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the cause of the
Georgia Martyrs

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A Message from the Bishop

BELOW: Bishop Gregory J. Hartmayer of Savannah celebrates Mass at the Santa Catalina de Guale mission site on St. Catherines Island in Georgia Oct. 14, 2013. It was his first visit to the site of the oldest church in Georgia. The mission dates back to the 1570s and has been the subject of study by archaeologists for nearly three decades. Scientists on the island continue to excavate with a sense of urgency as erosion from rising sea levels threaten the remains of a vanished American Indian community.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Peace and all good things!

When I was appointed Bishop of the Diocese of Savannah in 2011, I was suddenly presented with a series of changes and surprises in my life. As a Franciscan Bishop, one of the most significant surprises was learning that the Diocese of Savannah had presented a formal beatification case to the Congregation for the Causes of Saints requesting Rome to recognize five Franciscan friars killed in Coastal Georgia in 1597 as martyrs of the faith.

I read the official document presented to Rome which had been meticulously prepared by a team of Franciscan scholars and diocesan representatives throughout the decades, and found the lives of Friar Pedro de Corpa and his companion friars Blas, Miguel, Antonio, and Francisco to be quite remarkable. I learned about the string of missions founded by Spanish missionaries along the Atlantic coast of Florida, Georgia, and South Carolina in the late 1500s, and about the general friendly relations that existed between the missionaries and various indigenous peoples.

Shortly after arriving to Savannah I visited the site of the Santa Catalina de Guale Mission, founded in the 1590s on the shores of today's Saint Catherines Island approximately thirty miles south of Savannah. Dr. David Hurst Thomas, an archaeologist from the American Museum of Natural History in New York who has dedicated much of his professional life to finding, researching, and preserving the history of the Mission, led the excursion. I celebrated Mass on a rustic altar where the mission had been, an area now marked by beautiful palm trees. Here countless Guale natives came to know Christ, and the remains of many of them still lie beneath the ground at the site. It was here where Friar Miguel and Friar Antonio were martyred in 1597 as they refused to believe that a war party was coming to kill them. It was a unique thrill for me to celebrate Mass on this holy site where friars also celebrated Mass centuries ago, and to stand on holy ground consecrated by the blood of martyrs.

Aware that I have inherited the fruits of the tireless efforts of many before me, including my predecessors Bishop Raymond Lessard and Bishop Kevin Boland, my desire is that this case move forward in Rome so that these fellow Franciscan friars will be recognized as martyrs and be declared blessed by the Church. I renew my commitment to this cause every time I consider the courage they displayed in leaving behind their home country of Spain to preach the Gospel in distant lands, and the steadfastness with which they preached the faith even when having to defend the sacramentality of marriage with their lives. The story of Friar Pedro de Corpa and Companions is timely and their beatification in the 21st century appropriate because these men defended the sacrament of marriage. They are signs of hope for us today when secular forces attempt to redefine the institution of marriage, making the friars a welcomed voice to all those who strive to live out the vocation of marriage.

In 2015 I visited the Congregation for the Causes of Saints to inquire about the cause, and was directed to Father Giovangiuseppe Califano, OFM, the Postulator of the Cause of Friar Pedro de Corpa and Companions. Father Califano has guided us these past few years to move the case forward. Cooperation with the Franciscan Friars of the Holy Name Province of New York continues since for many years this Province advanced the cause. At the direction of Father Califano, the Diocese of Savannah has taken steps to increase awareness and devotion to these five courageous friars who first preached the Catholic faith in our state. We have developed a variety of ways to tell the story of Friar Pedro de Corpa and Companions including a beautiful website, prayer cards, posters and other initiatives. In the near future we hope to have tangible signs at the various sites of the martyrdom of the friars along the coast of our diocese.

As a Franciscan Bishop, I especially feel determined to contribute to the public recognition by the Church of the price of discipleship in boldly preaching and witnessing the teachings of the Church. Friar Pedro de Corpa and Companions are our spiritual ancestors in South Georgia, a local church that is rich in diversity and history. May they pray for us and our intentions, and may their ultimate sacrifice in the name of Christ be officially recognized by the Church.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

+ Gregory J. Hartmayer, OFM Conv.

Most Reverend Gregory J. Hartmayer, OFM Conv.
Bishop of Savannah

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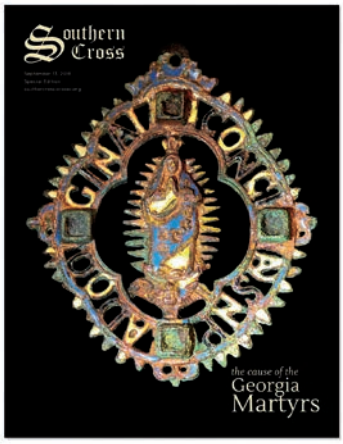

ON THE COVER

One of the religious artifacts, a medal, from the archaeological dig at Mission Santa Catalina on Saint Catherines Island. The medal depicts Our Lady of Guadalupe. The inscription, moving clockwise from the top, is best read as Concepida sine pecado original and translates in English to Conceived without original sin. *(The squares on the medal represent nails and block out some of the letters.)* This artifact and thousands of additional artifacts from the dig are housed at Fernbank Museum in Atlanta.

