

## FR. VICENTE LÓPEZ DE URALDE

### A face of the merciful Father

In 1992, two years after the death of Fr. Vicente, his biography was published. The biography began as follows: "Fr. Vicente is not, nor was he ever, the typical hero or anti-hero of any novel. In his life, there was nothing very extraordinary nor striking: neither intelligence, nor courage, nor beauty, nor eloquence, nor overwhelming and brilliant activity that draws crowds. Thus, you do not have in your hands the life of what the world understands by the word *hero*." Indeed, Vicente López de Uralde died with a reputation for holiness. We could well say that he is the icon of those that Pope Francis has called "saints next door." In him, the fruits of the Spirit appear concentrated in what is essential: goodness. God, rich in mercy, found in Vicente an open channel to show Himself once again, in a clear way, to many people who were in need of such mercy.



Vicente was born on January 22, 1894 in the city of Vitoria (Spain). His father was a carpenter and his mother a seamstress, which gives us an idea of the modest economic status of the family. There were five children in the family, two girls and three boys. All three of the sons became priests: two in the diocesan clergy and one Marianist. Vicente encountered the Society of Mary in a school in his town, created for the children of families with little money and run for a few years by the Marianists. Beginning when he was a child, he always said that it was clear to him that he wanted to be a priest. In 1905, he entered the postulate of the Society of Mary in Escoriaza, a town near his city. In 1910, he entered the novitiate located in Vitoria. He pronounced his first vows on March 25 of the following year, and his perpetual vows on August 24, 1917. As a young religious, he taught in different Marianist schools while studying for a degree in Philosophy and Letters, which he completed in 1921. His priestly formation took place at the international seminary of the Society of Mary in Fribourg (Switzerland). His ordination took place in Fribourg on March 29, 1925.

In 1928, Vicente went to the city of Cádiz. He remained in that city for 62 years. Throughout those many years, he followed an inconspicuous path of growth in holiness. He manifested this growth in his life of prayer, in his way of participating in community life, and in the great fruitfulness of his priestly ministry, especially through the sacrament of Reconciliation. It is worth quoting some descriptions of Vicente written by his superiors at different times:

*A simple, joyful and modest priest, he enjoys universal sympathy in the Province thanks to the qualities of his heart. He always welcomes anyone who approaches him. He does not distinguish between people. His cheerful and kind words dissipate all misunderstandings between people. They became the bond that united even the most diverse of characters.*

*Equality in his treatment of others is, perhaps, the dominant note of his beautiful soul. (Alonso Thibinger, Vice-Provincial, 1928)*

*He was highly esteemed by the Brothers and the pupils because of his self-denial and his good character. Despite the fact that he had no authority in class, the pupils did not take advantage of him (Antonio Martínez, Vice-Provincial, 1933)*

*An exemplary priest in his relations with the Brothers. He was self-sacrificing and humble. Fr. Vicente was all things to all people. Classes are difficult for him because he is too lenient. He is the confessor of half the city and of the community (Florentino Fernández, Provincial, 1946)*

*He enjoys a reputation for holiness among the people outside the community, for his patience, kindness, self-denial and Franciscan simplicity. He has no authority with the children. In community, he is a cause of union, fervor and joy (Francisco Armentia, Provincial, 1955)*

In these few words the outstanding traits of Fr. Vicente, his many qualities as well as his limitations, come to the fore. It must be said that neither the great myopia that manifested itself very early and left him blind in his last years, nor the hard moments in which he felt exhausted by the amount of work, caused him to become a negative person. He was not destined to be a great teacher or intellectual, but he was destined to be a community builder and a much sought-after confessor. He spent long hours in the confessional and the testimonies of the people who received God's forgiveness from him are numerous. He distinguished himself by his welcoming attitude, by his listening and by knowing how to transmit the mercy that heals hearts. A Marianist religious says this:

*I also knew Father Vicente in the confessional, and I always found him there dressed as the Good Shepherd, never as a judge. The solemn forgiveness made you come out of that encounter relieved and at peace, while, at the same time, hopeful and excited.*

In the city of Cadiz, he was well known and loved. Throughout his life, he received many tributes from the city. Two of them are significant for their official character: the City Council named him Adopted Son of the city in 1968, and awarded him the Gold Medal of Cadiz. He died on September 15, 1990 at the age of 96. The process for beatification of Fr. Vicente has begun. After the completion of the diocesan phase in January 2010, the *Positio* is now at the Congregation for the Causes of Saints. The Theological Consultors of that Congregation will examine it in December of this year.