination promise given in the Cathedral of Coutances 1781/1782, still even in times of

persecution - just as St. Norbert did - had with him his breviary, a missal (excerpts) and a portable altar. The Word of God gave him courage to prove his backbone and to be a witness to the faith before the tribunal that sentenced him to death - as a priest. Such witnessing can give us courage to be committed in regard to those entrusted to us - be it for accompaniment of prayer or in ministry.

Questions for reflection:

What would we find “in the rucksack” of Premonstratensians today? For a modern ministry really both a breviary and a laptop/cell phone. Then as today Christian religious, just as our martyr Peter-Adrian, are announcing “*Christ - A and Ω (Alpha and Omega)*”. Do we speak and live our “*adsum*” that was given at our profession and ordination? Do we hold up the positive in life, can we explain signs, symbols, and events in such a way that the people of today are encouraged to believe? As a Eucharistic Prayer so strikingly describes: “Keep us attentive to the needs of all that, sharing their grief and pain, their joy and hope, we may faithfully bring them the good news of salvation and go forward with them” (Eucharistic Prayer for various needs III).

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Mysterium redemptionis

Peter-Adrian endured many hours of questions, of doubt, of the cross - with the suppression of his monastery, with the constantly new anticlerical laws, with his flight and return to his homeland, in the period of his living underground, with his capture in woman’s clothing and later in prison. Yet again and again he was able - like St. Paul - to sense the grace of God, which showed “its strength in weakness” (2 Cor. 12: 9). Frère Pierre-Adrien Jochaud du Plessix of Mondaye described this very well in his contribution to the preparation book for the beatification: “He no longer fought relying on himself, but gave away his weapons. He no longer belonged to himself but placed his life in God’s hands.” (p. 57).

On the glass window we see the witness of faith who was beatified by Cardinal Angelo Amato on April 29, 2012. He is standing next to the guillotine and executioner wearing the white habit of the Premonstratensians which he also carried with him in his rucksack during his almost one year period of persecution and at the time of his arrest on September 3, 1793. The “Vita A” of St. Norbert (composed before 1161) mentions the choice of the color: “*One thing is certain, that as witnesses of the resurrection we read that angels appeared in white garments.*”



The Easter white fits well the basic concern of the itinerant preacher and founder of the Order, Norbert of Xanten, and recalls the promises of profession, especially the handing over of oneself to the church of profession to which Peter-Adrian always remained faithful. Even after his return from Jersey he lived hidden in the shadow of his abbey Blanchelande.

Questions for reflection:

What does it mean for us to belong to a concrete community, to be and remain bound to it with all its strengths and weaknesses? How do we go about with ruptures in the history of its life, with experiences of dark phases and sorrow? What meaning does the cross of Christ have for us? Do we live limitations and renunciation as an indication of something to come? And do we have the courage, in light of secularism, to protect “what is holy” - be it in faith as in questions of people’s conscience? Do we really live from the strength of common prayer? I always find it very moving to celebrate the Easter Triduum in the monastery - the great liturgies, but also the Matins of the Triduum with the extinguishing of the seven candles and Easter Vespers with the procession to the baptismal font. Finally, does something shine through (especially with us Premonstratensians) of the white of the resurrection, of hope, joy and calmness, which faith can grant - even in times of possible lack of meaning and dryness?

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The artist portrays the “Martyr of the Truth” with his hand raised for an oath; the young religious speaks his mind before the tribunal, sticks to his life-story and speaks the whole truth. In so doing he raises his finger to heaven, to God, who has given him during the trial the grace of complete conversion. Peter-Adrian stands before us as a man of persevering faithfulness and brave confession. His entire life he proclaimed the Catholic faith - as is written in the apostolic document that was read out at the beatification: “Peter-Adrian found his death because of his courageous administration of the sacraments to the people of God and in refusal to give up pastoral service.”