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PEDRO DE CORPA
AND COMPANIONS:

The Story of the Georgia Martyrs

In the late sixteenth century, six Spanish Franciscans came to what is now the Georgia coast to minister to the native people called the Guale. Between September 14th and September 17th, 1597, all but one were murdered. Those murdered are depicted in the painting above, from left to right are Fray Pedro de Corpa, Fray Blas Rodríguez, Fray Miguel de Añon, Fray Antonio de Badajoz, and Fray Francisco de Verascola.

Evolution of a Mission

Ask about old Spanish missions in America, and most people will think of the adobe churches from the late eighteenth century that span the coast of California. Yet these missions, however historic and celebrated, were by no means the first of their kind in what is now the United States.

A full two centuries before St. Junipero Serra preached to the Native Americans along the West Coast, his brother Franciscan friars from Spain were spreading the Gospel in what are now the southeastern states.

Before the founding of the first permanent English colony in America or the Pilgrims came to Plymouth Rock (1620), first Jesuits and then Franciscans established missions in what are now Florida, Georgia, and South Carolina. They labored with remarkable courage and devotion to evangelize native peoples of the region, and tens of thousands were baptized, catechized, and provided the sacraments.

Their mission base was a Spanish settlement on the Florida peninsula, St. Augustine – the oldest still-inhabited city in America, founded in 1565. It was here in La Florida, as the Spanish called the colony, that the Christian faith first took root in the lands that today form the United States.

FRANCISCAN BEGINNINGS

Disheartened with the small number of Jesuits who had come in 1566 – only three, whereas he had requested twenty-four – Menéndez de Avilés in the following year appealed to the Franciscans for assistance in bringing the Faith to the natives.

1

Three years later, in the group which came in I590, there arrived Fray Blas Rodriguez, also one of the victims of the Revolt of 1597. Among the twelve friars who arrived in 1595 were two more who in two years would be slain: Fray Miguel de Añon and Fray Francisco de Veráscola.

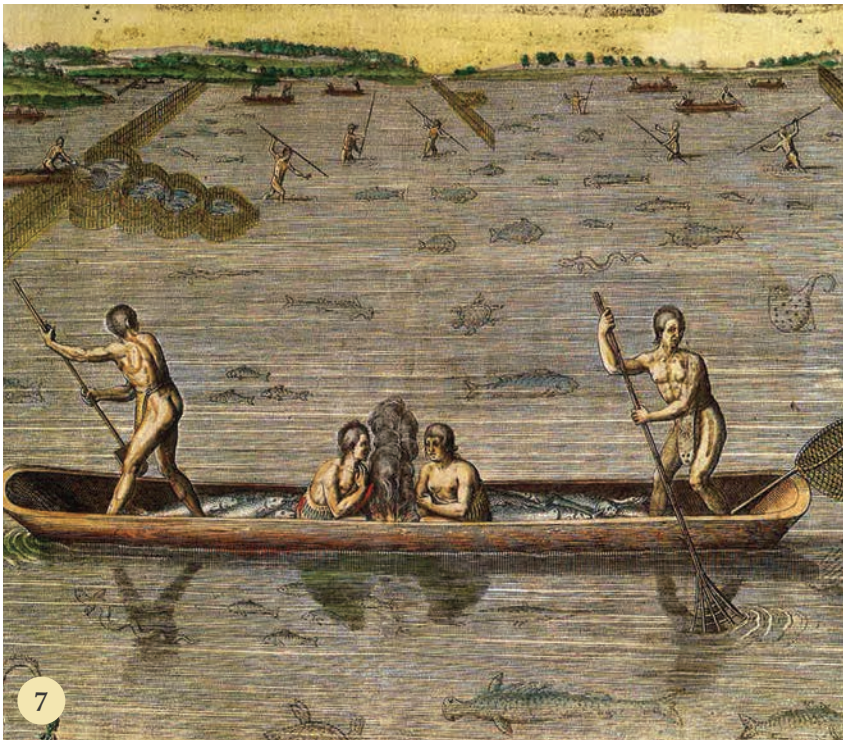
These five friars, whose Cause of Canonization is the subject of this present study, were slain allegedly in defense of the teaching of the Savior, Jesus Christ, in regard to the Sacrament of Matrimony. Within approximately one week in September of 1597, in a remote comer of the New World, they had testified with their lives to the sanctity of the marriage promises made by Juanillo, a baptized member of the Guale tribe of Native Americans. He was the heir apparent to the chiefdom of the Guale Indians in the area of La Florida known as Guale (modern-day Georgia).

While the tragic loss of these five friars was a severe blow to the struggling mission on the peninsula of La Florida, seeming to cripple the missionary work among the Guales, the group of surviving friars, fortified with faith in God and blessed with the coming of many missionaries in the decades ahead, saw the work of Christianizing the native peoples grow beyond all expectations. With an increase of apostolic laborers, new mission-posts were established in great numbers over the next century and a half. As the mid-point of the seventeenth century approached, there were approximately 30,000 Christian Indians associated with over forty missions in the confines of La Florida.15 With a growing number of missionaries from Spain, more and more the native people of La Florida submitted to the sweet yoke of Christ.

