

St. Manuel González García — *Bishop of the Abandoned Tabernacle*

Sherry Antonetti July 31, 2018

When we leave Our Lord alone, we are cheating ourselves of his presence and gaze

Like all of us, St. Manuel González García didn't start out to be a saint; he set out to be pastor of a parish of Palomares del Rio.

He dreamed of how welcoming and communal the experience would be, “of having a Church full of souls eager to listen to his sermons, of people fervently praying the Rosary with him each day, and of organizing a beautiful procession in the streets. He pictured crowds hastening to Sunday Mass.”

The reality when he arrived, was a Church poorly attended, where only those getting married or baptizing their children came, and a population that was not a community, but a cluster of human beings who worked side by side, and never invested in the Church or each other. The building itself was dirty, almost abandoned, and the altar cloths torn and burnt. The neglect included the tabernacle covered in dust and cobwebs. He considered begging for a different assignment, fleeing. He wondered how he could fulfil a mission, any mission in such a place, but kneeling before the tabernacle, pondering how impossible the task before him, he felt someone looking at him “in desperate need of a friend.”



His words: “My faith was looking at Jesus through the door of that tabernacle, so silent, so patient, so good, gazing right back at me...His gaze was telling me much and asking me for more. It was a gaze in which all the sadness of the Gospels was reflected; the sadness of ‘no room in the Inn’; the sadness of those words, “Do you also want to leave me?”; the sadness of poor Lazarus begging for crumbs from the rich man’s table; the sadness of the betrayal of Judas, the denial of Peter, of the soldier’s slap, of the spittle of the Praetorium, and the abandonment of all.”

Despite being canonized by Pope Francis on Oct. 16, 2016, much of the English-speaking world does not know about this bishop from Spain. Victoria Schneider, a tiny woman with tremendous faith and fluency in both English and Spanish, was introduced to him by her spiritual director. Fifteen years ago, she made a pilgrimage to Spain and happened upon the bishop’s museum. The Order of Sisters there, gave a tour of the whole place with what are now, first class relics. She told me there are three volumes

of writing by Saint Manuel González García, and only 1 percent as of now, has been translated into English. She'd written reflections for Eucharistic Adoration for her parish, translating some of his writings as part of it. God always starts with the two loaves and five fishes we offer, and does the multiplying.

When the parish invited the Missionaries of the Most Holy Eucharist to come as part of a Parish mission on the Eucharist, she gave two of her essays to the visiting priest. After reading the reflections she'd made from the saint's writings, he begged her to consider translating more of his words, so that the saint's wisdom might "touch the world." She reordered her schedule and started doing the work. It took time. She and the priest became friends as they worked through the many letters and essays of the Saint. Victoria had to ask people in Spain to verify her own work, and became friends with the vice postulator just months before the canonization as a result of the constant emails and examinations of his writings.

The results of her work, is the book, *The Bishop of the Abandoned Tabernacle*. Victoria's discussion of his writings and his life reveal both her and the saint's ardent faith and devotion to the Eucharist. In every chapter, I found something which honestly compelled me to run to the local adoration chapel to spend time; gems like "The Heart of Jesus in the tabernacle looks at me. He looks at me always. He looks at me everywhere. He looks at me as if he doesn't have anyone else to look at but me."

The one thing made very clear from the whole of his writings, is how much we leave Christ alone in the tabernacle of our hearts and our lives, how much we are cheating ourselves of Christ's presence and gaze. Saint Manuel González García's writings are a means of discovering Who we adore, as well as reminding us constantly, why we ought to seek to always be adoring. This is not a book to devour, but to explore and revisit, to bring with one to adoration, so as to practice being at the foot of Jesus, rather than anxious about many things. "This is the real heart of Jesus." She said, "and the saint helps us understand what he does from the tabernacle."

Sherry Antonetti is a freelance writer, blogger and published author of The Book of Helen. She lives just outside of Washington, DC with her husband and their ten children.

**A relic of Saint Manuel will be here at
Saint Leo Church from 4-6 p.m. on Tuesday, May 30, 2023
for public veneration and prayer.**

Mass will be celebrated at 6 p.m.