

NOVEMBER 16
 SAINTS ROCH GONZÁLEZ, JOHN DEL
 CASTILLO, AND ALPHONSUS RODRÍGUEZ
 PRIESTS, RELIGIOUS, MARTYRS
 MEMORIAL

Roch González of Santa Cruz was born in Asunción in Paraguay in 1576. He was already a priest when he joined the Society in 1609. For nearly twenty years he pacified the fierce forest-dwellers, gathered them into reductions, and taught them Christian faith and morals. He was betrayed and murdered for his Christian faith on November 15, 1628, together with Alphonsus Rodríguez, a Spaniard and priest of the Society. Two days later in another reduction John del Castillo suffered a cruel martyrdom. He too was a Spanish Jesuit, and had vigorously defended the Indians against their oppressors. They were canonized by John Paul II in 1988.

From the Common of Several Martyrs, or of Pastors

THE OFFICE OF READINGS

Second Reading

From the letters of Saint Roch González, Priest and Martyr
 (Annual letter of P. Roch González written in 1615 to his Provincial P.
 Peter de Oñate. Spanish text in *Documentos para la Historia
 Argentina*, vol. 20, Buenos Aires, 1929, pp. 24-25.)

*My hope in the Lord is that this cross, which has arrived
 so recently on these shores, may lead to the erection of
 many others.*

I soon returned there and found somewhere to stay in a small hut near the river; soon afterwards they offered me a slightly larger hut made of straw; but two months later the Rector sent me Father Diego de Boroa. He arrived on Whit Monday, and we were both very consoled as we

thought of the way the love of God had brought us together in such a remote and out-of-the-way place. We then divided our tiny house in two by means of a wall of reeds, and added a chapel little broader than the altar where Mass was to be celebrated. It was because of the power of this supreme, divine sacrifice, in which Christ offered himself to the Father on the Cross, and even now is among us in glory, that the demons who used to appear to the inhabitants of the place have no more dared to display themselves. We have this on the authority of some of the natives.

Still we decided to remain in our hut, despite our lack of all necessaries. Food was utterly primitive: we ate wheat or a meal made out of something they call "mandioque," which they live on. Because we go out looking for the herbs the parrots eat, the natives call us "parrots" by way of a joke.

While things were going on in this way, the demons were afraid that the entrance of the Society into these regions would mean the loss of their own long-held power; so they tried to spread a rumor throughout the whole Parana region that we were spies and magicians and that we brought death with us in our books and statues. So strong was this view that, when Father Boroa was trying to explain some of the mysteries of the faith to the pagans, some of them were afraid to stand near our holy statues in case somehow death passed from the images to themselves. Bit by bit they are learning the faith, especially as they can see with their own eyes that we are true fathers to them, willingly letting them have anything we may have at home and helping them, day and night in their labors

and sicknesses, spending ourselves for the healing of their bodies and—what is more important—their souls.

The love the Indians have for us has now been established, and we have decided to build a church, small and very low and thatched with straw, yet as far as these poor men are concerned a royal palace. They are amazed when they look up at the roof. As they did not know how to make bricks for the church, we had to dirty our own hands and show them how to do it. So the church was finished for the feast of Saint Ignatius last year, 1615. On that day we celebrated the first Mass in the church and renewed our vows, adding other festive rites that the poverty of the place allowed. We even tried to train the young men to dance, but they are so primitive that they could learn nothing. Then we erected a little wooden tower and hung a small bell up high, which amazed the people, who had never seen or heard anything like it before. The cause of the greatest devotion was the cross that the natives themselves had set up in front of the church; for when we had explained to them why we Christians adore the cross, they all genuflected with us before it. My hope in the Lord is that this cross, which has arrived so recently on these shores, may lead to the erection of many others.

Responsory (Jn. 10:15, 18; Jer. 12:7)

R. I lay down my life for my sheep. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.

V. I have forsaken my house, I have abandoned my heritage; I have given the beloved of my soul into the hands of her enemies. No one. . . .

Concluding Prayer

Lord, you called your martyrs to go out from their own country to sow the seed of your Word in distant lands. May it yield fruit a hundredfold in a harvest of justice and peace. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.