THE BLOOD OF MARTYRS

Among the missionaries who in 1587 came to La Florida there were two who were destined to give their lives in defense of the teachings of Christ: Fray Pedro de Corpa and Fray Antonio de Badajoz.

Three years later, in the group which came in 1590, there arrived Fray Blas Rodriguez, also one of the victims of the Revolt of 1597. Among the twelve friars who arrived in 1595 were two more who in two years would be slain: Fray Miguel de Añon and Fray Francisco de Veráscola.



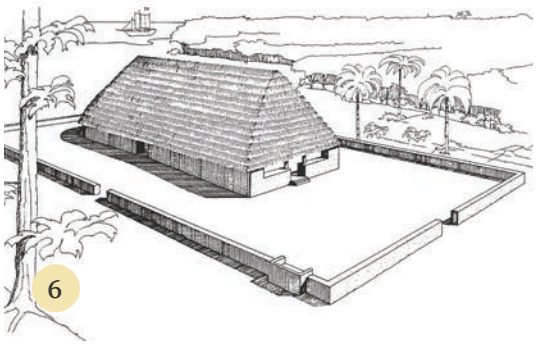
1 | The Atlantic Shore of Saint Catherines Island appears today much as it did when the Fransicans established a mission in the late 16th century.

2 | Dr. David Hurst Thomas, Natural Museum of History, speaks to pilgrims sitting on the rough pews above the site of the mission chapel.

3, 4, 5 | A small sample of the artifacts from the Mission Santa Catalina dig on deposit at the Fernbank Museum in Atlanta. 3.) A cross. 4.) Clay faces thought to have adorned the chapel walls. 5.) A ceramic bowl foundwithin the chapel.

6 | 16th century drawing of a Franciscan mission church in Central America.

7 | This scene depicts the maritime aspect of the Guales' utilization of the lowland marshes. From the cover of " Native American Landscapes of Saint Catherines Island, Georgia – 1 The Theoretical Framework ", by David Hurst Thomas: American Museum of Natural History, Anthropological Papers, Number 88.



Fray Pedro de Corpa

TOLOMATO

Fray Pedro was a Castilian born in a tiny village in the diocese of Madrid in or around A.D. 1560. He joined the Franciscans in Astorga, was ordained a priest, and had served in the New World Missions since 1587. Since he was the most experienced of the six friars who served the Guale, Pedro was in charge of the Mission de la Natividad de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe (the Mission of the Nativity of Our Lady of Guadalupe) at the Guale capital, Tolomato (near Darien, Georgia), where their great chief or mico, don Francisco, lived.

Fray Pedro de Corpa was born in the region of Villalbilla, in the territory of the present diocese of Madrid-Alcalá. Located about 3 miles from Villalbilla there is a village called Corpa, which in the sixteenth century probably was the site of a farming community.

Fray Pedro joined the Franciscan Order in the Province of Castile, presumably about the year 1577, and is thought to have been ordained to the priesthood about 1584. In 1587, he joined the company of friars recruited by Fray Alonso de Reinoso, departing for Florida.

The group consisting of twelve friars under Fray Alonso de Reinoso left the port of San Lúcar de Barrameda on a ship commanded by Gil Vadillo. In the group was Fray Antonio de Badajoz, the lay friar who also was to give his life for the Gospel in the slaughter of 1597.

The newly arrived Franciscan brethren were greeted enthusiastically by the few friars already in the mission, struggling to keep alive the work of evangelization started some decades before by the Franciscans. It is not known for certain precisely where Fray Pedro began his missionary work in La Florida, but it is certain that he spent some time in one or the other of the missions in the region of San Agustin: Nombre de Dios, San Sebastián or San Antonio and its territory, San Pedro or San Juan. Before the decade was out, he was assigned to the mission in Tolomato in the territory of the Guales. That mission was one of special importance, as the Indian village of Tolomato was closely linked with the traditional headquarters of the Guales.

Fray Pedro was singularly successful in converting the natives. He is said to have contributed in an extraordinary way to the conversion of the Indians, even at a time when not many among them were asking to be admitted to Baptism. It is also reported that he developed a good command of the language of the Guales.

Fray Pedro's role in the events leading to the martyrdom was central. While no document refers to him as regional superior in the Guale missions, the very fact of his being in charge of the mission at Tolomato, gave him preeminence. Fray Pedro was a logical choice for this assignment. With the exception of the octogenarian comisario Fray Francisco Marrón, resident at San Agustin, and two lay brothers, Fray Pedro had the longest service among the natives.

When Juanillo, heir-apparent to the office of cacique (head-man/chief) among the Guales and a baptized Christian took a second wife, Fray Pedro probably had the ultimate responsibility for defining the official position of the Church. Perhaps after consultation with Fray Blas in the nearby mission of Tupiqui, and adhering faithfully to the Church's teaching on the essential nature of Christian marriage as the exclusive union of one man with one woman, Fray Pedro admonished the errant Juanillo to adhere to the marriage promises he had made as a baptized Christian in receiving the sacrament of Matrimony. Moreover, in union with Blas, he made known his opposition to Juanillo's succession as cacique.

