

Thematic meditations

**MONDAY**



**THAT HE MAY REIGN**

**ON EARTH AS IN HAEVEN**

43<sup>e</sup> Pèlerinage de Pentecôte  
de Paris à Notre-Dame de Chartres

7, 8 et 9 juin 2025



# Blessed Francisco Castello Aleu

## MEDITATION 7

### Introduction

Dear pilgrims,

Today, during the course of the day, we will arrive at the Cathedral of Chartres, the destination of our pilgrimage.

We will walk under the watchful gaze of Blessed Francisco Castello Aleu, a Spaniard who remained steadfast in his faith in God, dying with the cry of "Long live Christ the King!" This cry was not for him merely a pleasing formula but the final act of charity he performed before dying under the bullets of the republicans.



### Key Points

- Presenting a beautiful role model for youth.
- The importance of education, doctrinal formation, and spiritual life in working toward the reign of Christ.
- How to act concretely for Christ the King.
- Small sacrifices prepare us for the ultimate gift of one's life for Christ.

### INTRODUCTION

Francisco Castello was a Spaniard, 22 years old, handsome, elegant, an engineer, engaged to a charming young woman. He was a saint... He died by firing squad, thrown into a mass grave atop the bodies of his diocese's bishop and over 200 priests, religious, and elite Catholics—also martyrs for the faith.

Dear pilgrim, he was a young man your age, someone who embraced life with open arms. He was a saint, just as you can and must become one. So listen closely! The story of this young man's life must serve as a model for you. May the beauty of this morning's pilgrimage help you appreciate the beauty of a young soul like his—someone very much like you.

### A Solid Catholic Upbringing

Francisco was born in 1914, in Catalonia. He had two older sisters. His father died a few months after Francisco's birth. His mother, therefore, raised him alone, taking great care to impart Catholic doctrine and a deep love for the Holy Eucharist.

This was the foundation of Francisco's holiness: solid doctrinal formation from his earliest years, and a profound love for the Mass and Holy Communion.

Dear parents listening to me, and dear friends considering the vocation of marriage: you are the starting point of your children's sanctity! Do not hesitate to be demanding of them when it comes to matters of faith, catechism, and the sacraments. And above all, be examples for them!

Francisco was a handsome, intelligent, cheerful young man with a pure heart. Aware of his many gifts, he sometimes displayed vanity. In this, he was a completely normal child, with faults like everyone else.

## **A Transformative Experience: The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius**

In 1929, Francisco was 15 years old. He experienced the deep sorrow of losing his mother, who died suddenly. This trial forced him to mature quickly. He and his sisters, now orphans, consecrated themselves spontaneously to the Blessed Virgin. They went to live with their aunt in Lerida, still in Catalonia.

The following year, he passed his baccalaureate exams with flying colors. That same year, he participated in his first retreat of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius. During this retreat, Francisco received abundant graces.

"From that moment on, between the ages of sixteen and twenty-two, there was not a single moment in his life that was not marked by an act of love toward his neighbor, in whatever form."

Francisco became a great promoter of these Exercises, which he attended several times before his death: "If the work of the Exercises had not been so neglected, today's politics would look entirely different!" he asserted with conviction.

Dear pilgrim, have you ever participated in a retreat of St. Ignatius?

If you wish to be a saint like Francisco Castello, here is an excellent way to set yourself on the right path. I strongly encourage you to sign up for one of these retreats soon [you will find some good addresses at the end of this meditation]: in just a few days, God will transform you into a pure and radiant soul, enlighten you in the major decisions of your life, and make you a valiant soldier of Christ the King. So do not hesitate—be generous!

## **A Soul of an Apostle: To Truth Through Charity**

In 1931, Francisco began his studies in chemical engineering in Barcelona. A brilliant student, he earned his degree in 1934 before being hired at a fertilizer factory.

His student life in Barcelona is a beautiful example. You may ask yourself, "How can I act concretely for Christ the King?" Well, dear friend, listen, meditate, and reflect on what you can do...

Working for the reign of Christ means giving Him first place in all times and places; it means bringing God to those around us, offering the gift of Truth through the gift of oneself.

Francisco understood this well. He visited the sick in hospitals. On Sundays and feast days, he worked at a youth center where he taught children both ping-pong and catechism. He also gave classes on the Church's social doctrine to young apprentices to shield them from the anti-clerical environment of workshops and factories.

Once employed at the fertilizer factory, he gave chemistry lessons to the workers, using the opportunity to occasionally speak about God and sow seeds of truth.

But his favorite association was the Federation of Christian Youth of Catalonia, whose purpose was to provide solid doctrinal formation to an elite group that would then penetrate all social strata and sectors of work, culture, leisure, and sports. He gave himself wholeheartedly to this mission.

To give oneself in order to give God—that was the work of his life.

## **Mariona**

Tireless, jovial, appreciated by all for his reliability, honesty, and charity, Francisco also loved mountaineering. He was deeply enamored with the mountains, which purified both soul and body. But above all, Francisco fell in love with a young woman, Maria Pelegri, affectionately nicknamed Mariona. They became engaged in May 1936.

He gave Mariona books on faith and formation, but he would never have the chance to express “the tenderness he had reserved for her.” For a storm of unprecedented violence was brewing in Spain.

## **A Most Courageous Witness**

Indeed, revolution was on the horizon. On July 1, 1936, Francisco was called to military service. One day, an officer made offensive remarks about the Church. Francisco stood up and protested energetically, saying: “I urge you to focus on fulfilling your duty and to refrain from insulting the beliefs of others. I am a Catholic, and your comments offend me.” A heavy silence fell over the room. The officer continued the training but would not forget the audacity of this young man.

