

The Prison Story

In Mallorca there was a murder case in which two young men who had been found guilty of murder, were to be executed. A few days before the sentence was carried out, the prison chaplain visited the local office of Catholic Action and requested that two young men visit the condemned prisoners to try to persuade them to go to confession before they were executed. He thought that perhaps laymen would be able to reach them for they would have nothing to do with him.

At the time, Eduardo Bonnin was president of the youth chapter of Catholic Action and he decided to undertake the mission himself together with the vice-president, Andres Rullan. They asked many people to pray. There were some who went without sleep that night praying for this intention. The night before the execution they went in great fear to the prison.. The prisoners had been asked for their last wishes. Eduardo was told that when condemned prisoners are asked for their last wishes, some request to see family members to say goodbye, or some desire to write a letter to friends. In this case, the prisoners had asked for some "paella" and when they arrived they were eating and smoking cigars that their fellow prisoners had given them.

Their attitude seemed as if they were not worried at all but Eduardo noticed that their laughter and jokes were forced, trying to cover up the inner anxiety they were feeling. Looking at the scene their own fears increased and Eduardo asked the prison director for permission to let them take the place of the guards. When this had been granted, they began talking to the prisoners, listening to their stories. They invoked the aid of the Holy Spirit relying on Him and in the prayers of their brothers. They began by telling the prisoners that they were the most fortunate men in the world.

They explained that they were going to ask them to intercede for them because if they wished it, at dawn they could be in heaven. They also explained to the prisoners that when a person has been entrusted to undertake an important mission, he will find friends everywhere and now they were seeking their intercession when they appeared before Our Father in heaven. They explained to them that they were seeking their intercession with our Lord for them and their plans in the Cursillo. No one knows the day of one's death unless by special revelation however, they knew that at dawn they would be executed and they should realize that when a person faces the hour of his death and is in the grace of Our Lord, all is saved, but if he is not, then all is lost. Neither the Pope nor bishop, nor any priest, nor any man or woman know the day not the hour of his death, whereas they were somewhat privileged position because if they would properly arrange their "passport", if they would place themselves in the Grace of God, in other words, confess, they would be in a position to repeat what happened on Mount Calvary when Our Lord said to the good thief, "Now you will be with me in Paradise," in other words, if they wished they could fix their date in Paradise.

These prisoners at first thought that this was too good to be true but as they continued their dialogue they opened up, relating stories of their own lives, and gradually they sounded more reasonable. Obviously the prayers of the people were reaching heaven and Divine Grace started to penetrate their hearts. At one point, they recalled their youth and how wretchedly they had behaved towards their parents. One of the prisoners requested to write to his family but he could not finish the letter and instead dictated to Eduardo what he wanted to write. In the meantime there were priests ready to hear their confession and after a few hours of talking, they finally agreed willingly to go to confession.

In the prison a member of the military court asked one of his members, "did you see the prisoners?" and he answered, "Yes, I saw them, they are like 'prison fodder', but once they had received the sacrament of confession, their attitude changed and even the expression on their faces changed. The one who had said "they are like prison fodder", after hearing their high spirits in spite of what awaited them, told the prisoners, "You have given me a lesson in courage!"

At dawn the priest celebrated the Mass and Andres Rullan, the two young men and Eduardo attended. They all went to communion, after which they had breakfast together. Eduardo was so nervous that he could not eat. When they had finished breakfast the hour had come.

Undoubtedly, the most impressive scene was their last words of farewell, when one said to the other, "Well, until we meet again before Our Father".

The executioner was waiting, and with a cold voice he said, "Take your seat, handsome". The prisoner was made to sit on what looked like an old barber's chair, a black hood was placed over his head. At that moment Eduardo and Andres went to the chapel to pray before the tabernacle. At that moment, when the executioner was about to proceed, the prisoner, Andres Trobat shouted, "Eduardo".

Eduardo went running towards him and he said, "Why don't you lend me your crucifix?" Eduardo gave it to him and he died kissing it. During the night, whilst talking to the prisoners, Eduardo had held in his hands the crucifix which he always had with him. The condemned man had asked what it was, and Eduardo told him it was the image of Christ to Whom he was praying for words that would convince him of the Truth. In the prisoners last moments he showed that he understood the meaning of the crucifix. When the turn of the other prisoner came, Eduardo told him, "Your friend asked for my crucifix. Do you also want it?" "Of course I do", he said. And he died kissing it.

In the talks that lasted until dawn and after they had gone to confession, Eduardo talked to them about the Cursillo. He asked them to remember them and their Cursillo, from heaven.

There are some people who, distorting the facts, say that the Cursillos began as a result of these executions, but that is not accurate. The executions took place in January 1949, and the Cursillos had already begun in August of 1944.

The priest who was with the prisoners up to the end, after returning the crucifix to Eduardo, said, "I am morally certain that these young men are now in heaven".

There have been times when in some Cursillos things have not been going too well and Eduardo and others have talked about "their" prisoners in their prayers to the Lord and they have complied as they said they would.

The following letter was written at 12 midnight, 28 January, 1949 from Palma de Mallorca to the family of Juan Trobat.

Dearest family, so close to my heart,

These lines I am writing are the last you will receive from your son and brother. I am writing them more with my heart than my pen and I hope you will keep them with you until the end of your life.

I am now in the chapel, and have only a few hours remaining before I leave this life.

After my life of ill luck, and being the victim of wrong environments, God has granted me the extraordinary grace of enabling me to recognize my past faults and making peace with Him. He has given me this opportunity for sincere confession, which has opened, little by little, the gates of heaven.

It only remains for me to ask your pardon for all the heartaches I gave you during my life, with my straying, to recommend to my brothers whom I love with all my heart never to stray from the path of duty that you, my parents, taught us to follow.

I hope that these lines which I am writing during the last moments of my life will serve to express my apologies for all the disappointments and troubles which I have caused during my life and may this serve as advice to my brothers to lead their lives as God expects from His faithful servants.

I have reached the end of my life. Thank God for giving me these moments to make amends for my past life and to die as men who die in faith.

I am surrounded by people who are trying to alleviate my pain. Only faith gives me the courage and the energy to bear this great trouble/

If you want to know more details of our last moments you can write our Chaplain Jose M. Fabian Rubio, who can give you more details of my last hours in this world.

But rest assured, I am going to heaven. There we will live happily for all eternity. Sacred Heart of Jesus, I trust in You.

My last thoughts on Earth are for you.

Goodbye until Eternity, your son and brother who waits you in heaven

Juan Trobat

The above account was written in the first person and is the actual account of what happened in "The prison story" from Eduardo himself..