In his epic poem La Florida, Escobedo – who had come from Spain to the New World at the same time as Fray Pedro de Corpa – attests that de Corpa had a special regard for the central Franciscan virtue, that of poverty. The virtues of chastity and obedience, likewise the object of his Franciscan profession, were especially dear to him. "I and the people who accompanied him to the land where we lived together are witnesses of his sanctity. Poverty was his favorite virtue. He admired the chaste and holy angelic choir and he was submissive to his bishop or superior, always demonstrating his obedience by quickly obeying all orders. Being a wise and holy man, the love of God burned in his heart, and by means of prayer, abstinence and self-discipline he gave good example to the Indians of the West (New World) whom he strove to convert."

1 | It is believed that Fray Pedro de Corpa was baptized in this font dating from the 1500s. The font is located in Assumption of Our Lady church in Villalbilla, Spain. Photograph by Minna MacLeod.

Fray Blas Rodríguez

TUPIQUI

Fray Blas was born in Caucos, Spain around A.D. 1552. Blas joined the Franciscan Province of St. Gabriel at the Convent of Santa Olalla of the strict Alcatarian Reform discalced. Blas had been ordained a priest for almost seventeen years. Back in Spain, he had been called a confessor as he courageously stood up for the Faith there, but Blas Rodríguez did not seek praise, nor even comfort. He volunteered for the missions, and he had already served in the New World since 1590.

Fray Blas Rodriguez was born in Cuacos, a town in the Valley of Plasencia, in the Province of Cáceres. The presumption is that he was born in the decade 1550-60. Situated in the foothills of the Sierra de Gredos, today as in times past Cuacos is largely devoted to the raising of sheep and goats.

At a date not firmly established – presumed to be in the early or mid-1570's – Blas became a member of the Discalced Reform in the Franciscan Province of San Gabriel. It was a time of extraordinary fervor and zeal, an age singularly vibrant in the history of the Franciscan Order in Spain and Portugal. Ordained to the priesthood presumably in the decade of the 1580s. The first certain date we have for Fray Blas' activity is the year 1590, when he offered himself for service in the new and struggling mission of La Florida.

On May 17, 1590, by royal mandate twelve friars – one of them being Fray Blas Rodríguez – were authorized to sail for the New World. The earliest indication we have of the scene of his labors is in 1597: at the time of the Revolt he was in the mission at Tupiqui.

Tupiqui is thought to have been situated slightly to the north of Eulonia, in present-day Georgia. As the friars had been engaged in missionary work in the area of Tupiqui for almost a decade before the events of 1597, it is possible that Fray Blas had been assigned there shortly after his arrival in 1590.

Fray Blas' mission at Tupiqui was not far distant from Tolomato, the mission assigned to Fray Pedro de Corpa. The two friars were probably able to meet from time to time, in this way easing the strain of their solitary and difficult living.

While there is no hard evidence that Fray Blas was directly involved in the marriage question, both he and Fray Pedro used their moral authority to prevent Juanillo's succession as cacique (Chief).

There are two primal sources for our knowledge of the martyrs and their sacrifice in defense of Christian marriage – namely, the authenticated judicial documents relating to the trial of the natives who in 1598 were questioned in the presence of the governor, as well as Oré's authoritative Relación de los Mártires, which he compiled on the basis of the living tradition of the friars and the people in the several missions which as the envoy of the Minister General he visited in 1614 and again in 1616. Both of these primal sources clearly recount the sacrificial death of Fray Blas Rodriguez in the Revolt of 1597.

Miguel de Añon

One of the five Servants of God, Fray Miguel is the most distinct personality, and at the same time the most elusive. About him in many regards there is the least certainty. To begin with his name: Is "de Añon" to be considered a regional reference.

The year of his birth is not certain, but from various references to his priestly activity it is deduced that he probably was born early in the decade of 1540-50. He entered the Franciscan Order in the Province of Castile seemingly about 1570. In 1595 – when, it is thought, he probably was in his forties – he responded to a call for service in the missions of Florida. He was one of twelve missionaries sailing from Spain on July 14, 1595 They arrived at San Agustin (modern-day Florida) on September 23. Shortly after his arrival, Fray Miguel was assigned to Mission Santa Catalina on Guale (modern-day St. Catherines Island). Originally the site of a Jesuit mission during their short period of service in La Florida, this mission had been taken over by the Franciscans as a strategic geographical center on the Barrier Islands. Fray Antonio de Badajoz, whose command of the native language was outstanding by reason of the ten years he had spent in the Florida mission, was selected for this post so as to assist the venerable priest, Fray Miguel, in restoring the importance of the mission which had been largely abandoned for some years after the withdrawal of the Jesuits. Fray Miguel, by his gentility and winning manner, shortly had captured the respect and the friendship of the native Gualeans. Added to his other personal qualities, Fray Miguel was endowed with a singularly pleasant singing-voice, and this captivated the Indians.

