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**GYPSY SAINT**  
Ceferino Jiménez Malla  
(1861 - 1936)



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## INTRODUCTION

*This biography forms part of the Positio super martyrio, presented to the Congregation for the Cause of the Saints during the process for the beatification of the Servant of God Ceferino Jiménez Malla, a Spanish gypsy who lived between 1861 and 1936. It concerns a gypsy who lived a true nomad and true Catholic all his life, crowning his existence with martyrdom in August 1936 during the Spanish Civil War.*

*His life was simple and unassuming - as simple as his background - but fascinating. Whoever comes into contact with the figure of Ceferino is struck by his deep humanity and the intensity of his inner life.*

*The Civil War 1936-39 turned the country upside down and brought with it a heavy religious persecution. At that time the Church in Spain lived through a real baptism of blood and of fire. L'Osservatore Romano on 7th August 1932 commented: "We report in other columns on this page so many facts and proofs of the systematic struggle which is being carried out, not without violence and frequently barbaric and illegal methods, against the Church and religious freedom, and it is difficult not to recognize in this' struggle a determined and implacable will towards persecution." In three years of persecution, around 7,000 ecclesiastics became true martyrs, offering their lives to uphold the Christian faith. Many laypeople were killed for belonging to the Catholic Church and having stood up for their faith in Christ. Among these was Ceferino Jiménez Malla, the only gypsy to die for purely religious reasons, because he dared to defend a priest and proclaim publicly his own faith.*

*His death was considered a heroic act, and his reputation as a saint quickly spread. In 1993 the process for his beatification got under way, arousing interest and enthusiasm both within and beyond the worldwide gypsy community. Fr. Romualdo Rodrigo OSR, Postulator of the Cause, and Msgr. José Luis Gutiérrez, Relator, set themselves to work with care and precision, collecting facts and testimonies.*

*From their research and the studies they carried out, emerges the figure of an extremely honest man; commended for his charity and generosity towards the poor (he himself being poor); remarkable for his apostolic fervor, his deep spirituality and devotion to the Eucharistic Christ and to Mary; valued for his moral qualities and for his extraordinary native intelligence (even though he was illiterate); and esteemed for his good sense in giving advice and for his special gift of being able to resolve and settle disputes among the gypsies. He was respected not only among his fellow-gypsies but also by the highest civil authorities, priests and bishops, to whom he was bound by a warm friendship.*

*The Servant of God, Ceferino Jiménez Malla, by his life and his death has shown the world that Christ is present among all peoples and all races, and that saintliness can arise anywhere (Positio, p 3). The Church recognizes in him a true and faithful son, the gypsy people a witness to Christ and evangeliser to his own kind.*

*The Pontifical Council for Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerants, which has among its responsibilities the promotion of pastoral care for the gypsies, entrusts this biography to the reader in the hope that the example of the life, virtues and martyrdom of this Servant of God will help build up an attitude of welcome and solidarity towards all gypsies, and enable this people to regain their proper dignity and their due place in society.*

## **Life, virtues and martyrdom of the Servant of God**

This chapter will be divided into two parts. In the first we will describe the life and virtues of the Servant of God; in the second we will speak of his martyrdom (in both the material and formal sense), and of the spread of his reputation.

### **I. LIFE AND VIRTUES OF THE SERVANT OF GOD**

Writing about a nomad who spent many years of his life with no fixed abode, it is difficult to be sure of dates - particularly for his birth, childhood and First Communion. The only document we have available are the baptismal certificate of his nephew Juan Fernando Jiménez, in which the Servant of God appears as godfather, and the record of the Servant of God's marriage process in 1912, during which evidence of his baptism was presented (cf. Doc 10, *Summ*, p 87).

#### **Biographical sources**

To help us with our biography all we have is a small life put together in the 1960s by Fr. Angel M. Fandos CMF, and published in 1973. This is a 32-page pamphlet, six inches by four, written in simple language and entitled "El Pelé - a Gypsy with the Makings of a Saint". Although he has failed to list his sources, the author seems to have relied on testimonies he managed to collect in Barbastro.

Apart from this short life and the two documents just mentioned, we have the declarations of various eye witnesses: people who knew the Servant of God, and several members of his family.

#### **1. Birth and early years**

From what is said by the Servant of God in his marriage process, we know that he was the son of Juan Jiménez and Josefa Malla, and that he was born in 1861<sup>1</sup>. We do not know for certain the day or place of his birth<sup>2</sup>. Fr. A Fandos states that Pelé was born "like his brother Felipe and his sister Encarnacion at Alcolea de Cinca, a delightful suburb of Huesca"<sup>3</sup>. In the absence of documentation, one might assume that the Servant of God was born in the same place as his brother and sister, but this assumption cannot be confirmed either by witnesses or by documentary records.

Fr. Mario Riboldi, relying on the declarations of Maria de los Milagros Jiménez (better known as Maruja, which is the name we will use here), daughter of Josefa (Pepita) who was adopted by the Servant of God, gives it as a fact that they were born at Benavent (Lérida)<sup>4</sup>. In fact, Maruja declared on oath: "I have heard from the daughter of a half-brother of Pelé's, called Leonor, that he was born in Benavent" (*Summ* pp. 19-20, 5). However, this declaration seems to us too general and hardly convincing.

In the baptismal certificate shown by the Servant of God for his marriage process, it says that he was a native of Fraga, where he was baptized (cf. Doc 11, f 88). It is due, as Fr. Mario Riboldi states, that in order to avoid complications gypsies sometimes say a child was born within the

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<sup>1</sup> Nicolás Santos de Otto states that the Servant of God was born in 1865 (cf. *Summ*, p 40). On the other hand Maruja, Pelé's grandniece, and Josefina Urgeles Pelayo; told Don Riboldi that Pelé died at the age of 75 (cf. Riboldi, p 13). A document found recently, which formed part of the marriage process, indicates that Maruja was right, since in the petition in which the Servant of God requested the opening of this process, he stated that he was 50 years old and that Teresa, his wife-to-be, 52. The petition is undated, but the process was opened on 3rd January 1912. Assuming that the petition is from the previous day, or goes back to the end of 1911, it can be deduced that the Servant of God was born in 1861.

<sup>2</sup> In Spain the registration of births began from 1870. Up to then there are only the ecclesiastical registers in which the dates of birth, marriage and death of the faithful were recorded. In the civil register of Fraga the registration of births, marriages and deaths began in 1876, that is six years later than the date established by the Government.

<sup>3</sup> FANDOS, p 12; *Proc* f 224.

<sup>4</sup> RIBOLDI, p 13. Unfortunately the baptism book at Benavent was also burnt.

territory of the parish where they are seeking to bring it for baptism<sup>5</sup>. But in this case it seems the parent of the Servant of God told the truth with regard to his birthplace, since in another official document from 1903 it says that the Servant of God was a native of Fraga. We refer to the baptismal record of Juan Alfredo Jiménez, son of Felipe Jiménez Malla, brother of the Servant of God. Pelé acts as witness, and states that he is a native of Fraga (cf. Doc 10, *Summ*, f 87).

There will always be some doubt, given the contradiction between what is stated by several witnesses and what we find written in the document referred to. However, it makes more sense to believe what it says in the document.

We have little data on the childhood of the Servant of God. His parents were nomads, and it seems they traveled around various villages in Catalonia and upper Aragon. Maria de los Milagros Jiménez (= Maruja), his adoptive grandniece, states that he was illiterate and that he "had a very poor childhood" (*Summ*, p 20, 19). She confided to Fr. Mario Riboldi that "her granduncle told her he had suffered from hunger when he was small, and that: 'returning home from a sale, if he saw smoke, he was happy because there would be something ready to eat; if there was no smoke, the women hadn't cooked'"<sup>6</sup>.

To the witness Nicolás Santos de Otto, who was closely associated with him for many years, the Servant of God related that "when he was very small he knew very great poverty. He worked as a basket-seller, with one of his uncles. On several occasions he received help from Cucaracha, the famous bandit of our land<sup>7</sup>, whom he met along the road while traveling with his uncle" (*Summ* p 42). This information was collected also in his time by Fr. Fandos, presumably from gypsies who were well acquainted with the life of the Servant of God, since he writes: "He learned to earn his bread from when he was very small, weaving creels and baskets and taking them to sell through the villages"<sup>8</sup>.

Probably he learned the prayers of the Church when he was small, since his grandniece Maruja has declared that in private he prayed in the Catalan language (*Summ* p 20, 6). It can be assumed that he made his First Communion as a child, and was confirmed, since he was subsequently admitted to the celebration of canonical marriage.

The intellectual formation of the Servant of God was non-existent. Fr. Fandos, who knew him, states that "he never went to school... Totally illiterate, he could not read, write, or do sums"<sup>9</sup>. We can add that he was unable even to sign his name, since in the marriage process which we spoke of earlier the application is signed for both (and in very nice handwriting too) by Teresa Jiménez<sup>10</sup>. In the record of the declaration made by Pelé to the Vicar General of the diocese it says: "He has not signed because he is unable to" (cf. *Summ*, Doc 11,b, p 89).

It is known that his father separated from his mother (though we do not know when) and went with another woman by whom he had several children. One of these was called "El Turons". Pelé had to look after the family and especially his little brother Felipe, born in 1882. There was such an age difference between the two that Felipe called his brother "Dad", because in reality he had been a father to him. This was told to Fr. Riboldi by the gypsy Bartolo<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> RIBOLDI, p 13.

<sup>6</sup> RIBOLDI, p 23.

<sup>7</sup> The bandit Cucaracha was well known in those days in the region called Los Monegros, which extends from the River Ebro to the River Cinca, in the Province of Zaragoza and that of Huesca. The bandit fell into a fatal trap set by the Civil Guard in February 1875, when he was only 37 years old. So the Servant of God could only have been a little boy when he met him.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. FANDOS, p 12; *Summ* p 64.

<sup>9</sup> FANDOS, p 15; *Summ* p 65.

<sup>10</sup> Teresa, wife of the Servant of God, signs herself Giménez. It is necessary to remember that gypsies are indifferent about writing the name Jiménez with either "j" or "g".

<sup>11</sup> RIBOLDI, pp 24 & 26.