## **Imprisoned for Being a Catholic**

The revolution erupted, bringing total chaos. It was open season on priests and committed laypeople. At home, Francisco received orders to report to the fortress where he was assigned. His family tried to dissuade him: “Don’t worry about me,” he replied. “What could happen to me? I have no enemies at the fortress... and perhaps I can do much good there.” With that, he left.

A few hours later, his family received a hastily written note: “I am a prisoner at the barracks. Signed, Francisco.”

The people’s tribunal, composed of Marxist workers and soldiers, summoned him for interrogation. Officially, he was imprisoned on charges of being a fascist. The supposed evidence? Chemistry books written in Italian and German found on his desk. Weren’t those countries fascist? This false accusation wounded him deeply, and he did everything possible to clear his name. He had never been involved in any political party. He asked his colleagues at the factory to vouch for him. However, despite their affection for Francisco, fear led them to declare him a “miserable”—which, in the slang of the time, meant “a practicing Catholic.”

He was offered freedom on the condition that he renounce his faith. He flatly refused.

## **In Prison: Joyful Amid Terrible Conditions**

In the dreadful atmosphere of his prison cell, Francisco remained joyful and astonishingly serene. He

organized the recitation of the rosary and held small evening talks to explain the meaning of Christian life to his fellow prisoners.

He organized games, gave lessons, boosted the morale of his companions, and moved from cell to cell to encourage those who were struggling. He sent those about to face execution to confess to a priest who was also imprisoned with them. He even formed a choir! At night, sacrificing his rest, he devoted himself to prayer.

## The Death Sentence

On September 29, 1936, Francisco was summoned once again by the people's tribunal. He knew he was going to his death. He made a fervent general confession to the only surviving priest.

Before his judges, Francisco dismantled the weak arguments accusing him of being a fascist. The prosecutor then asked: "Let's cut to the chase! Are you a Catholic?" With a clear voice and a radiant face, Francisco replied: "Yes, I am a Catholic!" The prosecutor immediately called for the death penalty. When the presiding judge asked Francisco if he had anything to say in his defense, he replied: "What for? If being Catholic is a crime, I very willingly accept being a criminal."

## His Final Letters

Back in his prison cell, Francisco managed to write three letters: one to his sisters and his aunt, one to his spiritual father, and finally, the most moving, to his fiancée Mariona. Here is an excerpt:

*"Something strange is happening to me: I cannot seem to feel sorrow for my death. An astonishing, inner joy, intense and strong, fills me completely. I wanted to send you a sorrowful farewell letter, but I simply cannot. I am entirely wrapped in joyful thoughts, like a premonition of Glory.*

*I wanted to tell you how much I would have cherished you, the tenderness I had reserved for you, the happiness we would have shared. But for me, all of that is secondary. I must take a great step."*

## He Went to His Death Singing

On September 30, 1936, Francisco climbed into the truck with his fellow prisoners, heading toward the cemetery where they would be executed. He began singing the *Credo*... "I believe in God..." The other prisoners joined in. Then they sang the hymn of the retreatants: *"Lift your hearts, my brothers! Let us ascend singing!"*

Upon arriving at the cemetery, the prisoners lined up, facing the firing squad. Francisco called out: "One moment, please! I forgive all of you. And I will see you in eternity."

With hands joined, eyes fixed on heaven, and a prayer on his lips, Francisco stood firm. "Fire!" shouted a determined voice.

Francisco let out a final cry: *"Long live Christ the King!"*  
And the gunshots rang out.

## CONCLUSION

On March 11, 2001, Pope John Paul II beatified 233 Spanish martyrs, who were murdered out of hatred for the faith during the Spanish Civil War. Among them was the great Francisco Castillo Aleu.

### Dear pilgrim, what should you take away from this example? Three things:

#### 1. Doctrinal formation is essential.

Francisco was able to share the Truth so effectively because of his deep knowledge of Catholic doctrine. So, get to work! Resolve to study your catechism regularly, read doctrinal works, and explore the encyclicals of the popes. Remember the saying: you cannot give what you have not received. You are capable of this—the Truth is simple. God makes Himself accessible to you. Work to know Him better each day.

#### 2. Never miss an opportunity to do good.

In your family, your parish, your school, or your workplace, countless small opportunities will present themselves. Do not wait for the grand moment that will never come; act here and now. Give of yourself. Give your time. Every Catholic should have at least one commitment where they give themselves freely for the glory of God. Have you found yours?

#### 3. Be the light of the world.

The Good God, who dwells within you by His Grace, desires to draw all those around you to Himself. Be a willing tool in His hands. Be eager to transmit: transmit the faith, transmit doctrine, transmit the goodness of God. Strengthen the brightness of your flame through prayer; meditate, pray often, and pray deeply.

*Long live Christ the King!*

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Jacinto Peraire Ferrer, *He Went to His Death Singing*, Traditions Monastiques, 2007

### A Few Resources for Participating in a Retreat of St. Ignatius (Spiritual Exercises):

- With the Retreats of the FSSP: [www.oeuvredesretraites.fr](http://www.oeuvredesretraites.fr)
- With the Benedictines of Flavigny ([www.clairval.com](http://www.clairval.com)) or Solignac ([benedictins-solignac.com](http://benedictins-solignac.com))
- With the Missionaries of Divine Mercy: [misericordedivine.fr](http://misericordedivine.fr)
- With the Institute of the Good Shepherd: [www.institutdubonpasteur.org](http://www.institutdubonpasteur.org)