Shortly after his arrival in La Florida, Fray Miguel was invited by the friars and the people of Havana to come to that city to preach to them. Accepting the invitation, he boarded a vessel to make the trip which he thought would be a matter of six or seven days. But on reaching Cape Canaveral, bad weather made it impossible for the vessel to clear the cape. For forty days they were becalmed. Finding in this an expression of God's will for him, he gave up his intention of going to Havana, turned around and came back to San Agustin, resolving to begin immediately the more important task of preaching to the natives. Determined not to leave his Indian charges, he remained faithfully at his post on St. Catherines Island.

When in mid-September of 1597 the revolt of the Gualeans erupted, the two friars on Santa Catalina Island were peacefully and surely building the faith in the hearts of their flock. The idyllic situation was reflected in the natives' esteem for the two friars. Gratitude for their presence was typified by the spirit of the local head-man in his efforts to protect the two missionaries from the violent demands issued by the mainland Indians that the friars be put to death. The rebels, having slain Fray Pedro at Tolomato and plotting the death of Fray Blas at Tupiqui, sent a message to the cacique of Santa Catalina, ordering that he should kill the two friars stationed there. The chief refused to follow the command.

The cacique pleaded unsuccessfully with Fray Antonio to flee with Fray Miguel.

Shortly a band of the rebel Indians from the mainland appeared on the island. Realizing what was about to take place, the two men of God prepared themselves for death. After Fray Miguel celebrated Mass, he and Fray Antonio spent their last four hours in prayer.

Falling upon the two friars, the rebels killed Fray Antonio, the veteran missionary who had spent ten years in the service of the Cause of Christ in La Florida. Then the violent mob seemed to lose its courage for they hesitated to move against the venerable priest. An unbaptized Indian, however, came forward and killed him.

SANTA CATALINA

Fray Miguel was likely the son of a Castilian nobleman. He joined the Franciscans at the Covent of Santa Victoria and was an ordained priest who had served in the Georgia Missions for only two years

Antonio de Badajoz

Among the five Servants of God, Fray Antonio de Bada joz is the only one not a priest but belonging to the Franciscan Order as a lay friar. Fray Antonio de Bada joz eminently displayed those qualities of soul which have made the Franciscan lay brother an honored element of the Order's tradition.

"De Badajoz" as part of Fray Antonio's designation is an indication of the general area of his origin, the Province of Badajoz. The province of Badajoz takes its name from ts capital city, located precisely on the border with Portugal on the Rio Guadiana, which separates Portugal and Spain at that point.

A new awakening of the apostolic spirit was at the same time surging throughout Spain. And it was providential that at that same moment in time there was a new awakening of apostolic ardor, as the New World was being opened up to the message of the Gospel.

Some years after his profession as a friar and after a period of humble service in the friaries of his province, Fray Antonio sought and received permission to go among the peoples of the New World who were being evangelized. It was a work of extraordinary sacrifice being carried out by Catholic Spain.

In the same group of missionaries that included Fray Pedro de Corpa, he came to La Florida in 1587, one of twelve friars recruited by Fray Alonso de Reinoso for the struggling mission.

Of the specific details of Fray Antonio's earliest years of La Florida, little exact information is kmown. Fray Antonio, though a lay friar, was given the distinctive form of tonsure reserved for clerics so that he would be accepted more readily by the natives. Where precisely he discharged the duties of catechist in the extensive area being evangelized by the friars is not on record. The friars already had mission-posts established at Nombre de Dios, just a short distance from San Agustin, as also at Mission San Sebastián and Mission San Antonio, both relatively close to the center of activity.

Mission San Juan de Puerto was more distant, and still farther was Mission San Pedro on present-day Cumberland Island, the most northerly mission among the Timucua Indians. Fray Antonio made himself available not only for catechizing the Indians but likewise for the service of his confreres and the native people. Meanwhile, he was making remarkable progress in his mastery of the native language of the indigenous people. His facility in communication was to be an important factor in the development of the mission system, especially when he was assigned to live and work with the newly arrived Fray Miguel at Mission Santa Catalina. Fray Antonio knew the language of the Indians of Guale very well; he was referred to as lengua, that is "the interpreter" for Fray Miguel. After the notable increase of the number of apostolic workers with the arrival of the group in 1595, an ambitious plan was developed for intensifying the work of catechizing the natives; and the importance of Mission Santa Catalina was affirmed with the appointment to that post of Fray Miguel and Fray Antonio.

On two distinct days (probably September 16 and 17) the rampaging Indians, having already killed Fray Pedro in Tolomato and Fray Blas in Tupiqui, sent word to the cacique on the island of Guale (St. Catherines) that he should kill Fray Miguel and Fray Antonio, the two friars at that mission.

Warned of the threat they faced by the local cacique, the two friars stayed at the mission where a party of Indians from the mainland arrived to carry out the execution of the friars.

Once Fray Miguel and Fray Antonio learned of the fate awaiting them, they turned to intense prayer as they awaited the final hour. Fray Miguel offered Mass, and then the two friars spent more than four hours in prayer before suffering the fate which awaited them.

