

Father Eustaquio Van Lieshout, SS.CC.

by Fr. Marcus Vinicius Maciel, SS.CC.

The look that was clear, firm, and penetrating.

The attention toward the sick and toward the poor as a characteristic of a life engaged in the following of Jesus.

A Dutchman who looked so much like a peasant trained in work, exertion, and in suffering.

The presence of Father Eustaquio remains alive and present in so many who knew him and in those who come close to his testimony and to his work.

His tomb in Belo Horizonte continues to attract every day a large number of persons, fathers and mothers of families, children, adolescents, and young students who are about to go to schools which carry his name, sufferers, the ill, the unemployed, people in need, but full of faith, hope, and gratitude.

"Health and peace to all. Health for your bodies, but, more than anything, peace for your souls."
(Father Eustaquio)

Cor Rademacher in his recent history of the Congregation, presents Eutaquio as: "a religious man touched deep in his heart by the misery of the people. These people needed something that would help them. Eustaquio van Lieshout was drawn to do whatever he could and entered on a path of going out to many and offering real help to them."

Father Eustaquio said, "To win souls, to alleviate pain and suffering is my great ideal."

Every day, throughout the day, we find youths and adults, children and old people kneeling in front of his tomb, always covered with fresh flowers. We find the name "Eustaquio" and "Eutaquia" in many families, also as a name for cities, districts, streets, businesses, schools, institutions of assistance, and religious institutions which carry his name.

It is interesting to note that after the beginning in Agua Suja and Poa, his conspicuous presence did not go beyond a few days in Rio de Janeiro and in the Campinas, some months in Patrocinio, two months in Ibia and in Belo Horizonte, not quite completing a year and a half. We know this without the sources of mass communication which today bring the most distant news close.

Father Eustaquio van Lieshout was one of the three first religious of the Sacred Hearts who arrived in Brazil. "The year 1925 will be noted by the entrance of our congregation in the immense Brazilian territory. We left Amsterdam on April 23. Father Norbert Poelman, the provincial of Holland, and his three companions, the religious Gil van den Boogaard, Eustaquio van Lieshout, and Matieas van Roy arrived in Rio de Janeiro on May 12, and on July 5 took possession of the station which was offered in Agua Suja, in the diocese of Uberaba." (Annals of the Sacred Hearts, 1925, pp. 247-248)

Born November 3, 1890 in Aarley-Rixtel in Holland, died only 53 years old in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, August 30 of 1943. Beginning with 1943, August 30 became a religious event with thousands of devotees.

The young Humbert, his name of baptism, knew the example of Damien of Molokai, and so wanted to be a missionary like him. He entered the novitiate in 1915 and became a religious of the Sacred Hearts. In 1919, he was ordained a priest. Within a few years, he was entrusted with diverse responsibilities: parish service, enthronements, preaching of retreats, and assistant of the master of novices. Even in the first years of his priestly ministry, he worked with a vast camp of Belgian artisans who were refugees of war. His extraordinary heart of a pastor began to become known. His dedication, zeal, and commitment without distinctions was recognized by the Belgian kings with a medal. Then came the moment to realize the dream of following the Lord by being a missionary like Damien. In 1924, he was sent to Spain with other priests of the Congregation in order to learn the language and prepare himself for a new foundation in Latin America without a specific destination. The magazine "Annals of the Sacred Heart" of the year 1925 noted the departure of the Dutch missionaries with their provincial for Chile and in the next newsletter to the previously cited installation in Brazil.

The first service assumed by the Congregation was the Sanctuary and Parish of Our Lady of Abadia in Agua Suja in the region of Miner's Triangle, the state of General Mines, which today is called Romaria in the hinterland of mining.

"Remember always and before everything: the birth, the life, the death of Jesus; this is our Rule."
(Pierre Coudrin)

"We do not have the faith written on our forehead, but we should assume it, showing respect by our conduct and by works that honor, conserve, and maintain it." (Pierre Coudrin)

"Here we have a beautiful occasion to practice the four ages of the life of our Lord. Education of the youth is almost entirely neglected, the hidden life is imposed forcibly because we are close to 100 km from the closest train station; the public life is translated in our traveling from chapel to chapel, preaching and doing good without fuss; countless difficulties, enormous distances, continuous journeys by horse on impossible roads, the extraordinary ignorance of the people all work together in such a way that we do not easily forget the crucified life of our divine model."
(Letter of Fr. Gil to the Superior General, November 7, 1925)

The situation was an abandoned parish in which the people lived from uncertain gold fields, the washing of earth in search of gold and precious stones, in the River Bagagem, given the name "Agua Suja"-Dirty Water. The uncertainty of work generated basic conditions of life which were very precarious and a deteriorated social atmosphere. Nevertheless, Father Eustaquio won the hearts of the people. "Nevertheless, I find myself happy and satisfied for seeing so much kindness that God wanted to pour over the souls of our good people of the Mines. I am certain that because of their simplicity, this people pleases God. The ways that our Lord in a special way inspires me are: priestly ministry, prayer, preaching, visits to the sick and to all who suffer."

