

## Interview with Òscar García y Tomás Minguet

*Last Saturday, the 28th of January, Oscar Garcia and Tomas Minguet were ordained as priests in the church of the Pious school of Valencia, a place, especially meaningful for both of them, because there, they were students as children, and there, they vowed and started the vocational process. Tomas (26 years old) studied teaching in the University of Valencia and did his High School in theology where he obtained a degree in Ecclesiastic studies. Currently, he practices the piarists ministry in the Pious Schools of Castellon, six year old children. Oscar (30 years old) has a degree in Catalan Philology from the University of Valencia. He also, finished his studies in the Faculty of Theology of "San Vincente Ferrer de Valencia" and in teaching of English in the school of Edetania. Currently, he practices the Piarists ministry in the collage of "San José de Calasanz de Algemesi". In addition, Oscar's family has been for a long time very much connected to the pious School, because his maternal Uncle, Francesc Mulet, is similarly a piarists priest.*

*Tomás and Oscar are going through Rome and it is here that we find them. Oscar and Tomás are very different.*

*Tomás and Oscar are very similar: they are piarists priests.*

**Oscar, what image did you have of your uncle when you were a child?**

I'm not sure.... Someone happy and normal. He was close to us. But, to tell the truth, I didn't identify myself with him, I mean that I didn't imagine myself as a piarist; to be more precise, it didn't even occur to me.

**When did you start thinking that you could be a piarist?**

When I was 17 years old, I participated in young pastoral piarist groups and that did me a lot of good, I was thirsty to connect myself to Christ. During this time I had the opportunity to live for two weeks in the "junior residence" of Malvarrosa with the young Piarists that were in formation. It was a very important experience for me and I remember that at the end of it, it was clearly said to me, because of what they had seen and what they had been told, God had called me to be a piarist. It was difficult for me to accept it, on the contrary, I rebelled and said no. I continued my life, I studied and I realized that it didn't fulfil me, that I wasn't happy. It was a critical time in my life and I remembered - as the prodigy child - that experience and those words, of how I had felt. Something happened inside of me and then, I don't know, I wondered that maybe it had been true about the calling to be a piarist. I went to tell my uncle and he answered that I should wait a year and then tell him again after a year had gone by. A year went by and I returned and put the idea to him again, and that is how all the vocational process started.

*Tomás studied in the same college as his father had, with the Piarists of Valencia.*

When I was young I was afraid of choosing, deciding... not just one way of life or another. When I discovered that the Christian life means to be chosen for something and you can do it, if you want, this brought about a great surprise and happiness in me.

I asked to the piarists what I had to do in order to find out what God expected from me. One of the recommendations that was given to me was to "try out" and that's how, at 17 years old, I had the experience to live almost two months in a house of piarists formation. During this time I was happy. I felt I was where I should be. I made "steps" forward. I tried to follow the murmurs of God. Many times, more than feeling that god told me that this was his will, what I understood was that God didn't tell me to leave this path. And if He doesn't tell you to go, you must continue.

### **Family Reaction**

*Both coincided in saying that their respective families felt, on the one hand, happiness, because they appreciated the piarists' life a lot, and on the other hand, pain, because this decision meant leaving home at 17 years old. The friends of both of them were very respectful about their decision.*

And this was very important - says Óscar - because religious vocation is not very well looked upon.

### **In what way?**

I mean, the secondary students with whom I'm with, clearly say to me that the idea that they have of a priest is someone that seems to be bitter and frustrated; that isn't happy. So to see you happy or meeting people like us, that are young and happy with our vocation, draws their attention.

### **Why do you think that this idea of a priest not being happy exists?**

Óscar: The idea is that the priest is missing something, I mean on the emotional side.

Tomás: There are many factors. Prejudices feed themselves. Spain is an anti-clerical country and a priest or a nun who commits a mistake or those that aren't a true testimony, are news; but those that give their life for others and live to the utmost their vocation and are happy in that way are never news. I also think, that young people, in general, are very secularized; they live mostly according to their passions and instincts; in an eroticized and consumerist society, with a false concept of freedom; so, all that seems to go in contra to this (like religious vows), are rejected.

### **How can one be a true testimony in this context?**

Óscar: By living fully our vocation; being completely what we are and what we're called to be; opening ourselves up to the Holy Spirit, allowing Him to act upon us and from us. I think it's about not falling into the routine of filling ourselves with God every day, *as shells that spill like canals*, as Calasanz said. This doesn't mean, if you live coherently, you will attract the youth, because they are very seduced by their environment and even if one lives coherently, they're not interested. I think we must do what we have to do and wait, because vocations come from God.

### **Tomás: When did you start thinking about the vocation, was the testimony of the life of the piarists that you knew important to you?**

Yes, there were piarists that drew my attention, although I don't know how to explain the reason. There are people that draw your attention and others that don't ... and it isn't by accident. It's clear that God told me things, through these people, and that was and is an important testimony.