SANTA CATALINA

Fray Antonio was born in La Albuhera near Badajoz. Antonio de Badajoz was of the strict order of the Alcatarian reform (discalced). He was a lay brother and not a priest, though he was respected by all the ordained priests with whom he worked as the catechist and translator. He had served in the New World missions since 1587, was fluent in the Guale language, and was working as Fray Miguel's translator at the time of the rebellion.

Francisco de Veráscola

For many reasons the Servant of God, Fray Francisco de Veráscola, stands out from among his fellow-martyrs of 1597. Though he was united to the others by his vocation and the sacrifice of his life for the sake of Christ, the details of his story in many ways set him apart from the other four.

Among the Five Martyrs, it is his life and death that have been the most minutely researched and described. His memory is recalled each year by means of an annual festival that has been held in his birthplace for almost half a century. His slaying was not witnessed by any devoted Christian who could have furnished information about his death, yet the knowledge of his agony has been constructed on the basis of contemporary conjectures and scattered depositions and relating rumors.

According to records preserved in Gordejuela, a town in the Basque region of Spain, he was born on February 13, 1564, in the Cantabria Province.

The family of the future missionary and martyr was relatively prosperous. His father, who held a minor office in the administration of the community, distinguished himself for his active role in social reforms for the benefit of the poor. As a youth he began to display that strength and impressive physique which later gained for him the nickname of the "Cantabrian Giant."

In time the maturing Francisco answered the call to become a priest as a spiritual son of his patron Saint Francisco of Assisi.

Toward the end of the year 1594, a call went out for volunteers for the struggling but promising mission in La Florida. It is significant that, of the twelve friars authorized to join the mission at that time, all were members of the Franciscan province of Castile, with the one exception of Fray Francisco, a member of the Cantabrian Province.

As one of the twelve he set sail from the port of San Lúcar de Barrameda on July 14, 1595, aboard the vessel called "San Francisco." Incidentally, five of the twelve friars also bore the name "Francisco."

Of all the missionaries assigned to the territory of Guale, at thirty-one or thirty-two years of age Fray Francisco was the youngest. As a token to his zeal and enthusiasm, he was the only one of the newly arrived friars to receive the challenging task of inaugurating an entirely new mission.

His youth must be seen as an additional factor to win the friendship and good will of his flock. Even the more elderly among them, but especially the young would naturally be impressed by his athletic ability.

In his zeal to build up his mission on the Island of Asao not only in the spiritual sense but likewise by providing a worthy place of worship, Fray Francisco had erected a primitive chapel and a crude shelter for himself on the northern point of the island. Around this center of worship, dedicated in honor of Santo Domingo, by the waters of Altamaha Sound, a small village of newly Christianized people was taking shape. The church and the friary needed to be completed so that the community might be more united by a regular routine of organized activities.

In early September of 1597 he undertook a journey by canoe to San Agustin to obtain some needed materials for both worship and construction. Upon his return, it became clear that the friar was overpowered as soon as he set foot on the shore, having been taken by surprise. Oré in a few words described the slaughter of the friar, the "Cantabrian Giant": "They waited for him and when he disembarked, two Indians took him in their arms, while the others arrived and killed him by means of blows from an ax. Then they buried him." His body was never found.

SANTO DOMINGO

Fray Francisco was born in Gordejuela, Spain on February 13th, 1564 to a relatively prosperous Basque family. He was a Cantabrian Franciscan and joined the Convent of Valladolid. Francisco had been ordained a priest for a few years before coming to La Florida. He had served in the Guale Missions for only two years.

1 | Archaeologist and anthropologist David Hurst Thomas talks with Bishop Gregory J. Hartmayer, OFM Conv., of Savannah along the shore of St. Catherines Island in Georgia Oct. 14, 2013. Earlier in the day, the bishop celebrated Mass on the site of the island's mission church, which dates back to the 1570s and has been the subject of study by Thomas and others for nearly three decades. Scientists on the island continue to excavate with a sense of urgency as erosion from rising sea levels threaten the remains of a vanished American Indian community. (CNS photo/Nancy Phelan Wiechec) (Oct. 15, 2013) See bit.ly/MartyrsVideo

Archaeologist Dr. David Hurst Thomas, who has spent more than 40 years excavating in the southwest and southeast, said the more he studies the missions, the more he becomes fascinated by the contrast between the missions in the southwest and those in the southeast. He has come to think of the Franciscan missionaries at St. Catherines as sixteenth century "Peace Corps members".

"Basically there was an alliance between the Church and the Indians that preserved the Indian culture," he said. Instead of forcing religion on the Native Americans, the Franciscans brokered an agreement with them that kept the Indians' way of life while incorporating the teachings of Christianity. "There is no way that two barefoot friars could have stood up to 300 armed warriors had they chosen a confrontational approach on St. Catherines Island," Thomas said.

2 | Dr. David Hurst Thomas displays an aerial photograph of the chapel digsite while speaking to Pilgrims at Saint Catherines Island.

1 | Father Conrad Harkins, OFM, Vice Postulator of the Cause, offers a prayer prior to sealing the reportatio for delivery to Rome.