The giving of witness is especially the task of canons regular. From the strength of the Holy Spirit they should encourage people as well as accompany and enable them that they too become witnesses of the resurrection. Thus our abbeys and priories can become places of imparting values and strengthening of faith, of drawing strength and mission for those who seek these things. It is like the times of St. Norbert who “after the model of the early Church won over so great a number of faithful laity, men and women, that many affirmed that since the days of the Apostles no one in so short a time had gained so many followers for the perfect life as he did through his order.” (Vita S. Norberti). It is an encouraging sign that our Order is again growing in a short time. Let us entrust the future of our monasteries and the people entrusted to us to the intercession of Bl. Peter-Adrian!



Questions for reflection:

By what do we recognize our Christian convictions in light of the present crisis of faith and values, in times of pluralism and relativism? By clear options in concrete questions, perhaps in partnership, marriage and family, at the work place, in the structuring of free time, to

mention only a few examples. To make no false compromises is not only the ethical duty of politicians, finance and economic bosses, but of all Christians. Does the grace of baptism and confirmation shine through even in our everyday life, the sense that is incorporated into life by God, the determination for what is true and good? Do we therefore - true to our profession - ask for the grace of conversion, for the Holy Spirit? Are we committed to loyalty, bravery and backbone, to values and initiatives that are important to us (from our faith) so that the basic melody of Christians today and tomorrow is marked by confidence? Thus each day could become a “*Day of Pentecost*”...

Bl. Peter-Adrian Toulorge help us
to live filled with the Spirit with and for the people.

Dear Confreres, dear Sisters,

To sum up we could say: The Bl. Peter-Adrian received his life and his strength to witness for the truth from the hands of God (*a manibus*), he announced the message of the cross and resurrection under the protective hands of God (*sub manibus*) and at the end of his earthly journey gave his life back into the hands of God (*in manus*).

a manibus - sub manibus - in manus
from his hands - under his hands - into his hands

Before we look at a few video sequences of the festive liturgy, I would like to focus attention on the holy card that the Diocese of Coutances-Avranches had printed. This is also in three parts.

- On the left we see the surroundings in which Peter-Adrian was born and in which he lived and worked: *Incarnatio*
- In the middle is his passing over from this world to God, from death to life: *Redemptio*
- On the right are people with whom he worked and who have confidence in his intercession with God, those whom he wants to encourage to also be witnesses of the truth: *Missio*.



Video sequences

- We see the entrance of Cardinal Amato, the bishops and more than 150 Premonstratensians into the gothic cathedral of Coutances. As they enter a hymn “*In manus tuas*” composed by Dominique-Marie Dauzet of Mondaye is sung.
- The Abbot General, the Postulator and Vice-Postulator come before the Cardinal and Bishop Stanislas Lalanne asks for the beatification.
- The Postulator reads a Vita, and then Cardinal Amato proclaims the Apostolic decree of Pope Benedict XVI; the large picture is uncovered and everyone acclaims their joy and thanksgiving with the hymn “*Laudate omnes gentes*”.
- The Bishop, the Abbot General, the Postulator and Vice-Postulator thank the Cardinal and, through him, the Holy Father for the beatification of Peter-Adrian Toulorge.
- At the end of the celebration of the Mass Abbot General Thomas expresses thanks in the name of our Order and all those who are celebrating and for the first time says: “*Blessed Peter-Adrian, pray for us!*”

In conclusion - before I am open to questions on the *Materia*:

At breakfast in the bishop’s house in Coutances on the day of the beatification, Cardinal Angelo Amato said: “Congratulations, Father Gabriel. A beatification for a young postulator is like winning the cup in a world championship.” That corresponded to my feelings. I was moved to tears as the papal decree was read and the picture was unveiled with enthusiastic singing...

My sincere thanks go to Abbot General Thomas Handgrättinger, the Procurator General, Bernard Ardura, the Vice-Postulator of the five causes as well as my treasured predecessor Donatian De Clerk; I thank everyone who has supported me in the past nine years and ask for your trust for the next six years in the upcoming election.

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