## **2. He settles in Barbastro**

According to Maruja's statements, the parents of the Servant of God had no fixed place of residence. We do not know if they went to live in Barbastro. In the application in which Ceferino Jiménez Malla and Teresa Jiménez Jiménez, at the end of 1911, sought permission to get married in church, they state that they are "residents in Barbastro for thirty-two years" (cf. *Summ*, Doc 11,a, p 88). From this we must conclude that the Servant of God settled at Barbastro in 1878 or 1879. He was then 18 or 19 years old, and probably already married in gypsy fashion to Teresa Jiménez, who came from Lérida.

For the baptism of Juan Alfredo Jiménez, son of Felipe, which took place on 9th December 1903 at Barbastro, it is stated that the child's parents had their home at Barbastro, and the same was stated of Ceferino Jiménez and his wife, who were the godparents (cf. Doc 10, *Summ* p 87). It is no surprise that the Servant of God declared that he was married, since for the gypsies a marriage celebrated according to their rites is a real marriage, and Pelé had been married in gypsy fashion to Teresa Jiménez Malla, born at Lérida on 23rd May 1859 and baptized the same day in the parish of St. John the Baptist (cf. Doc 9, *Summ* p 87).

In 1911 Ceferino and Felipe were issued with identity cards at Barbastro, respectively on 1st and 15th July. Teresa, Pelé's wife, also proves to be domiciled in Barbastro in 1911<sup>12</sup>.

## **3. The religious marriage**

We do not know the reasons which impelled Pelé to marry in 1912 according to the rite of the Church. Rev Antos Lalueza, who was Vicar General of Barbastro and spent many years in pastoral work among the gypsies, states that generally, gypsies get married first gypsy fashion, and many of them then regularize their union by getting married in church because this is the simplest way to get the union juridically recognized by the State. This observation of the witness is perhaps valid for the second part of this century. At the beginning of this century and the end of the last, it was unusual for gypsies to get married in church. It is a fact that few cases are to be found in the parish registers of weddings celebrated between gypsies, whereas there are a great many registrations of baptisms. Bearing this in mind, and bearing in mind also the life which the Servant of God lived later on, we may suppose that he was moved to legitimize his union for religious reasons.

On 3rd January 1912 he put in an application to the Episcopal curia of Barbastro, asking for dispensation from the banns. The following day, 4th January, the Vicar General of Barbastro sent the file to the judge and Vicar General of the Diocese of Lérida, since the couple wished to get married in that city. We should remember that the bride was a native of Lérida and must certainly have had relatives there<sup>13</sup>. It has not been possible to get hold of the marriage record, but from the marginal note on the baptismal certificate of Teresa Jiménez, the wife, we know the marriage was celebrated on 9th January 1912 in the parish church of St. Lawrence the Martyr in Lérida.

Since they had no children, they adopted<sup>14</sup> a niece of the wife, called Pepita Jiménez Jiménez, best known as Pepita<sup>15</sup>, whom the Servant of God always treated as his own daughter (cf. *Summ*, Doc 6, 11, p 20). The parents of Pepita, Ramón, nicknamed "Petit", and Beatriz lived at Barbastro. Pepita's father died there in 1919 aged 64. In the church record it says: "received the sacraments of Confession and Viaticum". Not long afterwards Beatriz, mother of Pepita, moved from Barbastro to

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. Doc 10, p 87. In the same document Felipe Jiménez Malla, brother of the Servant of God, makes a declaration as a witness and presents his identity card issued on 15th July 1911 at Barbastro (cf. *Proc* f 140).

<sup>13</sup> Because of the fires during the Spanish Civil War, it has not been possible to find the marriage record in the Lérida parishes.

<sup>14</sup> Fr. Fandos states that he legally adopted Pepita (p 14). It is more likely that this was not a legal adoption, but a de facto one. In effect, in Pepita's marriage certificate she says she is "the daughter of Ramón, deceased, a native of Zaragoza, and of Beatriz, native and resident in Zaragoza".

<sup>15</sup> In the marriage record it says the bride is called Beatriz, whereas her daughter Maria de los Milagros (Maruja) and everyone knew her as Pepita. Surely in drawing up the marriage record, the parish priest made a mistake.

Zaragoza<sup>16</sup>. Maruja, the eldest of the grandnieces, states that the Servant of God gave Pepita "a good Christian education, sending her to boarding school at St. Vincent de Paul College, run by the Daughters of Charity ... Pepita also had contact with gorgios (non-gypsy) friends at the boarding school in the city" (*Summ* p 20,11).

#### **4. Horsedealer**

Fr. Fandos states that on his visiting card the Servant of God presented himself as a "horsedealer"<sup>17</sup>. Thanks to his honesty and entrepreneurial spirit, he knew times of great prosperity in this business. Fr. Fandos relates that Pelé won for himself the trust and admiration of the inhabitants of Barbastro for his spirit of service and, above all, for having once rescued Rafael Jordán, the ex-mayor, who suffered from tuberculosis. One day in the street he suddenly started coughing up blood. The Servant of God went to his help without any fear of infection, and took him home. In gratitude for this heroic act Don Simon, a rich man and brother of Don Rafael, gave Pelé a large amount of money advising him to go to France and buy one of the mule wagons that the French Government was putting up for sale at the end of the World War. Pelé, who had close relatives in Dax and Oloron, went to the neighboring country and bought up a large number of mules which he quickly sold in the villages of Somontano. According to the testimony of Nicolás Santos de Otto, he repeated the operation on several occasions, earning a big profit ... until he could consider himself rich, and he remained well off for many years" (*Summ* p 42).

Thanks to this good piece of business, Pelé was able to buy and do up his house in the San Hipólito district, where he was living as a tenant<sup>18</sup>. He also established a stud of horses which he always kept well stocked. All this would definitely have taken place around 1919, just after the end of the First World War.

Several witnesses mention Pelé's stud, to which both gorgios and gypsies flocked to get horses (cf. *Summ*, Test 4, *Summ* p 14, 9; Test 6, *Summ*, p 20, 12; Test 9, *Summ*, p 27, 9, Test 22, *Summ*, p 48, 9).

But fortune did not always smile upon him. A series of circumstances, together with his own prodigious generosity, brought him little by little to ruin.

Fr. Fandos mentions how when he was at the fair in Vedrell to sell some mules, one of the fairmen recognized two of them as having been stolen from him in Valle and brought a charge with the police. Pelé was taken to prison. The case came before the court. The mules had definitely been stolen in Valle, as the victim of the theft maintained. But Pelé was able to show, with proper receipts, that he had bought them in ignorance of where they had come from. The judge, after reading the verdict of acquittal, permitted himself to add: "Pelé is neither a thief nor a swindler. He is St. Ceferino Jiménez Malla, Patron of the Gypsies"<sup>19</sup>.

This case was mentioned too in the testimony of Maria Carlota de Otto, who heard it from her father, who had helped with the defense (cf. *Summ*, p 44, 13). Fr. Mario Riboldi collected stories from a number of elderly gypsies who were witness to the case. One of them, "El Bomba, maintained that Pelé was accused at Barbastro and that the hearing took place at Vedrell. He adds that several witnesses later saw Pelé going up Calle San Hipólito to the cathedral on his knees, with two huge candles in his hands, to give thanks to God for having been exonerated<sup>20</sup>. The witness Alejandro Mora, although he was not aware of the reason, records having seen Pelé set off on his

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<sup>16</sup> RIBOLDI, p 71.

<sup>17</sup> FANDOS, p 17.

<sup>18</sup> In the Barbastro land register, property no 2301, corresponding to house no 31 in Calle San Hipólito, it says that the said house is the property of Ceferino Jiménez, who bought it from a certain Gregorio Sehum.

<sup>19</sup> FANDOS, pp 2-21.

<sup>20</sup> RIBOLDI, p 89.

knees "from his home towards the cathedral" (*Summ* p 32, 8). All this, as Fr. Mario Riboldi ascertained from the witness Constancio Ramiz Ballabriga, took place in 1922<sup>21</sup>.

The misfortunes of the Servant of God did not finish here. A few months later, God put him to a fresh trial touching his beloved wife Teresa who, according to the register of deaths in the archive of the Episcopal curia, died un-expectedly on 4th December 1922. The Servant of God immediately called the priest, who administered to the dead woman the sacraments of Penance and Extreme Unction "sub conditione" (cf. *Summ*, p 89; Doc 12).

His wife dead, he remained alone with his adopted niece Pepita, who was barely 16. Perhaps to avoid gossip, or in the desire to create a new family nucleus, he decided to settle the girl's future by giving her in marriage to Juan Alfredo Jiménez "El Lisardo", his immediate nephew, son of his brother Philip.

According to the established custom among the gypsies, Alfredo and Pepita were first married gypsy fashion, celebrating a great feast with relatives and friends. The wedding made such a splash that old gypsies remember it to this day. Fr. Mario Riboldi drew out a memory from one of them, who "even though he had forgotten the name of the bridegroom, recalled that the feast was huge, and that five and ten centesimi coins were being flung around: he picked up 35 centesimi (his mother at that time was earning 1 pesete 25 centesimi a day). Also the ninety-year-old Maria Ardanuy, still alive and in good health today, says it was a very great feast<sup>22</sup>."

The religious wedding took place in the parish church of St. Francis of Assisi on 5th August 1923 (cf. Doc 13, *Summ*, p 90). The newlyweds continued to live in the house of the Servant of God, which was soon filled with happiness by the birth of a little girl, Maria de los Milagros "La Maruja", born on 25th May 1924. Six other girls followed, and one boy: Clotilde "La Teliné", on 15th June 1926; Trinidad, on 15th May 1927; Arturo "El Ketí" on 8th January 1928; Alegria y Salud "La Chone", on 28th May 1930, Nuri in 1934 (?); and Laura in May 1942<sup>23</sup>. The old man Pelé was able to enjoy the companionship of his grandnieces and grandnephew whom he loved like a father. He had a weakness for the eldest, Maruja, as she herself admitted. Certainly he suffered in 1934, when one of his grandnieces - Nuri - died. She was buried on 7th June in the tomb on his property (cf. *Summ*, p 90, Doc 12).

## **5. Pelé's last years**

After having married off his adopted daughter, he lived for a while with her and his son-in-law. Later, when the children arrived and the family began to grow, he handed over the house to the couple and himself went to live in a house in "Intramuro" for which the rent was paid for him by Don Nicolás Santos de Otto.

