

An unknown hero of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer.



“The righteous will live forever. The Lord will reward them (Wis 5:15). The people will proclaim their wisdom and God’s people will praise them (Eccl 44:15).”

During the summer of 1880, a young boy worked on a field not far from the Flemish village of Lendeledede in the diocese of Bruges, Belgium. This village was founded around the year 600. All the inhabitants of this village were Catholics who had a great devotion to St Blaise the Wonderworker.

This young boy was Achilles Delaere. His parents were rich farmers, and all 13 of the children in his family helped on the farm.

During the work in the field, young Achilles praised the glory and wisdom of God. He also regularly went to school. Once, he read the story of the martyrdom of the Jesuits in Canada. Their examples impressed themselves upon his young soul. He asked himself: “What can I do for Christ?” It is possible that Christ Himself replied on his question. One night he had a dream, where he saw Our Lord, who showed him a group of people who awaited him on the other side of the ocean. These people cried to him for help: “Come to us and help us in our spiritual needs.” Achilles often thought about this dream, and in the end he understood that Christ called him to the apostolic life. This dream never abandoned him, even if he did not know how or when it would happen.

Who was Achilles Delaere?

For the Ukrainian immigrants in the Canadian province of Saskatchewan, Achilles Delaere was “another Saint Paul” of whom Christ said: “I have chosen him to serve me and to make my name known...I myself will show him all that he must suffer for my sake” (Acts 9:15-16).

Achilles was born 17 April 1868. His parents were Emie Delaere and Natalie Decluyse. The Delaere family were pious and good people. Prayer was the life of the family. Achilles’ two sisters became nuns, and two brothers became priests. He was six when he went to school, where he was a very talented student. He spent the mornings at school, and in the afternoons he helped his parents on the farm, as they did not want him to waste his time. Achilles received his first Holy Communion at the age of 11. On the day of his first Holy Communion, he promised Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament always to serve Him faithfully and steadfastly. This day left an indelible mark upon his young soul. At the age of 15, he began to study Latin.

Entry into monastic life.

A Christian atmosphere of work and prayer helps to spread religious and priestly vocations. When Achilles told his mother about his decision to enter the Redemptorist Congregation, she said to him with tears: “My dearly beloved son, I had prayed that you would one day be a priest of Our Lord, but I did not tell this to anyone. I am so happy! Go, my son, and be a good monk. I will pray for you as long as I am alive, and I will not stop even after my death.”

His father was pleased as well that his son was willing to consecrate himself to the service of God and His Church. With his father's blessing, he entered the novitiate 8 September 1888 at St-Trond. Achilles liked the novitiate, as we learn from a letter to his parents, where he wrote these words: "...I had tears when I left you, but with a sincere soul I chose the monastery. Here everything is very spiritual and great. You must live in the monastery to feel it. It makes me happy. My dear parents, brothers and sisters, remember me in your prayers, that God will preserve me here, because I left the world to be faithful to His grace."

Achilles' way to the priesthood.

Brother Achilles Delaere made his temporary religious vows 6 October 1889, when he consecrated himself entirely to God in the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer. At the beginning of September 1891 he left St-Trond and entered the Redemptorist seminary in Beaulieu to study philosophy and theology. He was a serious student, and fulfilled all the obligations of the rule: meditations, rosary, spiritual reading and other spiritual exercises. Father Van Klepeaute said of him: "... he had good health and a good mind. His soul was sincere and tender. He did everything, even the smallest things with great love..."

He was ordained a priest 4 October 1896. For him it was the happiest day of his life. Shortly before this he wrote to his parents: "Priesthood is a sublime dignity and also a heavy responsibility. Pray for me that I may become a good religious and a holy priest. It would be better not to receive this dignity than to receive it unworthily."

Achilles' dream becomes a reality.

The young priest did not forget his dream about missionary work beyond his homeland. The French bishop of St Boniface, Manitoba, Adelard Langevin, had many Slav immigrants in his archdiocese. He needed many more priests than he had. In July 1898, the bishop on his return from Rome visited Fr Van Aertselaer, the Redemptorist Provincial in Brussels, and asked him to send missionaries for work with the Slavs in Canada. Father Aertselaer agreed to send Fr Achilles Delaere, who was delighted with this commission. On 8 September 1899, he received an official assignment to go to Canada and to work in Manitoba. Divine Providence watched over him.