2 | From left to right: Father Jeremiah McCarthy, Promoter of Justice; J. Kevin Boland, Bishop of Savannah; Gillian Brown, Archivist; Monsignor Francis J. Nelson, Vicar General; and Father Conrad Harkins, OFM, Vice Postulator, pose for a photograph. The event marked the official closing of the Diocesan Process, ordering the sealing of the records for preservation in the archives, and the transmission of notarized and authenticated copies to the Congregation of the Causes of Saints in Rome. Photographs by Michael J. Johnson, Southern Cross, March 16, 2007.

The Sainthood Process

SERVANT OF GOD

The official process of canonization, called a Cause, does not begin until five years after the death of the candidate. This period of time permits the Church to verify whether the candidate enjoys a true and widespread reputation of holiness and of intercessory prayer. When a Cause is officially begun, the candidate receives the title "Servant of God." The first stage of the process begins with the official opening of the Cause by the bishop of the diocese* where the Servant of God died, and the appointment of a postulator, to assist in its promotion. The bishop nominates various officials for a tribunal to gather all the evidence for and against the canonization. Two theologians examine the Servant of God's writings to make sure there is nothing in them contrary to the faith and moral teaching of the Church. Afterwards, they proceed to taking the testimony of witnesses who knew the candidate well.

VENERABLE SERVANT OF GOD

The second step toward canonization starts when all the evidence is studied by the Congregation for the Causes of Saints in Rome. If the evidence reveals true holiness exercised by the Servant of God, the Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation informs the Pope that the Servant of God either was a true Martyr or has lived a life of extraordinary and heroic virtue. The Pope orders the Congregation to issue the decree either of Martyrdom or of Heroic Virtue, and the Servant of God is given the title "Venerable." This means that the Servant of God either died as a true Martyr for Christ or led a life of heroic virtue and, is worthy of imitation by the faithful.

BLESSED

When the Servant of God has been declared a Martyr he or she may be beatified, that is, declared "Blessed." If, on the other hand, the Servant of God has been declared to have lived a life of heroic virtue, it must be proven that one miracle has been granted by God through the intercession of the Venerable Servant of God. Then, he or she is declared "Blessed."

For a healing to be considered a true miracle, a tribunal to gather all the evidence is established in the diocese where the event took place. It must be determined that there is no scientific explanation for the cure and that the intercession of the Venerable Servant of God is proven. The Congregation for the Causes of Saints conducts its study and judgment of the cure by the testimony of medical experts that no scientific reason can explain the recovery, and of theological consultants to verify that the intercession of the Venerable Servant of God was requested. Once again, the conclusions are presented to the Pope, who alone can declare that the event is a true miracle. Then, the Venerable Servant of God may be beatified. When someone is declared "Blessed," public ecclesiastical veneration is permitted by the Pope, but only in the diocese or country, or religious community to which the Blessed belonged. Churches may be dedicated to the Blessed, but only with the permission of the Vatican Congregation for Divine Worship.

SAINT

To be canonized, all of those beatified — both Martyrs and Confessors — one miracle is required. It must be proven that this event took place through the intercession of the Blessed and after the date of his or her Beatification. When this has been proven, the Pope proceeds to the ceremony of Canonization, which is an act of the infallible teaching authority of the Pope. By this act, the Church declares that he or she is a Saint in heaven with God. It also means that the Saint is worthy of public veneration by the universal Church, and held up as a model for imitation and a powerful intercessor for all. Catholics do not "worship" the Saints, but rather venerate them. United in the Communion of Saints the

faithful on earth ask the faithful in heaven, who are their brothers and sisters in Christ, to join them in presenting their needs humbly and prayerfully to God.

BEATIFICATION

The diocesan process for the beatification of Pedro de Corpa and Companions, or the Georgia Martyrs as they are commonly called, is already complete. At the present moment Father Giovangiuseppe Califano, OFM, the Postulator of the Cause, is overseeing the redaction of the final historical document which will be presented to the Congregation for the Causes of Saints.

There is currently a need for greater devotion to these martyrs and also more awareness about their story. These five men left everything that was familiar to them in Spain to share the Good News of Jesus Christ in distant lands. They died as witnesses to the Christian faith as they shared with others what they themselves had received.

At a time when the institution of marriage must be strengthened and upheld, the witness of Fray Pedro de Corpa and Companions fills us with great hope. The presence of Spanish missionaries in Georgia over four hundred years ago also encourages the many Latino Catholics who now call Georgia home.

3 | Copies of the materials included in the Reportatio of the Cause for the Georgia Martyrs stored in the Diocesan Archives.

Friar Pedro de Corpa and Companions

THE PRAYER OF THE GEORGIA MARTYRS

O Lord Jesus Christ, reward the apostolic zeal of Friar Pedro de Corpa and his four companion friars, Blas, Miguel, Antonio and Francisco, who labored for the spiritual well-being of the native Guale people of Georgia and gave their lives in witness to the Christian faith. Through their merits and intercession graciously grant the favor I humbly ask of You, so that, for the glory of Your Name, their heroic sacrifice may be officially recognized by the Church.

