

SAN GORG PRECA

Lyceum boy is Malta's first saint

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On 3rd June 2007, a past student of The Lyceum was declared Malta's first saint by Pope Benedict XVI.

Gorg Preca was born on 12th February 1880. He was baptised at St Dominic church in Valletta and given the names of Gorg, Paul, Manuel and Pio. Gorg means "a person who works in the fields".

When he was still very young he nearly drowned while he was out with the housekeeper. He thought he could just walk on the calm sea ... luckily, a dghajsa man, Mikiel il-Barklor, saved him from drowning.

When he was only five years old, and again was in the company of the housekeeper Filomena near the church of Our Lady of Pilar, Gorg was approached by an army officer who placed in his hands a pocket watch made of gold. Suddenly both the man and the gold watch disappeared.

In later years Gorg realised that the army officer was St Michael and the watch signified the writings that he had to prepare for the MUSEUM members to recite at each quarter of every hour of the day.

Gorg was admitted into The Lyceum. When it came to playing football he was not too keen to participate, and neither were the teams too keen to have him.

To and from The Lyceum in Valletta, Gorg walked all the way. One day he met on the way Fr Ercole Mompalao near the Mall in Floriana. While walking, Fr Ercole turned to the child and exclaimed, in what seemed like a prophecy, "Preca, when you grow older you will be entrusted by those people who fear God, and they shall find solace in you and you in them."

When Gorg terminated his studies at The Lyceum, he started studying for the priesthood. On 17th December 1904 he became sub-deacon at a ceremony held in St John's Co-Cathedral. On his way back to Hamrun, accompanied by his father, they reached the Mall in Floriana (where today stands the majestic statue of Christ the King), and a mysterious and very clear voice that was even heard by the father said, "Today I have seen you become engaged to My Church ..."

When he was still at the seminary, Gorg used to be saddened by the wrong manner of teaching the doctrine to young children in his home town Hamrun. This prompted him to engage in a friendship with a group of young men while they sat on the church parvis, talking about football and cracking jokes. He started meeting with them regularly and extending to them religious teaching. The friendship with this group of youngsters continued to flourish. Dun Gorg and one of the group, Eugenio Borg, used to go for long walks in the country, carrying with them the Holy Bible. Eugenio later became the first Superior General of the MUSEUM.

Just before being ordained priest, Gorg became very sick. The medical practitioner, Prof. Enrico Meli, declared that the young man was in imminent danger of dying, and even hinted to the father "do not spend money on the sacred vestments for the priesthood, or the missal." But on 22nd December 1906, Gorg Preca was ordained priest by Archbishop Pietro Pace. Dun Gorg always said that St Joseph was instrumental in his miraculous healing.

Later on Dun Gorg felt the need to get the group of young men to open a small room at No. 6 Fra Diego Street, Hamrun, and meet regularly to get more Christian education. The place was known as In-Numru Sei. The group of young men decided to name their meeting place "Muzew". Dun Gorg accepted their suggestion, but went on to change it to read MUSEUM (Magister, Utinam Sequatur Evangelium Universus Mundus), which means, "Lord, if only the whole wide world could follow the word of Christ."

The Society of Christian Doctrine adopted St John the Baptist as its patron saint. In a very practical manner Dun Gorg was teaching the society members the theological subjects that he himself had studied at The Seminary before becoming a priest.

All of a sudden Dun Gorg instructed the society members to give up smoking, and restricted membership to unmarried men. From there on the members used to walk or cycle to various villages, teaching the word of The Lord. Some even carried with them to their places of work excerpts from the Bible to study and learn more and better spread the word of God.

The teaching was extended to the surrounding coffee shops and bars, clubs and even in village squares and other shops. Those who listened were amazed with the way that the Catholic teaching was brought to them in the simplest of manners for all to understand and change their way of life. New MUSEUM branches were opened in Cospicua and Floriana.

Trouble started brewing and in 1909, Dun Gorg was summoned in front of Vicar General Salv. Grech who ordered that all the MUSEUM places be closed down immediately. Dun Gorg humbly responded, "You are my superiors and I am the obedient servant." But it did not take long for the village parish priests to get to know about this, and they rushed to the Archbishop to describe the good work that Dun Gorg had been doing in several parishes. Counter orders were given by the Archbishop and the society was allowed to continue teaching the Christian doctrine.

