 Reading time: 6 min.

(continuation from previous article)

The Salesian

He was close to the sick, the children. The Oratory, which the Salesians had founded at the beginning of the house, ended with his departure back in 1903. But the parish of Sant Vicenç picked up the torch through a young man, Joan Juncadella, a born catechist, and *El Sordo*, his great assistant. As mentioned earlier, a very strong friendship and ongoing collaboration grew between them, which was only ended by the tragedy in 1936. Alexandre took care of the cleanliness and orderliness of the place, but he soon proved to be a real animator of the games and excursions that were organised. And if necessary, he did not hesitate to make available the money he saved.

And he had a Salesian heart. Deafness did not allow him to profess as a Salesian, which he certainly wanted. However, it appears that he took private vows, which he made with the permission of the then Provincial, Fr Philip Rinaldi, according to the testimony of one of the rectors of the house, Fr Crescenzi.

He demonstrated his identification with the Salesian cause in a thousand ways, but in a particularly significant way by taking personal care of the house for almost 30 years and defending it in the difficult situation in the summer and autumn of 1936.

"*He seemed like the father to each of us. When, in 1935, three boys drowned in the river, the man's grief was as if he had lost three sons at once. We know that the Salesians did not consider him an employee, but one of the family, or a cooperator. Today perhaps we could say a consecrated layman in the style of the Volunteers with Don Bosco. A Salesian of great spiritual stature*."

Embracing the Cross, a true witness of faith and reconciliation

The Salesians returned to Sant Vicenç dels Horts in the autumn of 1931. The unrest that led to the fall of the Spanish monarchy affected the house in El Campello (Alicante) where the aspirantate was located at that time. The decision was therefore taken to move it to Sant Vicenç. The house, although relatively dilapidated, was ready. It was able to expand with the purchase of an adjacent tower. It was here that the life of the aspirants took place, whose testimony on *el Sordo* has made it possible to draw the portrait of the man, the artist, the believer and the Salesian to which we have referred.



Christ nailed to the cross, in the courtyard of the house, by Alexandre



The Deposition in the hands of Mary, in the courtyard of the house, by Alexandre



The Holy Sepulchre, in the courtyard of the house, by Alexandre

Now is not the time to refer to the critical situation of the years 1931-1936 in Spain. Despite all this, life in the Sant Vicenç aspirantate passed quite normally. The driving force of daily life was the vocational awareness of the young people, which always inspired them to look ahead in the hope of tying themselves to Don Bosco for good at a not too distant date.

Until the revolution came on 18 July 1936, on the same day Salesians and young people made their pilgrimage excursion to Tibidabo. When they returned in the afternoon, things were changing. In just a few days, the parish house in the village was burnt down, the Salesian seminary was seized, a climate of religious intolerance had spread everywhere, the parish priest and his assistant were arrested and killed, the forces of law and order were unable or unwilling to cope with the riots. In Sant Vicenç, the “Antifascist Committee” took power, which was clearly anti-Christian.

Although at first the life of the teachers was respected because of the care for the children they housed, they nevertheless had to witness the destruction and burning of all religious objects, in particular the three monuments erected by *el Sordo*. “*How he suffered”* seeing himself having to collaborate in the destruction of what was an expression of his deep spirituality and witnessing the expulsion of the priests.

In those days, *el Sordo* became clearly aware of the new role that the

revolution forced him to take on: without ceasing to be the community's main link with the outside world (he had always moved freely as an errand boy and in every kind of need), he had to guard the property as before and, above all, protect the seminarians. "In reality, he was the one who represented the Salesians and acted as our father. Within a few days, in fact, only the Brothers and an increasingly small group of aspirants remained.

The ultimate expulsion of both took place on 12 November. In Sant Vicenç, only Mr Alexandre remained. For his last days of life we know only three certain facts: two of the expelled Brothers returned to the village on the 16th to convince him to seek a safer place outside the village, which Alexandre refused. He could not leave the house he had guarded for so many years, nor could he maintain the Salesian spirit even in the midst of those difficult circumstances. One of them, Eliseo García, not wanting to leave him alone, stayed with him. Both were arrested on the night of the 18th. A few days later, seeing that Eliseo had not returned to Sarriá, another Salesian brother and a seminarian went to Sant Vicenç to get news of them. "*Don't they know what happened?*" said a lady friend they knew who ran a bar. "*She told us in a few words about the disappearance of el Sordo and Eliseo*."

How did he spend this last week? Knowing *el Sordo's* life as we do, always faithful to his principles and his way of doing things, it is not difficult to imagine him: helping others, without hiding his faith and charity, in the knowledge that he was doing good, contemplating the mystery of Christ's passion and death, real and present in the lives of the persecuted, the disappeared and the murdered… Perhaps in the hope that he could be the guardian not only of the Salesians' property, but the guardian of so many of the people who suffered. As we have recalled, he did not want to strip himself of the crucifix even during the months of religious persecution that culminated in his martyrdom. With this faith, with this hope, with this immense love he would hear from the Lord of glory: "*Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in small things; I will entrust much more to you. Enter into the joy of your Lord"* (Mt 25:21).

***El Sordo*'s gospel**

Having reached this point, anyone, no matter how insensitive, can only be silent and try to collect, to the best of one's ability, the precious spiritual legacy Alexandre left to the Salesian Family, his adoptive family. Can we say something about "his gospel", that is, about the Good News that he made his own and continues to propose to us with his life and death?

Alexandre is like the "*man who had an impediment in his speech*" of Mk 7:32. His parents' plea to Jesus for healing would have been continuous. Like him,

Jesus took him to a lonely place away from his people and said to him: "*Ephata*!" The miracle was not in the healing of the physical ear, but in the spiritual ear. It seems to me that the acceptance of his situation with a spirit of faith was one of the founding experiences of his believing life that led him to proclaim, like the deaf man in the Gospel, to the four winds: "*He has done everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak*" (Mk 7:37).

And from here in the life of *el Sordo* we can contemplate "the hidden treasure of the Kingdom" (Mt 13:44); "*the yeast that leavens the entire dough*" (Mt 13:33); Jesus himself "*who welcomes the sick*" and "*blesses the children"*; Jesus who prays to the Father for hours and hours and teaches us the Our Father (to give glory to the Father, to desire the Kingdom, to do his will, to trust in daily bread, to forgive, to free from evil. …) (Mt 7:9-13); "*the householder who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old*"(Mt 13:52); "*the Good Samaritan who takes pity on the beaten man, approaches him, binds up his wounds and takes charge of his healing*" (Lk 10:33-35); "*the Good Shepherd, keeper of the sheepfold, who enters through the door, loves the sheep, even to the point of laying down his life for them*" (Jn 10:7-11)… In a word, a living icon of the Beatitudes, of all of them, in everyday life (Mt 5:3-12).

But, even more, we can approach Alexandre and contemplate with him the Mystery of Jesus' passion, death and resurrection. A mystery that takes place in his life from birth to death. A mystery that strengthens him in his faith, nourishes his hope and fills him with love, with which to give glory to God, made all things to all people with the children and young people of the Salesian home, and with the villagers of Sant Vicenç, especially the poorest, including those who took his life: "*Father, forgive them for they know not what they do"* (Lk 23:34). Make me, Lord, a witness of faith and reconciliation. May they too, one day, hear from your lips: "*Today you will be with me in Paradise*" (Lk 23:43).

Blessed Alexandre Planas Saurí, layman, Salesian martyr, witness of faith and reconciliation, fruitful seed of the civilisation of Love for today's world, intercede for us.