Each night he took to stay with him one of the order grandnieces, Maruja or Teliné. Teliné, the smaller one, was jealous of her sister Maruja and always wanted to be the one to go with Uncle Pelé. In a declaration made before Fr. Gabriel Campo, the Postulator at Barbastro, Teliné told of her fights with her sister Maruja:

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<sup>21</sup> RIBOLDI, p 87. The same gypsy Constancio Ramiz, born in 1909, in a declaration made before Fr. Gabriel Campo, said: "I remember on the day of Pelé's trial (I can't remember if it was a trial or an interrogation) the road to Huesca, from El Coso almost to El Pueyo, was full of the caravans of gypsies who had come with their wagons for Pelé's court case. We went to see it" (*Proc* f 181). It is no wonder that so many gypsies should have come if we consider the great prestige Pelé enjoyed among his people, and above all if we consider gypsy solidarity. It is enough for one to fall ill or have a serious problem for a dozen of them to come looking for him and offer help.

<sup>22</sup> RIBOLDI, p 95.

<sup>23</sup> RIBOLDI, presenting the family tree on pp 36-37 of his book, and speaking of the marriage of Pepita, the adoptive daughter of Pelé, only indicates four girls and a boy. He forgets Trinidad, born in 1927 between Teliné and Ketí, and also Nuri, whose body was laid in the tomb on Pelé's property. Cf. *Summ* pp 89-90, doc 12. We don't know the date of Nuri's birth, only that she died on 6th June 1934.

*"Every day he wanted one of us. I was jealous of Maruja. I wanted to stay with Pelé. Come children - he would say - this one today, you tomorrow, another day ... and I counted the days until it was time for him to take me to his house" (Summ, pp 55-56).*

Going to sleep at Pelé's house had its advantages, because in the morning their granduncle, accompanied by the grandniece whose turn it was, after hearing Mass in the Claretian church, bought the child "a Vienna bun and a bar of chocolate" (cf. *Summ*, Test 2, p 56).

During the last years of his life, the Servant of God divided his time between Barbastro and the country house the Otto family had in San Esteban de Litera. Practically speaking he was working for the Ottos, who regarded him as one of the family and, to top up his income, he took up the sale of textiles.

## **6. Daily life**

It is not difficult to imagine the way of life followed by Pelé at Barbastro, nor what would have been his usual habits. We know he attended first Mass every day at the Claretian church (*Summ*, pp 8,3; 56,2) and then set himself to his everyday tasks. Like all his race, and being above all a horse dealer, he looked after the stud he had established at Barbastro, gathered grass for the horses, watered them, cleaned the stable, struck deals, attended the fairs in the nearby villages, and never missed the feasts organized by his fellow gypsies for one reason or another.

We need to remember that up to 1930 the district of San Hipólito, where the Servant of God lived, had no running water. So every day he had to carry water from the San Francisco spring to the horsetroughs, or else lead the horses at least once a day to the watering place. Another of Pelé's occupations was shoeing horses. For this he had a special tool which the gypsies call "puhamante" and the gorgios "tajavante". This tool was donated to the museum of the Claretian Martyrs of Barbastro, where it is now preserved, by José Castellón, son of "Ferruchón", who had inherited it<sup>24</sup>.

Fr. Fandos, who knew the gypsy lifestyle well and gathered information from the gypsies of Barbastro in order to write his short life of Pelé, wrote in an article published in a magazine:

*"Like almost all his race, he dedicated his daily occupation to the raising and trading of horses: gathering grass, buying horses, selling and exchanging them ... fairs and markets were enlivened by his personal presence; he knew how to cry up his wares with picturesque patter, ready deals, hyperbolic arguments ... without going beyond the bounds of justice and good friendship. He loved the gypsy festivals, clapping his hands, playing the castanets and shouting "Olé!". His presence at such festivals was an absolute guarantee of respectability and moderation"<sup>25</sup>.*

Besides his work and his occupation as a horse dealer, and besides his frequent attendance at festivals organized by the gypsies, Pelé cultivated a friendship with Don Nicolás Santos de Otto. He accompanied him on the numerous journeys he had to make around Spain, whether for reasons concerning his university career, or for political reasons. In this respect Nicolás Santos de Otto Jr states:

*"He made many journeys with my father throughout our province and outside it. He went with him to Oviedo when, having health problems, he went to take over a professorship in that university. Several times he went to Madrid. Pelé told us about all these trips. He told stories in a very amusing way, with profuse details and references to people he knew" (Summ, p 41).*

Fr. Fandos, who collected lots of information in order to write his little work, states:

*"Many times he accompanied the professor in his journeys throughout the length and breadth of Spain. Once, for example, as a trusted companion when he went to take over the professorial*

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<sup>24</sup> RIBOLDI, p 25.

<sup>25</sup> "El Cruzado Aragones", No 2474, 18/11/67.



*chair at Oviedo (1923). Another time, as a representative figure of the simple ordinary people, in the political campaigns for irrigation launched by the versatile Don Joaquin Costa, "the Lion of Graus". Again, at high profile national events, such as for example the official consecration of Spain to the Sacred Heart of Jesus (1919) by His Majesty King Alfonso XIII, surrounded by all his ministers, a large turnout of bishops, and the highest names in the army and the judiciary*<sup>26</sup>.

Maruja, grandniece of the Servant of God, has declared that her Uncle Pelé used to ramble around on his horse "Calderas", taking his daughter Pepita along for the ride. He could go from Barbastro to Huesca, 50 km away, and get back the same day (*Summ*, pp 18-19. 54).

In the last years of his life he left off working as a trader and devoted himself totally to the family of his friend Otto. He went frequently to the Otto estate at San Esteban, or looked after the house in Barbastro, where he often slept - so much so that the witness Rev Santiago Mompel Querol, Piarist, when he was interrogated as part of the process for Bishop Florentino Asensio, stated that the Servant of God "was the caretaker in the Santos de Otto house" (*Summ*, p 52,7). If we are to believe Nicolás Santos de Otto, besides the work he did for the family, he earned his living selling textiles round the villages (*Summ*, p 40).

In the midst of his occupations, as the witnesses state, he never missed Mass and daily Communion. He also participated faithfully in processions, public religious events, and the obligatory commitments of the various religious associations to which he belonged, like the Nocturnal Adoration and Eucharistic Thursdays, the St. Vincent de Paul Society, and the meetings of the Confraternity of Franciscan Tertiaries in which he was an officer.

Such a life, as a gypsy and at the same time as a fervent Christian, is a vibrant witness both for gypsies and for gorgios.

## **7. Pelé's personality**

We have sufficient data to be able to describe what sort of person the Servant of God was, both physically and morally. Every aspect of the man made him a strong personality.

### **a) Physical Appearance**

Beside the photographs which have been preserved, various eyewitnesses have described the physical appearance of the Servant of God.

Nicolás Santos de Otto, born 1915, who practically lived with him up to the time of his death, tells us that "he was tall, slim, in good health, with a strong constitution and a smart appearance" (*Summ*, p 40,3). This was also how some seminarians in Barbastro saw him in 1926, when the Franciscan Third Order was established: "What particularly drew my attention and that of my companions" states Rev Santos Lalueza, "was to find there a tall, dark gypsy, holding in his hands the tertiaries' banner. We commented very favorably on that" (*Summ*, p 13,4).

Maria de los Dolores, born 1911, knew the Servant of God from when she was a child and recalls him as a "tall, lean" man (*Summ*, p 37,3). And the little boys of the district, among whom was Roman Celaya, saw him "as a great gentleman with an overwhelming personality, tall, thin and distinguished" (*Summ*, p 10,9). Andrés Jiménez, gypsy, gives us a complete picture of Pelé's appearance: "he was tall, thin, a handsome man. He dressed in an elegant fashion in a suit and waistcoat. He had a watch chain which hung down from his waistcoat and disappeared into a little pocket. He went around with a walking stick" (Test 1, *Summ*, p 53,3). Indeed, in a group photograph in which he appears with Professor Nicolás Santos de Otto, and the children and some friends of Otto's, Pelé stands out from the rest. He appears dressed in suit and waistcoat, as stated by the witness Andrés Jiménez, but it is impossible to make out the watch chain because the photo is blurred.

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<sup>26</sup> FANDOS, p 16; *Summ* p 67.

Fr. Fandos informs us in his biography how Pelé used to dress. He says that on working days he "went around in a smock, with a beret on his head, down-at-heel shoes on his feet, with a whip round his neck or rolled up in his hand". And he adds:

*"His way of dressing when he joined the caravans to go to a festival was different. Sitting on horseback or on the driving seat of a covered cart, he kept up a lively conversation with his companions while keeping a careful watch over the team of mules or donkeys he was driving. Then he wore a jacket, tie, cloth hat and boots..."<sup>27</sup>.*

## **b) Character**

The Servant of God was distinguished above all for his personal qualities. Though illiterate and unable to keep accounts, he was gifted with an extraordinary natural intelligence, great good sense, proven honesty, and a special gift for settling disputes which arose among the gypsies, and between them and the gorgios. To all this must be added his great generosity, at times coming close to prodigality.

Nicolás Santos de Otto states that, although he had had no intellectual training, he was "of great natural intelligence and of correct and fair principles" (*Summ*, p 41). He was above all a very honest gypsy horsedealer - a rare enough quality in the business. On this all witnesses agree, both gorgios and gypsies. We will report some of their declarations.

José Cortes, gypsy, states:

*"He was famous as an honest man ... He conducted his business as a dealer with honesty; he didn't buy horses with defects and had no desire to cheat the gorgios. He was an honest gypsy." (Summ, pp 5-6).*

Roman Celaya, a neighbor who used to see a lot of him from the 1920s onwards, declares:

*"Pelé was famous for being an honest man. As a horse trader he didn't try to cheat, and this fact brought him prestige and helped him make money. If a horse had a defect he would even point it out. You would hear people say: 'Trust Pelé to advise you well'" (Summ, p 11,10).*

Adela Jiménez, gypsy, heard her mother say that Pelé "was honest in his work as a dealer and had no desire to cheat either gorgios or gypsies" (*Summ*, p 31,10).

