January 21st: Memorial of Saints Fructuosus, bishop and deacons Augurius and Eulogius, Martyrs

Gospel text (*Jn* 17:11b-19): Lifting up his eyes to heaven, Jesus prayed, saying: "Holy Father, keep them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one just as we are one. When I was with them I protected them in your name that you gave me, and I guarded them, and none of them was lost except the son of destruction, in order that the Scripture might be fulfilled.

But now I am coming to you. I speak this in the world so that they may share my joy completely. I gave them your word, and the world hated them, because they do not belong to the world any more than I belong to the world. I do not ask that you take them out of the world but that you keep them from the Evil One. They do not belong to the world any more than I belong to the world. Consecrate them in the truth. Your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I sent them into the world. And I consecrate myself for them, so that they also may be consecrated in truth."

"I gave them your word, and the world hated them"

Fr. Josep VALL i Mundó
(Barcelona, Spain)

Today, in the Dioceses of Catalonia the Church celebrates the feast of Saint Fructuosus, bishop and martyr and of his deacon's martyrs Augurius and Eulogius. We are well informed about their martyrdom by the authentic Acta; in particular, by the so-called "Passió dels sants màrtirs Fructuós o Fruitós, Auguri i Eulogi" (Passion of the saints martyrs' Fructuosus or Fruitos, Augurius and Eulogius). They died at the stake a day like today, January 21st, of the year 259, under the emperors Valerian and Gallienus.

The Mass for these Saints begins with these beautiful words, which perfectly synthesize their life of commitment and love in their episcopal and diaconate service: "More inflamed in love for Christ than by the flames of fire, Fructuosus, Augurius, and Eulogius, the three young men thrown into the furnace, cheerfully gave evidence of the resurrection they were awaiting."

We, Christians, must all bear witness to Christ. Even by giving our own life if necessary. "Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat" (Jn 12:24), i.e., it does not give any fruit. Our Tarragon saints, as ministers of Christ, gave much fruit throughout their lives by word and

action; but in the end they gave it all up, like so many other martyrs of those times of persecution, by offering their own life in cruel martyrdom. Before the crying people of God who gathered at the Tarragon amphitheater, Fructuosus encouraged them by saying: “You will not long be lacking a shepherd, nor can the love and promises of the Lord fail you either here or in the hereafter. For what you look upon now seems but the weakness of a single hour.”

Tarragona has always stood out by its good shepherds. Tertullian, a Christian writer, had already stated, a few years before, that "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church". And it did actually so happen in that Imperial city. From that See, Christianity quickly spread to many other places. How convenient would it be to remember here and now those verses from the pre-Christian roman poet Virgil, which can be applied to Fructuosus and his two deacons! “A new offshoot of a fructuous plant is scattered there / and within short, a gentle tree / its fertile branches stretching skyward / marvels at its new leaves / and at fruits that do not belong to it.”