The trip to Canada.

On 14 September 1899, just before Fr Achilles boarded the ship he met his family for the last time. Together with Fr Joseph Koppen, he left for the Canadian mission. He arrived in Quebec 28 September, and journeyed to Brandon, Manitoba, where the Belgian Redemptorists had built a monastery the previous year.

Missionary work in Canada.

Father Achilles worked at Brandon amongst the Poles and Ukrainians. Before the trip, he went to the Redemptorist seminary in Tuchow, Poland, where he learned Polish. Only when he arrived in Canada did he understand that Ukrainian is quite different from Polish. But it was not a problem for him to learn Ukrainian. The work of Fr Achilles was hard, exhausting and often not appreciated. Because of his love for God and devotion to Our Mother of Perpetual Succour, Fr Achilles never gave up the work entrusted to him by Divine Providence. In the beginning, Fr Achilles served the Ukrainians as a Latin rite priest, but he soon realised that people were afraid of him.

The Ukrainian Metropolitan of Lviv, Andrew Sheptytskiy, sent his visitator Fr Basil Zholdak to Canada. Fr Delaere accompanied him during the visitation of the Greek-Catholic chapels. He told Msgr Langevin that the poor people were losing their faith because of anti-Catholic propaganda. The bishop agreed. In May 1904, Fr E. Vrijdegs and Br Cyril came from Belgium to help Fr Delaere in his work. In Yorkton on 14 December, Fr Peter Gerard, superior of the house, built a chapel for the Ukrainians and dedicated it to St Gerard Majella, who was canonised early that year.

Fr. Delaere went to a Basilian monastery in Winnipeg to study the Eastern rite and culture. On 26 September 1906, he celebrated his first Divine Liturgy in the Eastern rite in St Boniface in the chapel of Msgr Langevin.

Metropolitan Andrew Sheptytskiy during his visit to Canada and United States was happy to see the work of Fr Delaere among the Ukrainians. His missionary work was so great that Pope St Pius X himself called him to Rome, where at an audience on 12 May 1912 he spoke to the Vicar of Christ about his flock and the necessity of a bishop for them. Rome replied on the request of Fr Delaere and nominated a bishop for the Ukrainians in the person of Nykyta Budka, the future martyr and confessor of the faith, beatified by Pope John Paul II in June, 2001.

Foundation of a new province of the Eastern rite.

In spring of 1913, with the permission of Fr General Patrick Murray and Msgr Budka, they started to build a monastery in Yorkton under the title of Our Mother of Perpetual Succour. The monastery was blessed in 1914. The community had 4 priests and 1 brother. In 1917, they opened a minor seminary in Yorkton for future vocations, which later was moved to Roblin. In 1940, the Ukrainian province opened its own seminary in Waterford, Ontario. Under the direction of Fr Delaere the Academy of the Sacred Heart for girls and St Joseph's College for boys were built. As superior (1905-1927) and vice provincial (1919-1927), he directed the apostolic activity of his confrères and he himself preached missions and retreats. He established two Redemptorist centres, in Ituna, Saskatchewan and Komarno, Manitoba. Rome nominated him visitator and perpetual superior of the vice-province. In 1924, Pope Pius XI sent him his greetings and blessing for the Silver Jubilee of his missionary work.

“I have fought the good fight: I have finished my course: I have kept the faith. As to the rest, there is laid up for me a crown of justice, which the Lord the just judge will render to me in that day...” (2 Tim 4:6-8).

In June 1939, he celebrated the Divine Liturgy in a town south of Winnipeg, and afterwards became seriously ill. The Fathers took him to the hospital and administered the Last Rites to their beloved Father. He died there 12 July 1939, the feast of Sts Peter and Paul according to Julian calendar, those Apostles whom he had imitated throughout his life. A few moments before his death, he raised his eyes and smiled. Surely he had been visited by the Blessed Virgin Mary who came to accompany his soul to Heaven. One brother who was present at his death closed his eyes.

His funeral took place 14 July, in the presence of His Lordship Bishop Basil Ladyka and all the Redemptorist priests, and thousands of Ukrainian Catholics from Canada. After the funeral services the body of Fr Delaere was carried in procession to the Yorkton Cemetery as the church bells rang. There his mortal remains rest.

“May his memory remain with us forever,” and it does indeed.