His honesty was such that in order not to cheat people, he would put on one side the horses who had not been well broken in. His grandniece Maruja mentions this:

*"Uncle Pelé was an honest man in his profession as a horse trader, and I have heard said that when he had 'difficult' horses and was going to a fair, he put them on one side and those who went to buy knew this, and could distinguish them. In this way he didn't cheat" (Summ, p 20,10).*

The same thing is stated by the witness Trinidad Jiménez, grandniece of the Servant of God.

*"Pelé was honest in his work as a dealer, he didn't cheat and if the horses had any defect, he said so first. I have often heard this said by my grandfather (says Trinidad) who was Uncle Pelé's brother" (Summ, p 47).*

Another witness, Rufino Bruno Vidal, adds that not only he didn't cheat himself, but he reprimanded any gypsies who did.

*"Pelé was a very honest man; in his work as a horse trader he never allowed himself to cheat anyone, and so he would reprimand those gypsies who tried to cheat the gorgios, saying that was something you shouldn't do, and he was very much loved and appreciated by the gorgios" (Summ, p 23, 10).*

Members of the Otto family testified to the well-tried honesty of the Servant of God. Maria Carlota, daughter of Nicolás Otto, states:

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<sup>27</sup> FANDOS, p 16; *Summ* p 66.

*"Pelé was famous as an honest man and he showed it by his deeds; such was the trust my father had in him that he got him to look after our house in San Estebán de Litera, where he was often left in sole charge. There's more: the combination for my father's safe was: Pelé. We used to like him to come to our house, and we would go out to meet him" (Summ, p 43,10).*

Another testimony to the moral integrity of the Servant of God - albeit perhaps a rather exaggerated one - is that of Alejandro Moca Sesé, a friend of the Otto family and so also of Pelé. In a declaration made on 11th December 1993 before Fr. Gabriel Campo, he states:

*"He was such a good man it was difficult to think of any sins, lies or faults. He always seemed to be preserved by grace, as I would sometimes imagine the Virgin Mary, completely pure" (Proc f176).*

The biographer of the Servant of God can well write:

*"For the gorgios too, (Pelé) attained a remarkable importance. Never had the villages of the region known a man more honest, gentlemanly, sincere and Christian. In public and in private he showed himself respectful, humble, cheerful, peaceable, helpful and generous. For everyone he had a greeting, a smile, time for a pleasant conversation, a courteous invitation, a promise. In the researches I made to put together this historical sketch, I heard of nothing blameworthy. Where the other gypsies were concerned, he always treated them with great cordiality, not as if he was superior to them, calling them "tato", a term of affection which the gypsies use for each other"<sup>28</sup>.*

His physical good looks and his moral qualities made him a man of strong personality, respected by everyone and looked up to by gorgios and gypsies. Roman Celaya, who was one of a group of little boys in the neighborhood of San Hipólito where Pelé lived, states that "the whole gang saw in Pelé a great gentleman with an overwhelming personality" (Summ, p 10,9). And he adds:

*"Pelé enjoyed great prestige among the gypsies and also among the gorgios. They accepted his advice, and the gypsies regarded him as their 'chief'. All along Calle San Hipólito the neighbors trusted him and were his friends; they saw him as the advocate of the poor, and often went to him to seek advice" (Ibid., p 11,12).*

Maria Dolores Esteban adds that "among the gypsies he stood out because he had such a great personality" (Summ, p 34,3). Lucia Martin says the same: "I have heard tell that he had great influence among the gypsies, as if he was the 'chief'" (Summ, 36,12).

Through his strong personality he became friends with the leading people in the city, and among the gypsies he was "like the chief". So states Maria Carlota de Otto, who regarded him as a member of her family:

*"Pelé had friends in the city, among whom were my family, the Jordáns, the Jesus, Carmen Sichar, Pablo Jordán de Urries e Azara. Among the gypsies he enjoyed great authority and was like the 'chief'. And we were loved among the gypsies because of the relationship we had with Pelé" (Summ, p 44,12).*

Such prestige, and his conciliatory spirit, gave him the necessary authority to act as mediator in conflicts which arose among the members of his own race, and between them and the gorgios. He was looked on as a sort of arbitrator and peacemaker, and his interventions were always crowned with success. The disputants ended up shaking hands and becoming friends. This is affirmed by various witnesses.

Roman Celaya, who was Pelé's next door neighbor, after having spoken of his great honesty and the prestige he enjoyed among gorgios and gypsies, states: "If some-times there were quarrels among the gypsies, he was the peacemaker; they even went to look for him because it was he who settled the quarrels" (Summ, p 11,12). And José Castellón Jiménez, gypsy, states that he acted as

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<sup>28</sup> FANDOS, pp 1-17; Summ p 66.

"peacemaker in marriages, and in all sorts of other problems, among the gypsies" (*Summ*, p 48,9). Angel Tornes, who collected together the things people were saying about the Servant of God immediately after his death, states: "Among the gypsy race he was the man who settled conflicts between his compatriots, serving as judge and peacemaker to his own" (*Summ*, p 25,3).

Fr. Fandos refers us to what was said of him, in this respect, by his family members and friends.

*"His family and friends praised the special capacity he had to intervene in the petty conflicts which arose among those of his race. He would see some right on either side, calming down the mutual rancor. Generally his intervention was seen as fair, and accepted"*<sup>29</sup>.

## **8. A model Christian. His virtues**

The biographer of the Servant of God, who saw a lot of him at close quarters and knew of his piety, states that he does not know who gave him his first lessons in theology, but that certainly he had a deep spirituality. He was not a superstitious, or superficially religious man but rather had "deep-rooted religious convictions" (Test 19, *Summ*, p 41). As in the souls of the saints, we may suppose that it was the Holy Spirit who guided him. In this respect a statement of the witness Rufino Vidal, who participated with the Servant of God in the Nocturnal Adoration, is interesting: "Although he had never learned his letters, although he couldn't read or write, all the same he had a lot of spiritual formation. In him the spiritual life came from within" (*Summ*, p 23,8). A proof of his deep spirituality was his Christian resignation and the way he saw the hand of God in everything. In effect, Nicolás Santos de Otto reports that in reverses of fortune or disgrace the Servant of God always said: "God willed it, he knows about it. Praised be the Lord" (*Summ*, p 42).

The author of his biography does not tell us when the Servant of God began to devote himself to pious exercises. Perhaps, as Rev Santos Lalueza suggests, his friendship with Nicolás Santos de Otto - well-known in Barbastro for his piety - influenced him (cf. *Summ*, p 14, 8). And we cannot exclude the point, already stated, that he had had his marriage put right in 1912 with a church wedding. The fact that in private he prayed in the Catalan language, as Maruja states (cf. *Summ*, p 20,6), leads us to think that he had learned his prayers as a child, while he was living in Catalonia. Certainly after having celebrated his church wedding, he remained faithful to the practice of his religion. In fact, several witnesses who knew him in those years state that he was often seen going to church.

Fr. Fandos states that he used to attend daily Mass "in the church of the Missioners, or else in the Parish of St. Francis". And he adds:

*"The word was that in the bosom of his family he recited the rosary every day. And the gypsies say he did this to keep a vow, for a miracle he had obtained from Our Lady of the Rosary"*<sup>30</sup>.

The following anecdote, of which Fr. Fandos was an eyewitness, concerns his Eucharistic piety:

*"In 1922 I found myself in the church dedicated to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, standing before a group of men belonging to the Archconfraternity of the Eucharistic Thursdays. They were, if you like, the spiritual aristocracy of Barbastro. Mr. Pascau, Mr. Gravisasco, Mr. Puig, Mr. Gavas, Mr. Juseu (...) I asked them if we should invite Uncle Pelé - who invariably turned up for the liturgy every Thursday - to join the choir. The proposal was immediately accepted. From then on you could see the good Ceferino joining regularly, in the recitation of the prayers and in the chants, with the most prestigious men of Barbastro..."*<sup>31</sup>.

The witnesses interrogated by the tribunal confirm what Fr. Fandos writes about Pelé's piety, and even add some more details. José Cortes states that from the time he got to know him (from about 1915, since the witness was born in 1908 and knew him as a child), he saw him going to

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<sup>29</sup> FANDOS, p 15; *Summ* p 66.

<sup>30</sup> FANDOS, p 20; *Summ* p 68.

<sup>31</sup> FANDOS, p 19; *Summ* pp 67-68.

church (cf. *Summ*, p 5,8). Roman Celaya, born in 1913, was Pelé's neighbor, and he also saw him receiving Communion with great solemnity (*Summ*, p 10,8). The witness must be talking about the second decade of the century.

It can be proved by witnesses that from the 1920s, and even before, he was already very religious; he attended daily Mass and recited the rosary every day.

Delfina Arnal Girón, an old woman of 94 from Barbastro, recalls that Ceferino was an early bird.

*"I saw him going to Mass with my mother, from six to seven (the first Mass of the day). I knew him before I was married and remember I was clearing the pavement in front of my house. The gypsy said to me: 'Look at this, she's showing off what a worker she is, that way she'll get a husband!'" And the woman added: "He didn't like it if people blasphemed, and he would pull up anyone he heard swearing. He would say "What has God made you? He has given you your life. When I'm around, don't talk badly about God or about priests"<sup>B2</sup>.*

As Fr. Mario Riboldi observes, seeing that Delfina got married between the ages of 17 and 18, her saying that she saw the gypsy going to Mass refers to the years 1917-18.

The witness Alejandro Mora, after having told how Pelé went from his home to the cathedral on his knees with two candles in his hands, states that if anyone else had done this he would have been considered a figure of fun. In the case of the gypsy naturally it wasn't like that, because everyone knew how serious and religious he was. Considering that this happened after the court case over the alleged theft of the mule, that is around 1922, we must say that already at that time he was considered very religious.

Simon Sanchez Lalosa, ex-Claretian, was sacristan of the Claretian church in Barbastro in 1933 and could observe "how Pelé used to go there often, attending Mass and receiving Communion every day" (*Summ*, p 8,8).

Maruja, the grandniece of the Servant of God, born in 1924, recalls that "Uncle Pelé used to go to church a lot and took me and my sister there (...). He loved saying the rosary (...). I remember that he said his private prayers in the Catalan language" (*Summ*, p 20,9). Amparo Cenizo, daughter-in-law of the adopted daughter of the Servant of God, adds that she "heard it many times from my mother-in-law that Pelé used to go to Mass and receive Communion and recited the rosary at home" (*Summ*, p 26,8). Juan Broto, altar boy at the Claretian church towards the end of the 1920s, used to see the Servant of God "at Mass every day, and always sitting in the back pews" (*Summ*, p 33, 3).

