



## Two Blessed (Part 2)

When José Gregorio Hernandez graduated from med school in 1888, he was as learned as a 23-year-old Venezuelan of his day could be. Top in his class, he was also well-versed in philosophy, theology and music, could read and write Latin and Hebrew, and was conversant in six languages. The head of the university was so impressed with his student that he offered to build a clinic for him in Caracas, but José Gregorio declined. It had been his mother's wish that he first serve in his hometown of Isnotú, and he was determined to honor that request. Before long he expanded his practice to other cities in western Venezuela, but the leadership of the country, recognizing his talent and potential, had other plans for the country doctor. José Gregorio was sent to study in Paris and returned as professor and the leading figure of modern scientific methodology and medical research in Venezuela.



As gifted and dedicated a doctor, scientist and professor as he was, it is primarily his faith and heroic virtues of generosity and untiring service to the poor for which José Gregorio is known. In December of 1899, inspired by the life of St. Francis of Assisi, he became a lay Capuchin Franciscan. Twice he traveled to Italy to join religious orders there, only to fall sick each time, forcing him to return to work as a doctor in Venezuela. Such was apparently God's will. During the influenza pandemic of 1918 he cared for the sick throughout Caracas. On the afternoon of June 29, 1919, on his way to attend to a patient, José Gregorio was hit by the only car in all of Venezuela. In his fall, he struck his head on the cement curb and died. At Mass that morning he had offered his life to God for all those suffering from the pandemic. The process of canonization began in 1949. Over the years, literally thousands of Venezuelans have claimed miraculous healing through his intercession, many of our parishioners among them. Hundreds of testimonials have been submitted to Rome, but it is appropriate that at this time, during another pandemic, the Vatican has seen fit to accept one as a miracle beyond the shadow of a doubt. Pope Francis approved the decree for beatification on June 18, 2020, and all of Venezuela is waiting expectedly for the formal ceremony of beatification in early 2021.



After working at various jobs, 21 year old Bernard Casey enrolled at the archdiocesan seminary in Milwaukee in 1892, but his lack of education, made worse by the fact that classes were taught in Latin and German, took its toll. Bernard was sent home at the end of his first year. He tried again five years later, this time with the Capuchin Franciscans in Detroit, eventually being ordained a priest with the religious name Solanus. Due to poor grades, interpreted as a lack of intellectual acuity, Solanus was not permitted to preach on theological themes or hear confessions. He was sent to a Capuchin house in New York to serve as porter, answering the door, taking messages for the other priests, and receiving Mass intentions. It was a humble task, but greatness is not determined by the dignity of one's position but on how well one carries it out. Solanus became an outstanding porter.

As people came to enroll the names of relatives and friends for Mass intentions, Solanus prayed with them. Word spread like wildfire that folks were receiving amazing healings and conversions following those prayers. Long lines of people awaited him on opening the door each morning. The bishop ordered Solanus to keep a journal of those with whom he prayed, noting answered prayers. Over the next 40 years, Solanus filled several journals with notations for over 6,000 miraculous healings. Always concerned for the poor and needy, Fr. Solanus also ran a soup kitchen in Detroit during the Great Depression, serving hundreds of people every day.

Following his death in 1957, an estimated 20,000 people passed by the coffin of the humble priest. The process for canonization was begun in 1982. When his body was exhumed in 1987 to be placed in a more secure location, his skin was found to be still supple. His body had not begun to decay. Pope John Paul II declared Solanus Casey "Venerable" in 1995 and on, November 18, 2017, his beatification was celebrated in the presence of an estimated crowd of 60,000 at Ford Field in Detroit...all for a humble blessed porter.

### Points to ponder

Why do you think it is so important to Catholics in Venezuela that José Gregorio Hernandez be named Blessed and eventually a Saint? An uncle and two of Solanus Casey's brothers became priests serving in the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis. How important is family in the formation and sanctity of children?

*The Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis has staffed and supported parishes in the diocese of Ciudad Guayana in Venezuela since 1970. These "Did you know?" papers are designed to give you a better understanding of life in Venezuela and to strengthen connections between the parishes of the Archdiocese and their archdiocesan mission during our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary year. Please direct any comments or suggestions for future papers to Fr. Denny Dempsey at [ddempsey@churchofstdominic.org](mailto:ddempsey@churchofstdominic.org) or 651-368-7324.*