

## **Blessed Eustáquio Van Lieshout, ss.cc.**

He was born in Aarle-Rixtel (Holland), in the diocese of Hertogenbosch, on the 3rd of November 1890 and was baptized on that same day. At his baptism he was given the name Humberto. His life can be divided into two great periods: the time that he spent in his own country (1890-1924) and his time as a missionary in Brazil (1925-1943)

### **1. THE TIME LIVED IN THE NEDERLANDS (1890-1924)**

#### **1.1. Childhood and adolescence.**

He spent his childhood with his family. He was the eighth of eleven children. His family worked as farmers in Brabante. His was a very catholic family that each day recited the Ángelus and the Rosary. He participated in the celebration of the Eucharist not only on Sundays but also often during the week. In his home there was an environment of serenity and work, and thereby there was great solidarity among the children.

As a child, Humberto attended the school directed by the Sisters of Charity of Schijndel, and later the school run by a great catholic master, called Harmelinck. It was said that Humberto was a very jovial and social character and was well liked both at home and outside the home.

Very early he felt the call to priesthood, and therefore wanted to follow secondary studies, against the advice of his teacher who did not see him called to that life. His father wanted him to work on the farm and did not consider him capable of carrying out higher studies. In the face of his father's determination, Humberto told him: "I am determined to give the best of myself and we should have trust in our Lord. Things will go well" He went to Gemert to attend secondary school and remained there two years.

Having read the biography of Father Damien de Veuster, he decided to enter the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts.

In 1905 he entered the Apostolic School that the Congregation had in Grave and there he continued his secondary studies. Despite the difficulties, which he encountered in the studies, especially in languages, he was very dedicated and his teachers encouraged him given his will and disposition toward the missionary religious life.

#### **1.2. Formation as a Religious and Priest**

Having finished his secondary schooling, on the 23rd of September 1913, he was admitted to the novitiate, which at the time was in Tremeloo in Belgium. He took the name of Eustáquio, and was known by that name thereafter. In the face of the German invasion of Belgium in that same year, he had to return home. That situation lasted only a short time and he was able to continue the novitiate in Holland, making his temporary profession on the 27th of January 1915 in Grave (Nederland) and his perpetual profession on the 18th of March 1918 in Ginneken (Nederland).

In 1916 he finished his philosophical studies and during the years 1916 to 1919 he did his theological studies in Ginneken. His teachers, knowing that he did not have a mind gifted for metaphysical questions, nevertheless considered that he was acquiring a good theological vision and good judgment in questions of pastoral practice.

He was ordained a priest on the 10th of August 1919. His father showed great joy upon seeing his son celebrate at the altar.

### **1.3. Ministry in his own country (1919-1924)**

He exercised his priestly ministry in his own country for a period of five years. The first year was spent in Vierlingsbeek as socius to the novice master. His superiors sent him to the formation program motivated above all by his piety and strict observance of the Rule. Then he spent two years in Maasluis in pastoral service to the glass workers who were Wallonian and spoke French and who had taken refuge in the Nederland. Toward these people he showed a great apostolic zeal. This zeal was recognized by the Belgian state and they awarded him a medal for his service to that minority group. Finally, he spent two years in Roelofarendsveen as a parochial vicar to the Pastor, Father Ignacio Herscheid. Here his activity in parochial organizations was very strong especially in the confessional and attendance to the sick.

During the month of December 1924 he was sent to Spain to learn Spanish, primarily because it was thought he was going to go to the mission in Uruguay, to which he was destined, nevertheless he was later sent to Brazil, where the language was Portuguese. Father Eustáquio had wanted to be a missionary and the desire seemed to be fulfilled when the Province of the Nederland and the new Provincial, Father Norbert Poelman, looked for a mission in Latin America for that newly formed province. In the beginning his appointment was not clear until it was completed in Brazil.

## **2. HIS TIME SPENT IN BRAZIL (1925-1943)**

Father Eustáquio arrived in Rio de Janeiro on the 12th of May 1925 and worked as a missionary for eighteen years in Brazil. Of these 18 years, 10 were spent in Agua Suja (1925-1935), six in Poá (1935-1941) and then in the last two years of his life, brief stays in a series of houses of the Congregation: Rio de Janeiro, Fazenda de S. José de Rio Claro, Patrocínio, Ibiá and finally in Belo Horizonte as pastor of Santo Domingo where he died on the 30th of August in 1943.

### **2.1. Apostolate in Agua Suja (Romaria)**

On the 23rd of April 1925 Father Norbert Poelman, the Provincial, along with the three missionaries for Brazil: Gilles van de Boogaard, Eustáquio van Lieshout and Mathias van Roy left from Amsterdam. They arrived on the 12th of May and had to wait until the 15th of July to take possession of the parish of Agua Suja, which was actually named Romaria, in the diocese of Uberaba, in the region also known as "Triangulo Mineiro". The parish also encompassed the diocesan Shrine of our Lady of la Abadia. In the beginning he carried out the work as the vicar taking up the pastoral cares of the parish of Nove Ponte and its chapels. Later on after the 2nd of March 1926 Father Eustáquio was named pastor of Agua Suja. This was a parish where the people were fundamentally dedicated to the search for gold along the shores of the river Bagagem. Given the uncertainty of results of those works, the economic and social situation was difficult. Father Eustáquio dedicated himself completely to his parishioners and looked for a way to take care of them both physically and spiritually. Certainly the situation of the population and the parish after ten year of the apostolic work of Father Eustáquio is going to change greatly. His determination to improve the human and religious conditions of that population bore good fruits. He dedicated himself in a special way to the poor and the sick, bringing about as a result some healings through his ministry. The faithful of Romaria greatly felt his departure and even tried to prevent it.