Nicolás Santos de Otto, who was intimately associated with him for over 15 years, states that "he was a man who was very firm in his religious convictions" (*Summ*, p 40,3). And he adds:

*"He always carried his rosary with him, and you would often come across him saying it. When he was walking along the street, on his own or together with others, he always recited it. He was present every time he could at the Viaticum for the sick, at Mass, at the Forty Hours Prayer, as well as other religious ceremonies, in which he was a devoted participant, and was thought of as such" (Summ, p 41).*

Maria Carlota Santos de Otto, who practically grew up with Pelé around, confirms "that every day he went to Mass and said the rosary, because I myself saw him many times, and he made us say it with him (ie her brother Nicolás and her). I have heard it said many times in my home that he went to Mass every day and received Communion" (*Summ*, p 43,8). Moreover José Castellón, son of Ferruchon, close friend of the Servant of God, used to hear his father say "that Pelé went to daily Mass and said the rosary every day" (*Summ*, p 48,8).

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<sup>32</sup> RIBOLDI, p 91.

He was not ashamed of letting his faith be seen. He was first in the processions and always carried a lighted candle. Rufino Bruno remembers having seen him "leading the way in processions with a big candle" (*Summ*, p 23,19). And Trinidad Jiménez, one of his grandnieces, confirms that at Barbastro he was known for being "first in the processions" (*Summ*, p 47; cf. also p 40).

He did not limit himself to exterior displays of faith. His profound spirituality drew him to participate in associations which fostered prayer, the religious life, contemplation and charity, such as the Eucharistic Thursdays, the Nocturnal Adoration, the Confraternity of Franciscan Tertiaries, the St. Vincent de Paul Society.

As we have already said, Fr. Fandos - the one who got the Eucharistic Thursdays going in 1922 - asked the members of the Archconfraternity if he could let Pelé, who came to the Eucharistic liturgy every Thursday, to join the group. The response was unanimous, since everyone knew the spirituality of the gypsy Pelé<sup>33</sup>. Four years later, in 1926, the Capuchins decided to establish the Franciscan Third Order in the Church of St. Francis, and it was erected after a triduum of preparation. Besides the Bishop of the city, 11 priests, 33 seminarians and 114 laypeople became tertiaries. On that day Pelé, too, took the habit - and out of so many lay tertiaries he was one of the ten who were chosen as officers of the Confraternity. This shows the esteem in which the Servant of God was held<sup>34</sup>. Rev Santos Lalueza, who was then a seminarian, re-members that in the solemn ceremony whereby the Franciscan Third Order was erected, in which he took part together with other seminarians. "What particularly drew our attention was to find there a tall, dark gypsy, holding in his hands the tertiaries' banner. We commented very favorably on that". He was talking about Pelé (cf. *Summ*, p 13,4).

## **9. Apostle to children**

Fr. Fandos in his biography of Pelé states that the Servant of God "not only used to pray and conduct himself in an exemplary and edifying manner, but was a convincing apostle of the faith"<sup>35</sup>. Indeed, he sought by every means to spread the faith in his own way, above all by teaching children religious songs, telling them pious and devout stories and leading them to pray.

Fr. Fandos, again, writes down what was recounted by Donna Gloria Castellón (who must be the sister of witness 22, José Castellón), ie:

*"that he often got the children of the neighborhood together and took them out into the country, ostensibly to gather Hcenojo", an edible herb, but really to give them catechesis by telling them stories from the Bible and from Spanish history, and to get them singing church songs. He would exhort the kids to respect the birds and the ants. He would finish off by giving each one a piece of chocolate*<sup>36</sup>.

There are witnesses still alive who were invited to pray, taken for walks, and told stories by the Servant of God when they were small. José Cortes, a gypsy who was an eye witness, declares:

*"He would get a lot of children together, gypsies and gorgios, and teach them to pray, telling them little stories and giving them an afternoon snack" (Summ, p 5,9).*

Roman Celaya recounts that he was part of "a gang of little friends". Pelé showed them affection and tried to educate them:

*"Several times" - says the witness - "we would gather round him and he would take us out of the village; he gave us advice and we listened to him with great attention. It made a definite impact on our upbringing" (Summ, p 11,9).*

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<sup>33</sup> FANDOS, p 12; *Summ* p 68.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. the periodical "El Terciano Franciscano", XIV (1926) no 154, pp 334-335, *Proc* f 124.

<sup>35</sup> FANDOS, p 19; *Summ* p 67.

<sup>36</sup> FANDOS, p 16; *Summ* p 66.

Nicolás and Maria Carlota Santos de Otto remember with affection the pious stories Pelé used to tell them in order to educate them in the faith: "He would tell us - declares Nicolás - many tales and "histories" like that of St. Genevieve of Brabant. In this storytelling he was just as much taken up with the narration as we with listening" (*Summ*, p 41). Maria Carlota de Otto, this witness's sister, says the same (cf. *Summ*, p 43,9). Trinidad Jiménez, grandniece of the Servant of God, confirms that "he was very good with the children and treated us with great tenderness. He used to tell us tales and little stories, always about religious things, and took us to church to pray" (*Summ*, p 45,4). Andrés Jiménez, who was a child in the 1930s, remembers that "Pelé used to call the little boys (eight or ten) to go and pray in his house. He would tell them to be good, not do bad things" (*Summ*, p 53,1) On the affection of the Servant of God towards children (cf. *Summ*, pp 48,9; 20,9; 26,9).

Fr. Mario Riboldi puts down the testimony of El Bomba, born in 1908, which states that

*"when we were little we would go out with the other little boys, some of us sons of gypsies and others sons of gorgios, led by Pelé, up to the hill where the little chapel of San Ramón stands (St. Raymond, an ancient bishop of Barbastro). Up there the "kalò" used to make us laugh telling us things. I remember too that once the boys saw lots of ants and some of them started to stamp on them, but Ceferino put a stop to this, saying we shouldn't torment them because "they belong to God". Another Barbastro gypsy says he used to take the children to the "Bielsa enclosure", seat them round in a circle and teach them prayers and how to be good"<sup>37</sup>.*

## 10. Love for the poor

An expression of Pelé's faith, and of his love for God, was his love for his neighbor. We know from the author of his biography that he belonged to the St. Vincent de Paul Society, and moreover that during the last years of his life, when he was living in poverty, "he continued to give alms to the poor in whatever way he could"<sup>38</sup>. Virtually all the witnesses speak of the alms which the Servant of God used to give, and from which many of them benefited. José Cortes Gabarre, gypsy, born in 1908, declares:

*"I have seen on various occasions how he welcomed beggars in his house, gave them clothes in good condition and money, and he did all this in a very friendly way, treating them with affection".*

It was reported to Rev Santos Lalueza, who worked for many years with the gypsies, that Pelé was very charitable towards both the gypsies and the gorgios. Besides this he was told that "a young gypsy mother went to him, who had a child she couldn't suckle, and couldn't afford to buy milk for either. Every day, Ceferino gave the gypsy woman the money she needed to keep the child going (*Summ* 14,9).

Amparo Cenizo heard from her mother-in-law Pepita, the adopted daughter of the Servant of God, that

*"poor gypsies would go to him and he would take them into the house, feed them and treat them with great affection, calling them 'tato'". The witness adds: "I have heard her say too that Pelé took one poor gypsy who went to him into his stable and said: 'take whichever animal you want and you'll pay me when you can'" (*Summ*, p 26,9; cf. p 56,2).*

The brother and sister Nicolás and Maria Carlota de Otto, who practically lived with him for many years, state that "he was very charitable" and that "he gave many alms" (*Summ*, pp 41; 43,9). Trinidad Jiménez, one of his grandnieces, states that he did many works of charity, and adds:

*"When it snowed he used to go round the villages to see if there was anything the poor gypsies might need, and also in Barbastro. He ruined himself sharing his goods with the poor gypsies" (*Summ*, p 46).*

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<sup>37</sup> RIBOLDI, p 59.

<sup>38</sup> FANDOS, p 14; *Summ* p 65.

José Castellón declares that his charity was such that there was no gypsy in Barbastro or outside the city who did not have recourse to him or that he did not assist "morally and materially". His wife Teresa was not so generous, and sometimes told him off about this. When he used to give something "he would look round to see if his wife was watching" and say "it's so as not to have problems with my wife (...) if I can avoid getting into hot water" (*Summ*, p 48,9). Or he would say to the person he was helping: "Take this, don't let her know" (*Summ*, p 53,5).

We have already mentioned the heroic act of charity retold by Fr. Fandos, when he went to the help of someone ill with tuberculosis who had been coughing up blood, notwithstanding the terror this illness provoked through fear of infection. The witness Isabel Jiménez, Pepita's granddaughter, says:

*"I have been told that on one occasion when someone ill from tuberculosis had been coughing up blood, he went over, cleaned him up, put him over his shoulders and carried him home. And he did this despite the fact that gypsies are very touchy about sick people for fear of infection - and particularly at that time, when tuberculosis was considered an incurable illness".*

Proof that his charity was inspired by a supernatural spirit is the fact that he made no distinction between gorgios and gypsies, helping everyone, and that his love extended also to his enemies. Nicolás Santos de Otto declares on this subject:

*"He never had hard words for his enemies, or for those who thought or acted differently from how he believed you should think and act. When he referred to such people, it was only to make excuses for them or show compassion on them for their errors" (*Summ*, p 41).*

This never speaking evil of anyone and love for one's enemies are signs which distinguish the saints, and these virtues were not lacking in the Servant of God, whom some people already during his lifetime considered a saint.



## II. MARTYRDOM

Despite discrepancies between witnesses concerning the day on which the Servant of God was imprisoned, and the date of his martyrdom, the declarations are unanimous as regards both the material facts of his martyrdom, and what provoked it on the part both of the gaolers and of the Servant of God. Unanimous also are the declarations on the spread of his reputation as a saint and martyr, which began immediately both among the gypsies and the gorgios. We will now explore all these points, seeking to throw light on them from the witnesses' declarations and documents.