He sought to know the native herbs, applied and taught treatments, took care of health, visited the sick. He tried to be a friend of every family. He helped to organize a school for children and accomplished a transformation of the local spirit. The people considered him to be a holy priest, father, and defender of the poor.

When he was transferred to Poa, a suburb of Sao Paulo, there was a protest and even a revolt. Agua Suja was surrounded, the car which sought him enclosed, and the parish house was guarded. Finally, Fr. Eustaquio left the city on foot against the will of the parishioners. In Poa, a working man's suburb, his service continued, always caring for the poor and sick with his

customary greeting: "Health and Peace!" It was in Poa in the archdiocese of Sao Paulo that Father Eustaquio by accident became famous for his cures and blessings. In 1935, he went to Holland for vacation and had the opportunity to go on pilgrimage to the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Lourdes and brought back holy water. A great devotee of Our Lady, he constructed a small grotto and alerted the people that they could enjoy the water of the grotto, which always was carefully mixed with a little water brought back from Lourdes. Once the water of Lourdes was gone, he himself blessed the water according to the ritual of the Church. Such was the concourse of pilgrims in search of holy water by the "Vicar of Poa" that public health, the daily life of the city, and the municipal authorities, the superiors of the Congregation, and the bishops all tried to control the situation. Father Eustaquio had to withdraw for a time until he was forgotten by the crowd.

He began a life of wandering. He went from community to community, but everywhere the same thing happened. He was discovered by the people and crowds followed behind him. He suffered much from all this, but he was obedient. Derix, a Dutch author wrote, "When the people began to seek Father Eustaquio, it became his sacred way, a path of the cross, which would continue until his premature death. It was a path of total submission, of complete abandonment, of prayer and work."

With the consent of Cardinal Leme, he arrived at the convent of the Fathers at the seat of the Congregation in Rio de Janeiro, where there occurred the same commotion as in Poa. The Vicar General was compelled to communicate to him that he had to leave the city. His religious superiors decided on an opportune and temporary hiding place. His life of being on the run, fleeing from fame, by order of his superiors, brought him to a "retreat" on an estate in Rio Claro in the interior of Sao Paulo. There he even had his name changed to "Father Joseph." It was in this retreat that he experienced the conviction "to have been chosen by God to accomplish a special mission which could be summarized as follows: to raise a barrier against spiritual heresy, as well as bring back to the Church by means of its blessing and pastoring, so many people led astray from true faith. For that he had the conviction that God would grant special gifts and certain charisms. (Process of beatification, Belo Horizonte, 1962, art. 52, p. 34)

Saddened by his pastoral isolation, he went to ask that he be sent to Argentina, Chile, or Portugal, where he could begin again as someone unknown. Before this proposal could be realized, he was discovered in his hiding place. Don Francisco Barreto, bishop of Campinas, his confessor, assumed the responsibility to bring him with him to Campinas, and the newspapers announced that on June 16-18 of 1941, people of the whole city came running to him. "There was no distinction: rich and poor merited the same affection." (The Newspaper Popular Mail, Campinas, 1941)

Leaving the retreat in Rio Claro, he went toward the city of Patrocinio in Minas Gerais in the community of the school Dom Lustosa and was the chaplain of St. Lucy's Church. Afterward, for two months, he went to the neighboring city of Ibia to function as a vicar. In April of 1942, the Congregation assumed responsibility for Christ the King Parish, a poor and isolated parish on the periphery of Belo Horizonte. Father Eustaquio was accepted by Don Cabral as the new pastor. Father Hermegildo Verhoeven was his helper. The testimony of Father Hermegildo (concerning Father Eustaquio) was impressive; up to the sickness of Father Eustaquio's last days, Fr. Hermegildo manifested not only a great affection and respect for his colleague, but a true devotion as well as confidence in his intercession.