Amen.

LEARN. SHARE. PRAY.

The Earliest Inhabitants

In present day Georgia, Florida and South Carolina – La Florida of the sixteenth century – there are several prehistoric sites which lead scientists to affirm that as long ago as four thousand years there were human beings living along the Savannah River and on some of the islands on the Georgia coast.

MAP KEY

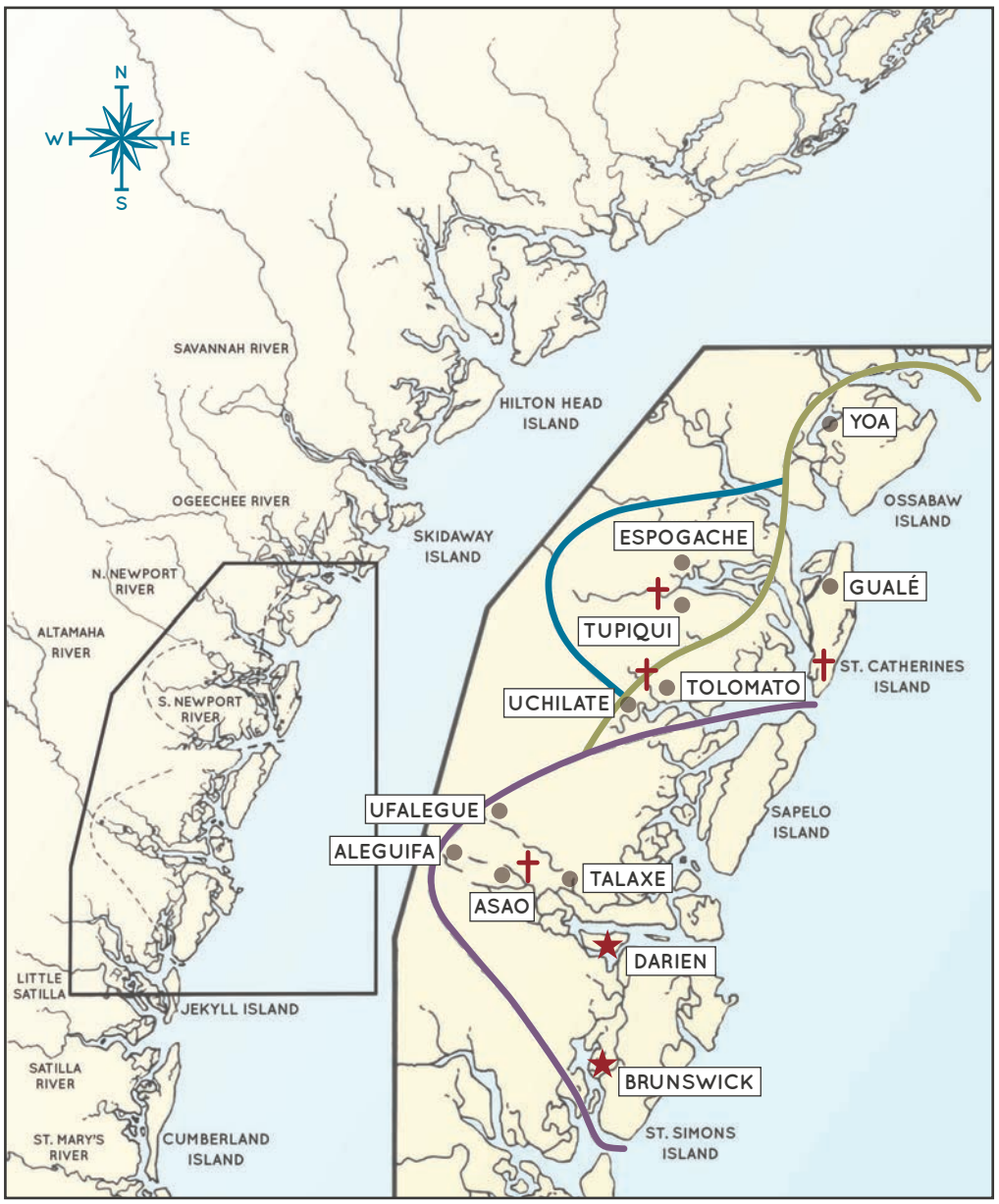
† **SITES OF THE FRANCISCAN MURDERS**

SAINT CATHERINES ISLAND
Fray Antonio de Badajoz and Fray Miguel de Añon

TUPIQUI
Fray Blas Rodriguez

TOLOMATO
Fray Pedro de Corpa

ASAO
Fray Francisco de Veráscola



GUALÉ: TOLOMATO CHIEFDOM

ESPOGACHE: TUPIQUI CHIEFDOM

ASAO: TALAXE CHIEFDOM

A Call to Action

1. Learn about the Cause.
2. Share the information.
3. Pray for the Cause.
4. Join the Cause to receive the quarterly newsletter.
5. Request a speaker to address your parish, school or organization.
6. Donate to cover the expenses of the Cause, including plans for a sculpture of the Servants of God.
7. For more information, please visit the Georgia Martyrs website at thegeorgiamartyrs.org