### 1. Arrest of the Servant of God (July 1936)

All the witnesses are in agreement in stating that the Servant of God was imprisoned for having stood up for a priest that some militiamen had arrested on the street, and for carrying a rosary in his pocket.

We don't know for certain the day on which he was arrested. According to Fr. Fandos he was arrested on "Saturday 19th July"<sup>39</sup>.

The witness Simon Sanchez, who at that time was a Claretian Brother and sacristan at the Claretian Church, also maintains that Pelé was arrested on 19th July, Sunday:

*"Pelé was arrested in St. Francis Square coming out of the parish church, together with the parish priest, on Sunday 19th July. I know because Fr. Munárriz CMF said to me 'They have arrested Pelé and the parish priest. We are lost', and they arrested him solely because he had stood up for the parish priest. They asked him if he was carrying any weapons and he showed his rosary. This too I know from Fr. Munárriz" (Summ, p 8,13).*

The same witness, in various letters of 1993 addressed to the postulator in Barbastro, states several times that Pelé was arrested on 19th July, Sunday<sup>40</sup>, after the 8.00 Mass, together with the parish priest of St. Francis Church. That same day Fr. Felipe de Jesus Munárriz, the Claretian Superior, told him to watch out if he saw anything strange at Sunday Mass (cf. *Summ*, pp 59-60).

Certainly this witness must be given serious consideration, since if he heard the news of the arrest of the Servant of God directly from the mouth of Fr. Munárriz, this would mean he must have heard it before 20th July, because on that day they arrested Fr. Munárriz and the witness never saw him again.

Nicolás Santos de Otto says the same:

*"We had hardly arrived in Barbastro when 19th July took us by surprise. On that day, anxious to obtain information and find out what was going on in the streets, he went out to take a walk. And he didn't come back" (Summ, p 42).*

Maria Carlota de Otto indicates the day on which Pelé was arrested, but states that he was at the Otto family home and that her father asked him to talk a walk round the city to see what was going on (cf. *Summ*, p 44, 13). This would mean firstly, that he didn't leave from the house of his adopted daughter, as Maruja says, but instead from the Otto home; and secondly that this must have been the first day of the revolution, because no one knew what was happening and this was why Nicolás Otto sent the gypsy to inspect the city.

There are other witnesses who have stated that Pelé was one of the first to be arrested. Thus Alejandro Mora Sesé, in a declaration made before Fr. Gabriel Campo, Claretian, on 11th December 1993, states that Pelé "was one of the first arrested in Barbastro" (*Proc*, f 176).

However, there are those who maintain that the Servant of God was arrested on Saturday 25th July, for the following reasons.

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<sup>39</sup> FANDOS, p 22; *Summ* p 69. Fr. Fandos makes a mistake here, since 19th July was a Sunday.

<sup>40</sup> Actually, in some letters he states that he was arrested on 18th, and in others on 19th, July, but he always says it was a Sunday; therefore it would have been 19th, since 18th was a Saturday.

In the first place Maruja, who in her various declarations has shown herself to possess an enviable memory, above all where dates are concerned, states that he was arrested on a Saturday. And she remembers this well from an important detail. Her mother said she had to go out for a moment to buy some chick-peas, because the following day being Sunday the shops would be closed.

*"I don't remember exactly what day of the month it was when they arrested him. I remember it was a Saturday because I heard my mother say: 'I must go and buy some chick-peas because it's closed tomorrow'. My mother said to Uncle Pelé not to go out that night, because she had seen men armed with rifles (...). I don't know why, but the fact is that despite receiving this warning, Pelé went out of the house, and my mother went to look for him and he was already in prison. She asked why, and they told her they took him when he defended two priests (...). He stayed in the prison 15 days" (Summ, p 21).*

And in an extrajudicial declaration she adds:

*"It was a Saturday night. The shops had still not shut (...). It was the first day on which men armed with rifles were going around Barbastro" (Summ, p 57).*

The witness not only states that it was Saturday, but indicates also an important circumstantial detail which confirms her assertion, ie that her mother went to the shop because the following day, Sunday, it would have been closed. Now, this could not have been Saturday 18th July because that day was such a peaceful day that in the evening the taxi-drivers were able to celebrate the Feast of St. Christopher with street dancing. Only after the dancing was over did people begin to notice anything unusual, and at midnight the People's Front seized power.

Various witnesses agree with Fr. Fandos in stating that the Servant of God was imprisoned for having stood up for one or two priests whom the militiamen had arrested. Now the first priest was arrested not on Saturday 18th, but on Sunday 19th.

The witness José Cortes Gabarre, in an extrajudicial declaration before Fr. Mario Riboldi, has stated that the gypsies in those days, that is after 19th July, were in hiding while Pelé went around without worrying about anything and carrying news<sup>41</sup>.

Fr. Francis Trell, priest, in a declaration made on 24th May 1994 before Fr. Gabriel Campo, stated that he had been a seminarian then and that "during the first days of the revolution I was hidden in a friend's house and he (Pelé) brought me news"<sup>42</sup>.

The witness Roman Celaya, in a declaration of 13th-14th February 1993 before Fr. Gabriel Campo, stated that "during the first days of the revolution they avoided killing gypsies, and even foreigners" (*Proc*, f 180).

One of the witnesses, the caretaker of the public depot in Barbastro which had been turned into a prison, mentions those who were arrested on Sunday 19th July 1936 (among whom were José Martínez, tenor singer at the cathedral) and cites the number of the others arrested, but not the gypsy - which is strange, since it would have attracted his attention:

*"They brought to the municipal depot ... a resident of Barbastro, who was certainly the declarant's elder brother, and wanted him put in prison ... the declarant would not agree because the order had not arrived ... A little later they brought along a priest called Fr. José Martínez and imprisoned him in the municipal depot, then Fr. José M Claver, and the number of detainees gathered together in the depot grew so that after three days there were 85 of them"<sup>43</sup>.*

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<sup>41</sup> Cf. RIBOLDI, "Un vero kalò", Italian version of "Un verdadero callo", p 129.

<sup>42</sup> Declaration of Fr. Francis Trell, in the Postulation Archive.

<sup>43</sup> National Historical Archive of Madrid, General Process of Enquiry, Barbastro, Box 1409/1, fol 144.

The witness Simon Sanchez, ex-Claretian, does not appear too credible in stating that the Servant of God was arrested on Sunday 19th July together with the parish priest of St. Francis, Fr. Mariano Frago. Indeed, as we read in the book "Martyrdom of the Church in Barbastro", this priest was arrested on 21st July at his home<sup>44</sup>.

Fr. Fandos states that when the Servant of God was taken to prison, he met there "Fr. Felix Sanz, Canon Mariano Sesé, Rev Martinez, tenor at the cathedral, a Benedictine Father, a Piarist Father and the Heart of Mary priests: Felipe Munárriz, Juan Diaz and Feliciano Peléz". Well, these priests were being arrested from 20th July onwards. If Pelé met them in prison, this would mean he was arrested after the 20th.

As we can see, there are "rounds for maintaining the first hypothesis as much as the second. Perhaps the declaration that he was arrested on 19th July can be reconciled with the declaration of Maruja, who states that he was arrested on a Saturday, which would seem to make it 25th July. In the first place Maruja maintains that Pelé left the house on a Saturday. Pelé could have left the house on the evening of Saturday 18th and gone to sleep at the Ottos' house. Then he could have gone out the next day, Sunday, attended Mass and been arrested coming out of the church, as the witness Simon Sanchez maintains. This is bearing in mind that Maruja says it was "the first day in which men armed with rifles were going around Barbastro" (*Summ*, p 57).

On the other hand, the reasoning adopted by Fr. Mario Riboldi is also worth considering, ie that José Cortes Gabarre and Fr. Trell said that, when the revolution broke out, Pelé went around the city and brought news while they stayed in hiding.

In any case, whether the Servant of God was arrested on 19th or 25th July does not alter the substance of things. What is important is that he was arrested for having stood up for his faith in Christ, and this is more than proved, in that all the witnesses state that he was arrested for two reasons: for having defended a Priest who had been arrested, and for carrying a rosary in his hand.

The Servant of God was definitely taken to the Capuchin Convent, where at least 350 detainees had been transferred - among them the Claretian Fathers already mentioned<sup>45</sup> - and he stayed there until the day he was shot.

According to Fr. Fandos, the reason for his arrest was the fact of his having gone to the defense "of a young priest who was struggling to free himself in the middle of a group of militiamen".

The Servant of God reproached the militiamen with these words:

*"Help me, Holy Virgin! So many men against one, and him innocent too!' The militiamen threw themselves on him and, on searching him, found in his pocket a little paperknife and a simple chaplet of the rosary. These signs were sufficient for the party to take him to prison"<sup>46</sup>.*

All the witnesses confirm what Fr. Fandos reports, that he was arrested for having defended a priest (cf. *Summ*, pp 6,13; 22,13; 27,13; 28,13; 34,13; 36,13; 38,13; 44,44). Some witnesses state that it was not one, but two priests (cf. *Summ*, pp 30,13; 48,4; 58)<sup>47</sup>. With minor variations, they

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid, Ch III, note 77.

<sup>45</sup> Fr. Fandos writes that on 25th July, wanting to empty out a bit the local prisons, which were in a crowded and infectious condition, they transferred three hundred and fifty detainees to the nearby Capuchin Convent. Among them, it would seem, were the Servant of God and his prison companions José Sublas and Vicente Bruno (cf. *Summ* p 24). In the cause for Fr. Felipe de Jesus Munárriz and his companion martyrs, the said transfer is described in the following terms: "On 25th July) a transfer of prisoners was organized from the municipal prison to the Capuchin Convent. They walked there in a number of lines, guarded by forces of armed police and militiamen. Once at the convent they distributed the prisoners among the cells" (Barbastren, CF.AB, *Informatio*, p 170. In the account given by Fr. Pablo Hall, eye witness, it says that the transfer took place on 21st July, cf. Ibid, *Summ* p 125).

<sup>46</sup> FANDOS, p 12; *Summ* p 69.