## **2.2. Apostolate in Poá (1935-1941)**

On the 15th of February 1935 he took possession of the parish of Our Lady of Lourdes in Poá, in the metropolitan region of São Paulo. He also received the work of pastoral care of the barrio of San Miguel Paulista, the actual see (seat) of the diocese. If the parish of Romária was difficult, the parish of Poá was no less so. When he arrived there was no parish church; there were problems with spiritual sects and a great indifference among the people. Father Eustáquio will again dedicate himself with great zeal to the visitation of families, the sick, the poor, the children and to parochial organization. After 1937, especially, the apostolate of Father Eustáquio is going to take on a very particular connotation: the gift of healing through the intercession of Saint Joseph. This activity was especially directed towards the strengthening of the faith of the people and freeing them from the tendency toward superstition. It is then that the reputation of Father Eustáquio began to extend itself throughout the country and from everywhere people came who wanted to see him and obtain the favor of some healing through his help. The crowds of people kept growing until there were as many as ten thousand people coming each through Poá. Given the limitations of that parish to accommodate such a number of people, the civil authorities began to interfere and later his superiors felt obliged to transfer Father Eustáquio. As soon as he received the order of his superiors Father Eustáquio responded and left Poá on the 13th of May 1941.

## **2.3. Apostolate in various locations (1941-1942)**

The last two years of his life were a true pilgrimage. Everywhere he went, including when he tried to hide from the people, there were persons who sought him out to look for some help, counsel or healing.

He stayed fifteen days in Río de Janeiro and there also there were great crowds of people looking for him. The publicity, which the press began to give him, was such that at one time they had to stop the traffic at the beach of Botafogo because of the number of people who had gathered to look for Father Eustáquio. Again they had to ask him to leave that area, this time trying to conceal where he was going.

In fact he took another name, Father José, in the Fazenda of Río Claro and there he dedicated himself to prayer, reading and also to taking care of the eight hundred workers in the factory. Some bishops and priests, in spite of his assumed name at this time, sought out his blessings and prayers for the sick, something which Father Eustáquio carried out with the permission of his superiors.

From the 13th of October 1941 to the 14th of February 1942, he was sent to Patrocínio, a place that was very different both from São Paulo as well as Río de Janeiro, where there were such great movements of people around his person. There he could again exercise the apostolate in a public way with some conditions. In any event, there also he brought about the admiration of the people and there was never a day that went by that people did not experience conversion through his intercession.

After this he was transferred to Ibiá, in Minas Gerais, as a pastor once again, when it seemed the situation had calmed down. In any case Ibiá was far from the places where there were such large numbers of people who were drawn to him.

After three months during which Father Eustáquio was able to exercise calmly his parochial activities, his superiors believed it was timely to transfer him to become pastor in Belo Horizonte in the parish dedicated to the Sacred Hearts. There he was going to remain from the 7th of April 1942 until the 30th of August 1943, the he died.

#### **2.4. Apostolate in Belo Horizonte ( 1942-1943)**

The parish of Santo Domingo in Belo Horizonte was a parish on the outskirts made up of poor people. There was a temporary chapel. Father Eustáquio looked for a way to obtain land in order to construct a church, construction, which he himself began and which was finished after his death. Moreover in addition to the ordinary parochial activities, every day Father Eustáquio used to receive some forty people in the confessional, who came to him having obtained tickets before hand, an arrangement of his superiors in order to avoid large crowds of people. He was especially busy with the confessions of the sick. As the result of requests from other parishes, he used to come in haste and hear many confessions. Certainly everyone considered him a true missionary and saint.

#### **2.5. His last days and death (20th to 30th of August 1943)**

On the 20th of August as he was taking care of a person sick with exanthemata typhus, Father Eustáquio himself contracted the illness. In the beginning it was diagnosed as pneumonia, but later it became evident that it was some kind of other serious illness, and it fact it was incurable. Aware of the approach of his death and having himself predicted that it would happen in a few days, he prepared himself for that event with prayer and the reception of the sacraments. The testimonies are clear in affirming the great strength with which he faced that situation until the end. His last words directed to Father Gil were: “Father Gil, Thanks be to God” and saying this he died.

The large number of faithful who wanted to visit the body of Father Eustáquio was very moving. From the viewing of his body in the parish church until he was buried on the 31st of August, both day and night large numbers of people filed into that church to pay their last respects to the one who both in life and until now has been considered a saint who healed and brought peace to so many sick and needy people.