

OUR SALESIAN PATRONS AND HEROES

BLESSED CEFERINO NAMUNCURA

Ceferino was the son of the “Lord of the Pampas”, the great cacique of the Araucani (Mapuche) Manuel Namuncura, defeated and subdued by the Argentine army in 1883. One can learn a great deal from his short life.

He was born at Chimpay on April 26, 1886 and was baptized in 1888 by the Salesian missionary Fr. Milaneseo. It was he who had been the mediator in the peace treaty between the Araucani and the Argentine army, which led to the father of Ceferino being allowed to retain the title of “Great Cacique” and the territory of Chimpay for his people. At eleven years of age he was enrolled by his father in the government school in Buenos Aires. He wanted him to become the future defender of the Araucani. Ceferino, however, was unhappy there and his father transferred him to the Pius IX Salesian College. Here began that story of grace that was to transform a heart not yet fully illumined by the faith into a heroic witness of Christian life. He immediately showed great interest in studies, he loved the practices of piety and took the religious lessons very seriously, and was well liked by companions and superiors.

“Jesus, please protect my brothers from the prairie. If they do not love You, it is because they do not know You.”





Two events launched him on the way to the heights: reading the life of Dominic Savio whom he immediately took as his model, and his First Communion, at which he pledged himself to absolute fidelity to his great friend Jesus. From then on, this boy, who found it difficult to “get into line” and “to obey the sound of the bell”, became a model student. One day, when Ceferino was an aspirant at Viedma, Francesco De Salvo seeing him galloping around on a colt asked him “Ceferino, what would you like best?”.

He expected him to say something about horse riding, an art in which the Auracani were masters, but the boy, pulling the horse up, replied: “To become a priest”, and then rode off. But it was especially in these years of interior spiritual growth that his health began to fail. He became ill with tuberculosis. He was taken back to his native soil but that did not help, and Monsignor Cagliero decided to take him to Italy for better medical treatment. His presence there did not go unobserved: the newspapers spoke in glowing terms of the Prince of the Pampas”. Don Rua invited him in a private audience, listening with great interest to what he had to say and giving him one of his special medals ad principes. On March 28 he had to be admitted to the hospital of the St. John of God Brothers on the Island in the Tiber where he died on May 11, 1905.

Ceferino was a ripe fruit of salesian youth spirituality. His remains are now in the Sanctuary of Fortin Mercedes, Argentina and his tomb is the goal of constant pilgrimages since the reputation for holiness he enjoys among his own people is so great. He was declared Venerable on June 22, 1972 and beatified November 11, 2007 by Pope Benedict XVI.