The need was soon felt for a female section to be opened. Dun Gorg chose Giannina Cutajar, of Paola, to open the first female MUSEUM house on 10th January 1910. Giannina was to become the first Superior General of the female section.

In 1911, while walking in the vicinity of The Cross (today known as Cross Road) in Marsa, Dun Gorg saw a very young boy of about 12 pulling a very heavy cart laden with rubbish. Dun Gorg gladly obliged to lend a helping hand, but when he placed his hand on the cart the boy suddenly disappeared. Dun Gorg said later that that little boy must have been Jesus, who was showing him that he must dedicate his whole life to the teachings of Christ. Besides preaching, Dun Gorg started writing too.

In 1915 Mgr Dom Mauro Caruana was ordained Archbishop of Malta and asked Gorg about the Society of Christian Doctrine. An inquest was opened to find out exactly what this teaching society was doing in Malta. After three months the parish priests from several localities again recommended to the new Archbishop that this society was doing a lot of good. Some small changes were suggested, and Dun Gorg obliged immediately.

Early on the morning of 19th March 1919, while Dun Gorg was praying, St Vincent Ferrer appeared and told him, "The Lord will be your right hand and will guide your feet so that you may not crumble under the weight of the teachings that you are giving out ..." From there on Dun Gorg started calling St Vincent Ferrer "The Prophet of the MUSEUM Society".

When his father was on his deathbed Dun Gorg wrote the words Verbum Dei Caro Factum Est (The Son of God became Man) on a piece of paper and placed it on his father's chest. After death the father appeared to his son and said that those words had helped him to have a good judgement in front of the Lord in Heaven.

Henceforth the words Verbum Dei Caro Factum Est were widely used among the MUSEUM members around Malta.

In 1921 Dun Gorg started the Christmas procession with the figure of Baby Jesus. This tradition continues to this day, and has even been adopted in countries where the MUSEUM society has emigrated and opened houses to teach the word of God.

After 25 years of teaching, Archbishop Dom Mauro Caruana finally and officially recognised the good work of the Society of Christian Doctrine. People flocked to listen to the sermons and teachings. Dun Gorg just loved teaching the little boys and girls. After a lesson he used to bless some sweets and distribute them among the children.

In August 1951 Dun Gorg blessed the foundation stone of the St Michael Secondary School. In 1952 he helped in the healing of a man from Marsa who was about to lose an eye, making the sign of the cross on the defective eye and saying prayers. From the very next day the miraculous healing started, and within one week the man was cured.

In 1956 the MUSEUM society was started in Melbourne, Australia. Dun Gorg had chosen five society members and instructed them to emigrate and start working in that faraway land, teaching the Maltese who had emigrated.

The Society of Christian Doctrine became so popular that besides Melbourne, branches were soon also opened in Sydney, Adelaide, Hobart and Capabala. At first only children of Maltese emigrants attended the teaching, but soon children of immigrants from other countries were also attending.

A very large chapel was built at Blata l-Bajda to house the MUSEUM general headquarters and the Preca Library. The chapel is dedicated to Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal. Dun Gorg was very devout to our Lady and to Our Lord Jesus Christ, in particular to the Crucified Christ.

In 1962 Dun Gorg was very sick and was confined to bed. Two days before he died, he was visited by Eugenio Borg, the first Superior General of MUSEUM. Dun Gorg blessed Eugenio and told him, "In you I have found the true leader of the MUSEUM society."

Dun Gorg passed away to eternal life on 26th July 1962. To this date he is still our nation's greatest example for leading a sacred and good life. His canonisation by Pope Benedict XVI on 3rd June 2007 is the culmination of his life of example, which will continue to shine forever.

With the grace of God, the Society of Christian Doctrine today still teaches and expands around the world. Besides Malta it has branches in Australia, Sudan, Kenya, England, Albania and Peru. There is yet scope for expanding even more.

With the help of God more centres will continue to be opened in other new countries too. This will continue to bring to fruition the wish of Saint Gorg Preca that the world may, through evangelisation, become more united in Christ Our Saviour.