

First Friday, December 1, 2017

Fr. Denis Farkasfalvy

Our Lady of Dallas

John Brenner

I would like to use this opportunity to commemorate an event that took place sixty years ago on December 15, 1957. On a cold winter night a 27-year-old priest in Hungary, an assistant pastor in a small parish, was murdered while carrying the Eucharist to a dying man he was called to assist. The sick call was a fake, fabricated by a group of the town's communist leadership, upset by his phenomenal success among the teenagers and even elementary school children.

The name of the priest was Fr. John Brenner. He was Cistercian novice in our mother Abbey of Zirc in Hungary. As it is known from old and new evidence, he remained a member of our Order, taking and renewing his religious vows, although clandestinely. At this point there are still four of us here in the Abbey who knew and were part of this illegal Cistercian community before we left Hungary the year before Fr. John was killed.

His murder stunned us. At the time the government authorities allowed no publicity around the event. For forty years the memory of his martyrdom was kept private, a matter of oral tradition. Only after the fall of Communism did the process of beatification begin. In spite of great difficulties to find witnesses still alive, by 1999 all the documentation had been sent to Rome. Three weeks ago, on November 8, Pope Francis announced his recognition of Fr. John's martyrdom, and the beatification was scheduled for the coming summer.

At this mass today, I propose increase our gratitude that, improbable as it seemed 60 years ago, this brother of ours with whom many of us began our religious life while he is about

to reach the highest honor we can think of: the recognition of the universal Church of the life he was granted to live and give away for Christ and His Church.

You must think of a young, handsome but in a sense quite ordinary young man, playing soccer with the young men of his town with as much zest and enthusiasm as he had.. For forty years the Communist regime sabotaged the investigation and punishment for the crime by which he was killed. All that can be said with confidence today is that the crime was committed collectively by a group of half-drunken party officials and policemen, waiting for him in the dark as he was carrying the Holy Eucharist and defending it while he was stabbed, 32 times by several knives and hands, as shown by the autopsy report. His surplice covered with blood was preserved and is kept in the chapel built at the place of his martyrdom in Rábakethely, Hungary. We must pray and hope that in honor of this young brother of ours, a new Cistercian saint, we may be fortified in the faith and our resolve to give away our life to Christ and his People in the Church until his beatification will allow us to celebrate a mass in his honor and turn to him as our saintly intercessor.