Preaching retreats in schools and educational associations, the beginning of Father Eustaquio's time in Belo Horizonte would be agreeably tranquil. But soon, he began to seek out people and with the help of other priests brought about an organization which allowed him as

pastor to attend to a certain number of pilgrims. It was an effort to combine the pastoral work of the parish with attention to those who came from afar. In a short time, he was organizing a new parish and visiting families and the sick regularly. He began the construction of a new mother church of the Sacred Hearts, which ended up being known as the church of Father Eustaquio. He dedicated most of his service to those who suffered, the poor and the sick. He organized with the "Ladies of Charity" care for the poor. He founded a "Union of Laborers." He ministered to all of the people, extending himself to as many apostolic activities as possible. He said that he could not sleep peacefully thinking of the abandoned children of his parish.

Invited by a variety of priests, besides assisting those of his own parish, by the order of his superiors he assisted many others of the archdiocese, in addition to making visits to the cities of Nova Lima, Itauna, Para de Minas, Juiz de Fora, Pedro Leopoldo, Santra Barbara, and Montes Claros. A little more than a year after his arrival in Belo Horizonte, he was stung by an insect, contracting exanthematous typhus. The first symptoms appeared only eight days before his death. He suffered terribly with pains and bleeding in that time, which lacked anesthesia as well as penicillin. "For three days, Father Eustaquio suffered with suffocating hiccups. His tongue was dark blue, resembling raw meat. I aided the doctor in the application of blood-letting, which was done by means of Gillett razor blades. His back was cut to remove black and coagulated blood. He suffered horribly. He squeezed and crushed my hand because of the intense pain that he suffered. Never, however, did he complain. He edified me in this ordeal." (Father Humbert SS.CC.) On the evening before his death, he renewed his vows as a religious of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and of Mary, in whose service he had promised to live and die.

The patient asked for the presence of his friend and companion from the first hour of the mission and the present superior of Brazil, Father Gil. In the morning of the May 30, upon receiving the hoped for visit, Father Eustaquio spoke his last words: "Father Gil, thanks be to God." The news of his death spread quickly. The interminable wake lasted the whole night. A chronicler of the time said that the Municipal Cemetary resembled its state on All Souls Day.

On January, 1949, his body was exhumed and transferred to his final resting place in the Church of the Sacred Hearts. Even so, his tomb in the Municipal Cemetary has been one of the most visited ones up to the present time. In 1956, the cause of the beatification of the Servant of God was begun.

"Father Eustaquio, man of the people, man who loved intensely, man with a simple heart. In whose heart you performed wonders. All for you, Lord! Your person shines! Your person draws! Look toward us, Lord! Give us the courage of the apostle of love. Give us the zeal of a Joseph Mary Coudrin, the love of a Damien, the enthusiasm of Mateo, the simplicity of a Eustaquio, and we will continue your work, Lord: in the announcement, in the restoration, in the adoration, in the silence, in the looking, in the suffering, in the commitment, in the immolation, in the love. (Don Luiz Macilia Vilela SS.CC.)

Dates of the Life of Father Eustaquio

November 3, 1890-Birth and baptism in Aarle Rixtel, the Netherlands with the name Humbertus van Lieshout

January 27, 1915-Religious profession in the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts

August 10, 1919-Priestly ordination
March, 1920-Ministry with the refugees of Valonia, Belgium
May 12, 1925-Arrived in Brazil as a missionary
July 15, 1925-Arrival of the Congregation at the village of Agua suja (Fathers Gil, Matthias, and Eustaquio)
1926-Rector of the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Abadia
February 15, 1935- Pastor in Poa-Sao Paulo
July 15, 1935-Vicar of Agua Suja (now Romaria MG)
October 13, 1941-Arrival in Patrocinio
February 12, 1942-Vicar in Ibia
April 7, 1942-Pastor in Belo Horizonte
May 13, 1943-Launching of cornerstone of Nova Matriz, dedicated to the Sacred Hearts
August 30, 1943-Death of Father Eustaquio
January 31, 1949-Exhumation and transfer to a tomb in the Church of the Sacred Hearts
February 5, 1956-The cause of beatification begun

Texts of Father Eustaquio

"God bless you. When God calls us, he will indicate also the path. Our desire has to be the desire of Jesus. Our Lady and Jesus himself live in the midst of the world in order to show us that sanctification does not depend on the place, but on the person. Jesus, I follow you. Jesus I listen to you, always, always" (Father Eustaquio)

"Scream 'God!' Write 'God!' and there is nothing of God in the heart, except pestilence and venom, that which under the false mask of faith and of religion wants to spread throughout the crowd, whose faith though weak is not totally extinguished. And under this feigning of sanctity invades many souls, many hearts, and many homes. And the bad spirit, once having taken possession of these hearts is later seen as the damage and the poison spreading from there. It is seen as wars explode everywhere, as the hate among the poor increases and continues to grow with falseness of hearts, goes on reducing the eyes of faith in souls, and the spiritual damage it causes is gigantic in all classes of the people. And taking advantage of human misery, it is launched over sick creatures in despair for their annoyances, and so in the false hope of some small relief, they commit themselves with body and soul." (Father Eustaquio in the retreat at Rio Claro reproducing the voice of god in his soul, 1941)

"Oh, Jesus, by the blood that you spilled and by the tears of your Holy Mother, give sight to the blind, let the paralyzed walk, health to the sick, peace to all those who suffer and endure."