<sup>47</sup> It is unclear who was the priest the Servant of God sought to defend. The Postulator in Barbastro, Fr. Gabriel Campo, maintains that the Servant of God was arrested with the tenor at the cathedral, Fr. José Mardnez. However the witness Simon Sanchez Tolosa states that he is sure of the fact that the Servant of God was arrested together with the

report the words the gypsy is supposed to have pronounced against the militiamen: "So many people to arrest one clergyman" (*Summ*, p 6,13). "Bullies, four against one, and him innocent!" (*Summ*, p 27,13). "Help me, Holy Virgin! Aren't you ashamed to take a man away like that when he hasn't done anything, and so many of you to do it?" (*Summ*, p 42).

The witnesses Rev Pablo Pueyo, Rev Santos Lalueza, Adela Jiménez and Dolores Ibarz Aznarez also put forward as the reason for his arrest the fact that he was carrying a rosary in his pocket (cf. *Summ*. pp 35,12-22; 15,13; 31,13; 51,13).

## **2. Attitude of the Servant of God in the face of martyrdom**

When collecting information in the 1960s to write his little book about Pelé, Fr. Fandos was able to interrogate three of his prison companions, who were saved at the last moment. They assured him that in prison the Servant of God devoted himself to prayer. Fr. Fandos writes:

*"Some of those who were his companions in prison are still alive, like the businessman Don Vicente Bruno, the clerk Don Mariano Sanz and the farmer Don José Sublas. They speak of his recollection and of his living in an atmosphere of prayer"<sup>48</sup>.*

Rufino Bruno Vidal heard from his brother Vicente Bruno, one of Pelé's prison companions, that "in prison (...) he used to pray and recite the rosary" (*Summ*, p 23,20).

Various witnesses heard from Pepita, the adopted daughter who took him food each day to the prison, that he spent hours saying the rosary, to the point of putting his life in danger by demonstrating his faith. Pepita begged him many times in tears not to recite the rosary or flaunt his faith, because they would kill him. She sought help in the end from the anarchist Eugenio Sopena, who was one of the most influential members of the revolutionary committee and who had a high opinion of Pelé, to get him to save his life. Sopena tried more than once to persuade the Servant of God to hand over his rosary to him, and dissimulate his Catholicism, but did not succeed. The gypsy would not hand over his rosary because, as the witness Andrés Jiménez Jiménez, gypsy, states: "the rosary signified faith in Christ, reciting it was prayer" (*Summ* p 54,9), and he continued to recite it while in prison.

Maruja, daughter of Pepita, who was 12 years old, lived through the whole drama and recalls the suffering of her mother.

*"My mother used to take food for him in prison, and sometimes Teliné went with her. I knew he used to say the rosary in prison and that Pepita asked Eugenio Sopena, a great friend of the family, to help get him out and make him hand over his rosary. Eugenio replied that he had tried to do it many times, but that Pelé absolutely wouldn't listen" (*Summ* p 21,14).*

Clotilde Jiménez, Teliné, was Pepita's daughter and she was 10 years old, having been born in June 1926. She too remembers perfectly the drama the family went through when Pelé was in prison. We quote the declaration she made before Fr. Gabriel Campo Villegas CMF, at Castelldefells on 3rd December 1993:

*"Eugenio Sopena was 'a beautiful person'. He lived with his mother on the top floor of our house. The house was rented from Grand-father Menino, Pelé's brother. Pelé stayed with Don Nicolás. My mother, Pepita, said to Sopena: 'Eugenio, take his rosary off him'. And Pepita went and said to him, 'Uncle, don't pray so much. Give me the rosary. Throw it, throw it, so that I can pass you something'". And Pepita would go out with a headache. She hadn't been*

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parish priest of St. Francis of Assisi, Fr. Mariano Frago, going out from the 8.00 morning Mass (cf. *Summ* p 8, 13 and the testimony 4, pp 59-60). Simon Sanchez is perhaps mistaken in saying that he was arrested with Fr. Mariano Frago. It is more likely that he was arrested with Fr. José Martínez, treasurer of St. Francis Church, who was the first priest to be imprisoned in Barbastro.

<sup>48</sup> FANDOS, p 23; *Summ* p 69.

*able to persuade him. She kept saying "They're going to kill you'. Eugenio Sopena asked Pelé many times to hand over his rosary to him. But he didn't succeed" (Summ, pp 54-55,2).*

Amparo Cenizo, Pepita's daughter-in-law, heard many times from her mother-in-law that, when Pelé was in prison, she took him food and that she told him many times "to hand over his rosary because they would kill him; also Sopena insisted many times that he should give him the chaplet. And he always refused, saying that it was the only one he had. And perhaps he would have been saved from death if he had handed it over. I think that given how things stood at that moment, the Servant of God knew they would shoot him if he didn't renounce his faith. In any case, he did not apostasize from his faith. He preferred to die sooner" (*Summ*, p 27,14).

Almost unanimously the other witnesses state that the Servant of God used to recite the rosary in prison, putting his life in danger (cf. *Summ*, pp 6,15; 15,14; 13-18; 42; 44; 49,14). They add that a personage who was influential on the committee, to save him, asked him to hand over his rosary and not show his religious faith, but the Servant of God preferred to face death (cf. *Summ*, pp 6,15; 15,14; 30,13; 34,13-15; 44,15; 46; 49,14).

Basing himself on reliable sources, Fr. Fandos states that the Servant of God died shouting "Viva Cristo Rey!" (Christ the King for ever!)<sup>49</sup>. In effect, Telesforo Jordán de Urries, relative of Nicolás de Otto, wrote in 1965 to Fr. Fandos giving him more details on Pelé. One of the things he said was that it was generally spoken about in Barbastro, immediately after the war, that the Servant of God died shouting "Viva Cristo Rey"<sup>50</sup>. This is confirmed by various witnesses, among them José Cortes, who had it "from remarks made by some enemies of religion. (*Summ* p 7,22); Isabel Jiménez Cenizo, granddaughter of Pepita, according to what her grandmother told her (*Summ*, 30,22); and the sisters Trinidad, Clotilde and Laura Jiménez, daughters of Pepita (*Summ*, pp 46; 55,4). Rev Andrés Carrera Puertolas, who was a seminarian and who on 1st August was sent as a soldier to Barbastro, recalls perfectly "the comments which were being made in those days about the gypsy Pelé: 'When they took him to be shot with many others in the cemetery, he wouldn't stop shouting «Viva Cristo Rey», and he died with his rosary in his hands'" (*Summ*, p 60).

### **3. Martyrdom: the material facts**

There is no absolute certainty, either, about the date of his martyrdom. Fr. Gabriel Campo, following Fr. Fandos, maintains that Pelé was martyred together with the three Claretian Fathers on 2nd August 1936<sup>51</sup>. Fr. Fandos states that the Servant of God was taken to the cemetery and shot "on 2nd August 1936, around three in the morning, together with 19 others among whom were priests, religious and specially selected Christians"<sup>52</sup>.

Simon Sanchez, ex-Claretian Brother, also states that the Servant of God was murdered on 2nd August 1936 (*Summ*, p 9,17). Roman Celaya only knows that the martyrdom took place during the first days of August (*Summ*, p 12,17).

One of the witnesses who made declarations in the criminal proceedings against A. Avellana, Conrado Mur Peropadre, states that he was arrested on 22nd July, that he was first in the party prison and was then transferred to the Capuchin Convent, and continues:

*"One night they took twenty five prisoners to be shot; among them I recall there were Fernando Gagas; Fr. Tomas Andanuy, priest; the Perrelas, father and sons Fr. Crisanto, Piarist; the gypsy known as Pelé; someone else known as Creus; some mission priests and others that I don't remember, whom Avellana went to fetch from their cell" (Summ, pp 77-78).*

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<sup>49</sup> FANDOS, p 24; *Summ* p 70.

<sup>50</sup> FANDOS, p 29; *Summ* p 72.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. *Esta es nuestra sanare*, Madrid, 1992, p 222.

<sup>52</sup> FANDOS, p 24; *Summ* p 70.

The list of people indicated by the witness coincides - almost exactly - with the - less precise - list from the account given in the Causa Generale, in which are written the names of those shot day by day in the city of Barbastro.

*"On 2nd August 1936, by order of the committee, they took from the party prison with the above-mentioned authorization: His Excellency Fr. Mariano Sesé, canon; Rev Tomas Andanuy, beneficed priest; Rev Fr. José Martínez, tenor at the cathedral; Rev Fr. José Mariano Frago, of the Parish of St. Francis; Rev Fr. Victorino Puyol, of the Parish of Our Lady of the Assumption; Rev Fr. Manuel Falceto, priest; Rev Fr. Mariano Puig, priest; Rev Fra Felice Munárriz, Juan Diaz and Leoncio Peléz; together with Salvador Perrela Estadinti, mechanic; Salvador Perrela Blasco, mechanic; and Fernando Gabas Garcia, landowner. They were murdered in Camino Viejo de Sagoza in the district called "La Forca", a place within the municipal boundaries of Barbastro"<sup>53</sup>.*

The document fails to indicate the place of the shooting, which we know took place in the cemetery, and it leaves out the names of the Piarist Father Crisanto Dominguez; Gonzalo Creus, a non-commissioned officer in the army; and the Servant of God Ceferino Jiménez Malla, whom it lists among those killed on unknown dates during the first fortnight of August<sup>54</sup>, and who, according to the witness Conrado Mur already cited, were shot on the same day as the Claretian Fathers.

Well, we know with certainty that Fathers Felipe de Jesus Munárriz, Juan Diaz Nosti and Leonci Peléz, were martyred on 2nd August, and so the Servant of God would have been shot the same day.

Besides this the witness Alejandro Sese says he knows that Pelé was "among the first who were killed" (*Summ*, p 33,14-22). And in an extrajudicial declaration made before Fr. Gabriel Campo, he adds: "Since the death of Pelé was one of the first, the news spread quickly. We weren't used to it yet. Because it was one of the first, it made a greater impact" (*Proc* f 77). Also the witness Dolores Ibarz states that they killed him "at the cemetery wall and during the first days of the revolution" (*Summ*, p 51,14-23).

Despite this, Fr. Mario Riboldi maintains that the Servant of God was not martyred on 2nd August, but either on the 8th or more probably the 9th of that month. It is true that if, as said before, Pelé was arrested on 25th July and remained in prison fifteen or sixteen days, as Maruja states<sup>55</sup>, he must have been martyred on 8th or 9th August<sup>56</sup>.

