

Dr. Ivan Merz - Banja Luka, Bosnia 1896. + Zagreb, Croatia 1928



Dr. Ivan Merz was born in Banja Luka, Bosnia, on the 16th of December 1896. He was brought up within a liberal atmosphere. He attended Grammar School in his home town. After graduation in 1914 Ivan attended the Military Academy for three months and then commenced his studies in Vienna. During World War I he was drafted and thus his studies were interrupted. Ivan experienced all the horrors of the war on the Italian front. After the war Ivan continued his studies in Vienna and completed them in Paris. In 1922 he arrived in Zagreb where he became a professor of French language and literature. He received his PhD at the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Zagreb.

His meditations, studies and especially his recollections of the bloodshed and flames of the war made him recognise the truthfulness of the Christian faith. Desiring to give himself to Christ totally, he took the vow of celibacy as a layman. He devoted all his free time to the education of Croatian youth in the Catholic organisation called "Association of Croatian Eagles", with the slogan "Sacrifice - Eucharist - Apostolate". Ivan made particular efforts to keep the activities of Catholic organisations in the non political way. As a Catholic intellectual he had the ability of making enthusiastic, both by word and pen, young people and adults alike, for Christ and the Church. He was one of the champions of liturgical revival among the Croats.

Systematically he introduced the Catholic Action of Pope Pius XI into Croatia. Ivan's main feature was his love for and dedication to the Church, Rome and Pope. He tried to implant this same love and dedication into all with whom he came in contact. Although he was a young layman, he was considered a "pillar of the Church in Croatia". With his apostolate and his numerous writings in the Catholic Press, Ivan left us a valuable spiritual inspiration for future generations.

He intended to found a secular institute in which a community of laymen would work for Christ and the Church. After his death, his intentions were partly realised by Marica Stankovic, the founder of the Community of Collaborators of Christ the King. The name of Ivan Merz has meant - and still means - program of life and work.

Ivan was a man of living faith, sincere prayer, self denial, daily Communion, adoration, devoted suffering, board education; he was close to people giving Christian love to all.

Ivan died in Zagreb, on the 10th of May 1928, at the age of 32, with the reputation of a saint. In 1958, proceedings were started on the bishops' level for declaring him "Blessed".

On the 16th of December 1977 his remains were transferred from the cemetery and were buried in the Shrine of the Holy Heart in Zagreb. This is the church where he received Holy Communion, prayed and spent time in adoration for the last 6 years of his life. The number of graces granted and prayers answered at his intercession has been increasing.

SOMES THOUGHTS OF IVAN MERZ

"You know that university life in Vienna then the war, my studies and finally Lourdes have convinced me completely of the truthfulness of the Catholic faith and that my whole life, therefore, is moving around Christ the Lord. (Letter to his mother from Paris.)

I know and I feel that Catholicism is the only true faith.

Catholic faith is my life vocation.

Spiritual life is the meditation on God and his word, and the participation on God's inner life.

Why do I love the Church and the Holy Father? Because in the Church I see the clear picture of my beloved Saviour and God Jesus in all His perfection, and in the Holy Father I see the human image of my God and my Lord.

Our liturgy is an artful reflection of God's internal life.

In Lourdes, I came to cherish the rosary and it is going to be, apart from the Holy Eucharist, my greatest friend until I die.

The testament of Ivan written by him before his death: "Died in the peace of the Catholic faith. My life had been Christ, and death was my gain. I am expecting the mercy of the Lord and undivided, complete, eternal possession of the most Holy Heart of Jesus. Happy in peace and joy. My soul is reaching the goal for which it had been created."