"Oh, my Jesus, I love you. I love you with your cross, with your suffering, with your immense love."

"To facilitate the audience which His Excellency granted me this night, I wish to formulate in a few words the great ideal which stimulates my priestly and religious life of today. Although I never gave rest to my body when it tried to ease sufferings of my neighbor and remove from the world as much as possible the evil that puts up obstacles to happiness of life and of eternity, today, however, I see myself constrained from all sides from going to the aid of humanity and goodness in the quality of being a priest who by his blessings is seen as an instrument of Divine

Providence to ease the pains of one's neighbor. But as in all the material and even the path toward that which is spiritual the bodily cures which we ascertain are only means for a second cure, which is more and more important: the healing of the soul and not only the souls which obtained the healing, but of hundreds and hundreds of those who were witnesses, whose souls were in a complete spiritual indifference or in a profound lukewarmness in the things of God and of the soul. This is the holy vocation that I feel in myself: to relieve the physical pains in order to be able to rouse the faith shaken by the times. For this great vocation I feel myself especially called. Never was I conscious as I am now of how much the grace of God may accomplish for those who suffer... The Good God showed me visibly the path to take. Yes, today I see myself constrained, if my word fits, to go to the aid of those who suffer and endure. Even the gift of curing some illness by accident, which human science took to be incurable, God granted to me. But in this I do not glory..."

Texts about Father Eustaquio

"Father Eustaquio is considered to be a saint, not because of the cures which he effected, or for occasional miracles, but because of his virtues based on faith. He was a man of goodness, a man of God. He brought Christian conviction to its final consequences." (Magazine of the Reign, year 12, August, 1968, pg. 26, Belo Horizonte)

"The most salient trait of Father Eustaquio from the beginning of his priestly life, probably from infancy, he suggests, was the ideal that he had to be another Father Damien-charity with kindness, also zealous, full of compassion toward everyone, but principally toward the poor and sick." (Thomaz Keller, O.S.B., 1944)

"The slogan health and peace characterized the mission of the Servant of God. The presence like an instrument of peace, the dedication to the needy and the service without measure becomes the image of the Servant of God appreciated and a symbol of the presence of God. In conflictive and difficult situations, he does not stop announcing peace, the mercy of God which can transform life. He had a special concern for the health of everyone. Always ready to visit the sick, to give them comfort, courage, and meaning in their suffering." (Sergio Stein SS.CC.)

"I knew Father Eustaquio as the vicar in Agua Suja. What examples of the virtues! Always humble, willing, submissive, obedient. Of this, one may say: it was a way for him to do good. Father Eustaquio did everything for that good and simple people: counselor, guide, doctor, father, vicar. His blessings were conveyed as virtues of heaven, and besides spiritual comfort, gave even relief in disease. Throughout all the cities by which he passed, throughout the diocese of Uberaba, he left signs of a good example of a holy life and of a model priest. From Ibia, he went toward Belo Horizonte, where he continued to work, to do good, to pray, to construct temples of God, within a spirit of love for the Church and the hierarchy." (Don Almir Marques)

Biblical Resonances

"I am the good shepherd. A good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. I am the good shepherd, and I know mine and mine know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I will lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that do not belong to this

fold. These also I must lead, and they will hear my voice, and there will be one flock, one shepherd. (John 10:11, 14-16)

"So when he had washed their feet and put his garments back on and reclined at table again, he said to them, "Do you realize what I have done for you? You call me 'teacher' and 'master,' and rightly so, for indeed I am. If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet. I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do. (John 13: 12-15)

"I consider that the sufferings of this present time are as nothing compared with the glory to be revealed for us. For creation awaits with eager expectation the revelation of the children of God. We know that all creation is groaning in labor pains even until now." (Romans 8:18-19, 22)

"What will separate us from the love of Christ? Will anguish, or distress, or persecutiion, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or the sword? No, in all these things we conquer overwhelmingly through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life...will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:35, 37-39)

"I have become everything for the people and find nothing too burdensome to do for them. (Father Eustaquio)

"This is why I have spared you: to show you my power and to make my name resound throughout the earth!" (Exodus 9:16)

"In everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God... Then the God of peace will be with you." (Philippians 4:4,9)