### **Several times, during this encounter, you have both mentioned the importance of being happy and of showing yourselves as such. Do you think this is an attractive vocation?**

*Both gave an affirmative response. Tomás added that the vocation is also, taking the young people to the faith, because it's not only a way of life, but also a response to God's calling. One can do the work of a Piarists, but*

*vocation is much more than a duty. Oscar added that maybe a fear exists in the definitive, in deciding something for all your life and that he doesn't agree with the fact that they are so many cases of abandonment, as is sometimes thought. He affirmed that he knew many religious people who were faithful to their vocations and who were happy, but they aren't news.*

**Let's remember the 28th of January, the day you were ordained as a priest? How did you feel?**

Òscar: Well, there is a remote preparation and one that is closer. Actually, all your life, all the years of formation are preparing you for that day... Then comes, more particularly, the next preparation, after the diaconship, and with a special attention to the day of ordainment.

Tomás: The sacrament, what it does, is to seal all you have lived and have prepared. It's an important moment within a wider whole. I am very sentimentally dry for these things, so I live it in a more theological way, in a manner of speaking. During the celebration, I repeated to God "thy will be done". Maybe the most significant moment was the imposition of the hand of the Bishop Enrique Benavent and of all the priests.

Òscar: Well, it's beautiful, because, without Tomás mentioning it, for me too, it was this same moment; the imposition of the hands that impacted me the most. To feel that, after the bishop, other priests, one after the other, put their hands on me, consecrate hands, filled me with emotion and I was embraced by this special presence of the Holy Spirit. In addition (by chance"), it snowed that day, and I, surely more emotional than Tomás, took it as another wink from the Lord.

**How do you balance the choice of the poor people, the college.....?**

Tomás: It's evident that the children who I'm with aren't the poorest of Castellón, and sometimes, it causes me doubts, but it also helps me to think that Calasanz subordinated everything to obedience and I'm happily obeying. On a day to day basis, I try not to close myself to the concrete situations of poverty that exist.

Òscar: For me to opt for the poorest is the key. We spent a few months in Santo Domingo and it shocked me, because we lived among the material poverty and the poverty, in some cases, of not knowing Christ. The work that I do in the college with the young people has its challenge. The Lord has put me there, although perhaps, it's not what I would have chosen.

**Tell us about your experience in Central America:**

Tomás: It's a very fulfilling experience: to see and live the contrasts that exist there, in Santo Domingo. Seeing how so much wealth and poverty live alongside each other; to appreciate the permanent laughter of the children there, the welcoming sincerity of the people, as well as realizing the necessities that they have, because they're very exposed and in many cases they are already being eaten up. The piarists mission is urgent, to take them our faith and our culture, it's moving to see the brothers that give their all. It was a fulfilling experience that has moved me, but I don't know if I can say, at this moment, I should be living there.

Òscar: Going there, wouldn't matter to me at all; being especially moved by the Piarists "praecipue" of "especially the poorest". Over there I felt that everything came together and I myself felt that I was where I ought to be. I'd live very content,

because, in addition, I'd experiment with the calmness of the Piarists school, that remains as its basis and essence, to live of Christ and for Christ, in the mission, that is to announce the good news to the poor.

**Let's speak about the formation: the positive elements and those elements that you could contribute to it?**

**Tomás:** The thing that I have most liked is that it's been a time of formation. I entered when I was 17 years old, in all this time it has formed me to be a very patient- person, Christian and piarists. It has helped me to have a relationship with the Lord and this has been and is the nucleus for our vocation. I'd have liked or I'd like a higher quality in civil and theological studies, in these, we should be more prepared. However, this depends on the centres that we go to study, not on the Provincial head. We've definitely been inculcated with the thirst for and habit of study.

**Òscar:** The basic study of these years has been the study of and the relationship with God; and this to me seems very good. The formation is a time that, at least in my life, is wrapped in mystery, like Christ's 30 years of hidden life: memories, ambivalent feelings in the formation, and, you can't always understand what you are going through, while you're living it.

Maybe, as time goes by, you'll become to understand what you've lived; some situations of suffering I haven't been able to understand in full, but that, I'm convinced have a reason. I agree with Tomás in the improvement of the intellectual aspect and to have a better pedagogic formation. Now, I'm working with young people and I realise that I'm lacking a lot in formation. In my opinion, I'd put forward the experience in the Third World because it's a valuable experience.

*Both Oscar and Tomas agree that the most valuable experience of the formation has been the people that have accompanied them, as well as , the importance of the daily liturgy that give meaning to all they live.*

**What's your vision of the Order in general ?**

**Tomás:** I'm lacking perspectives to be able to answer that question.

**Òscar:** It's not something that I know a lot about...but hard times have been predicted, in which either the piarists is completely a piarists, this means a man that lives an integrated life of faith and learning, or a man that will not be meaningful to today's world. Today, people really need good pastors, who like Jesus blessed children and young people. The challenge is in walking towards this place.

(By Julio César Boffano)