Fr. Mario Riboldi writes:

*"During the night of 9th August 1936, between the Saturday and the Sunday, Bishop Florentino was slaughtered, and with him probably the Benedictine Father Mariano Serra Almazor and some others: there were thirteen people altogether. So was Ceferino Jiménez Malla among those shot? He may well have been, if the calculations we have made are correct"<sup>57</sup>.*

Besides, as Roman Celaya declares in his testimony of 13th - 14th February 1993, during the first days they avoided killing gypsies and foreigners (cf. *Proc*, f 180). It would have been strange if one of the first to be shot was actually a gypsy.

Here, too, we can conclude by saying that it matters little whether he was shot on 2nd or 8th August. What is important is to know that he was martyred for having professed his faith.

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<sup>53</sup> *Barbastren, CPM, Appendix*, p 61.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p 64.

<sup>55</sup> In a declaration made before Fr. Riboldi and Fr. Gabriel Campo, she actually said that he remained in prison 15 or 16 days. Cf. Riboldi "Un vero kalò", p 137.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> RIBOLDI, p 150.

### *Shot in Barbastro Cemetery*

Although we cannot indicate the date with any certainty, we know that the Servant of God was shot in Barbastro cemetery together with other people.

According to what we are told by the witness José Castelláno, son of Pelé's close friend "Ferruchon", they did not die under the first volley and it was a certain Bellostas who gave the coup de grâce. He heard this many times from the lips of his father, who in his turn heard it from one of those who took part in the shooting: The one who actually brought about his death was a certain "Bellostas", who lived in the same street as Pelé; when they shot the priests and the laypeople, Pelé didn't die from the first volley of shots and so "Bellostas" said: "The gypsy's still alive, he's the best, and he shot him again, killing him: this was the coup de grâce. I know this because my father told me many times and he heard it from one of those who took a direct part in the shooting, and who was very upset about Pelé being among the group that was shot. This same witness said that Pelé died with his rosary in his hand" (*Summ*, p 49,15-22).

From the records of the court case against the war criminals prepared by the Procurator General in the 1940s, we know that as a general rule the victims, before being thrown into a common pit, were stripped of everything they had on them - sometimes even of their teeth. Then, piled into a common pit, they were covered with quicklime and with water to set the quicklime working. Then they were covered with earth. This has been admitted by, among others, Mariano Carruesco Arnal, who helped the gravedigger at this sad task (cf. *Proc*, f 206).

It is hardly surprising that when this court case reached the stage of identifying the bodies, despite all their efforts the gypsies could not identify the Servant of God. Thus Maruja, daughter of Pepita, says: "From what I have heard, he was buried in a common pit in the cemetery and covered with water and quicklime. It was impossible to recover the remains even though my father, after the war, went to the cemetery, but could not identify him" (*Summ*, p 21,18).

#### **4. Cause of martyrdom ex parte tyranni**

It has been adequately proved that during the Civil War there took place in Spain a real religious persecution and that thousands of priests and religious were killed, and many lay people with them, solely out of hatred towards religion.

Where the city of Barbastro is concerned, in the processes prepared for the cause of the Claretian martyrs and the Bishop of the city, Florentino Asensio Borroso, it has been proved that both the priests and the Bishop were killed exclusively out of hatred for the faith. In the case of the Claretians the cause of martyrdom is beyond discussion, in that they were declared Blessed on 25th October 1992. With regard to the Bishop, too, it is known that he was martyred in *odium fidei*.

*"From the declarations in the process it can be deduced from all the evidence and with unanimity of criteria that the murder of the Servant of God must be imputed exclusively to the fact that he was a Bishop and a priest; they were trying to destroy religion"<sup>58</sup>.*

In our case, according to the unanimous statements of the witnesses, there was no personal vendetta. There could have been no motivation of a political sort (the Servant of God never being involved in politics); or for any material advantage; or from hatred provoked by cheating or rotten deals on Pelé's part, since he was a peaceful and honest man who would never do anyone any harm. They arrested him and then killed him because he was an extremely religious man, who demonstrated his faith publicly, and because he carried a rosary and prayed it in prison.

We will give some witness declarations. Roman Celaya Puyuelo, born in 1913, who knew the Servant of God well, declares:

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<sup>58</sup> *Barbastren, CPM, Informatio*, p 145.

*"I was never told that he got involved in any political factions. I have never heard anyone say he was killed out of personal hatred or for a vendetta. I am convinced he was condemned to death for the fact of being a Christian and a good person" (Summ, p 12,19).*

Rufino Bruno Vidal, born 1904, who knew Pelé since he was a child, states:

*"The sole motive they had for killing him was his religious faith, which he had demonstrated publicly many times. I remember having seen him leading the way in processions carrying a big candle. Besides this, he was known in the city as a Catholic. He didn't belong to any political party, nor was he accused from hatred or any sort of vendetta" (Summ, p 23,18).*

The testimony of Angel Tornes is no less explicit and significant:

*"I would like to add to my declaration that the Servant of God was condemned for his religious faith and I have never heard that there were any other motives, neither political, or for any material advantage, or social, or personal hatred. I believe that the atmosphere in those days was such that they killed him for the same reason as they killed the priests and religious, that is from hatred towards the faith, just as they also killed other laypeople from the same motive" (Summ, p 26).*

The other witnesses state the same. Here are some of the things they say: "For being a Catholic and a friend to priests" (*Summ*, p 6,19) "For being a good Catholic" (9,19); "For carrying a rosary and being a practising Catholic" (22,19); "For having stood up for a priest and because he was carrying a rosary with him" (27,19); for "his religious faith"; for "his religious fervor" (30,19; 34,16-22); "From hatred toward religion" (31,22b).

It is true that one of the butchers, Antonio Avellana, who incited his companions to take the Servant of God from the prison to be shot, when he was judged after the war, said in order to defend himself that he did it because "he had a hatred towards him because Pelé had swindled a relative of his, named Antonio, known as the riding master of Corzan, when he sold him a horse" (*Summ*, p 78). Maruja, Pepita's daughter, has a good answer to this one, saying that Pelé could not have cheated any relative of Avellana "because for many years he had no longer dealt in horses; he was poor and lived with Don Nicolás, as a trusted person, and Don Nicolás used to pay him wages" (*Summ*, p 56). We would add that it seems very strange that A Avellano should only then have recalled this alleged fraud of Pelé's, when previously he had said nothing. Besides, he was unable to prove this story of cheating before the tribunal.

## **5. Reputation as a martyr**

That in Barbastro both gorgios and gypsies considered Pelé a true martyr is declared by Rev Andrés Carrero, who was then a seminarian and who on 1st August was sent to Barbastro as a soldier in the headquarters. In those days everyone was talking about the case of the gypsy Pelé, who "when they took him off to be shot with many others in the cemetery never stopped shouting 'Viva Cristo Rey', and died with a rosary in his hand" (*Summ* p 60).

Indeed as the witnesses state, everyone, gorgios and gypsies, considered the Servant of God from the very beginning as a true martyr, who had given his life in defense of the faith. Thus for example Maruja, Pepita's daughter, states:

*"From the first moment everyone considered that Pelé died because of his faith, and the gypsies thought this just as much as the gorgios, and they still believe it today. The present generation continues to follow this version of what were the reasons for his death" (Summ, p 22,22b).*

José Cortes Gabarre, gypsy, confirms the reputation of the Servant of God as a martyr:

*"From the first moment the Servant of God was considered a martyr for the faith. He was so considered by gypsies and priests and laypeople, just as the priests and religious who were shot with him were considered martyrs. In my home we pray for his soul and sometimes we also ask him for something" (Summ, p 7,22).*



The gypsies who made declarations in the process state unanimously that among them Pelé is considered as a martyr because he died for his faith, and they even commend themselves to his intercession. This is stated by Elena Jiménez Cenizo and Isabel Jiménez Cenizo, respectively daughter-in-law and granddaughter of Pepita (*Summ*, p 29,22b; 30,22b). José Castellón, gypsy, states that his family used to commend themselves to his intercessions.

*"My family commend themselves to Pelé because we hold that he is a saint, and we have a picture for our private prayer, approved by the Church" (Summ, p 49,22b).*

The Santos de Otto family, too, always considered him a martyr and commended themselves to his intercession, as Maria Carlota de Otto states:

*"At home we always considered him a martyr for the faith, and on various occasions we commended ourselves to him for him to help us and solve some problem" (Summ, p 44,22b).*

This attitude has not died out with the passing of time, as happens in some cases, but has always remained alive, and always become deeper.

In the 1960s Fr. Fandos began to prepare his little booklet on Pelé and by doing so revived the memories of his martyrdom. In 1967 two articles appeared in the newspaper "El Cruzado Aragonés" recalling the character of the gypsy martyr (cf. *Proc* f 253). In the 1970s, as we are told by Rev Pablo Pueyo, Fr. Fandos insisted that a cause of canonization should be initiated (*Summ*, p 35,23), and three years later, in 1973, this same Fr. Fandos published a book entitled "El Pelé".

The Bishop of Barbastro himself echoes the reputation which the gypsy has always had in the city. He writes in the introduction to Fr. Mario Riboldi's book:

*"From the first days of my induction into the Diocese of Barbastro, the memory of Pelé has resounded constantly around me. Gorgios and gypsies have reawakened his memory and the sense of admiration they have for him on many occasions, stressing that during the first days of the bloody Civil War he gave his own life for the Christian faith which he professed"<sup>59</sup>.*

Rev Santos Lalueza, ex-Vicar General of the diocese, attests that five or six years ago the counselor of the gypsies of Poland became interested in Pelé, since the fame of his martyrdom had reached even to that country (*Sum*, p 16,23). Fr. Riboldi, more precise, maintains that the said counselor became interested in the cause of Pelé precisely in 1984.

The fame of the martyrdom remains alive in our days, as is attested by many witnesses (*Summ*, pp 24,24; 36,24; 44,24; 49,24). The opening of the process for canonization has aroused great enthusiasm among the gypsies, who came in great numbers to the opening ceremony, as can be seen from several photographs published in Fr. Mario Riboldi's book. Today, interest in the cause is being shown by gypsies of various nationalities.

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<sup>59</sup> RIBOLDI, "Presentazione del Vescovo di Barbastro".

Translated from Italian by Jean Olwen Maynard

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