



Catholic Pastoral Center

Diocese of Brownsville

Diocesan Relations
Office

Un Misionero Mariano

Mass at Basilica Honors Father Azpiazu

Bishop Raymundo J. Peña presided at a special Mass Aug. 1 for Father José Maria Azpiazu, an Oblate, at the Basilica of Our Lady of San Juan del Valle - National Shrine.

Father Azpiazu, age 100, passed away in San Antonio on July 29. He holds a very special place in the history of the Diocese of Brownsville for being named the first pastor of the San Juan community in 1949 and most significantly for being the founder of the original Virgen de San Juan Shrine which was dedicated to Our Lady of San Juan on May 2, 1954.

Father Azpiazu, who promoted the devotion to Our Lady of San Juan, oversaw the growth of the shrine during his 21-year tenure. He supervised the building of the pilgrim house and cafeteria, the retreat house, a residence for priests, a Catholic school, a nursing home, and a convent. He retired from the shrine in 1970.

Prior to the Mass a procession started at St. John the Baptist Church to the Basilica. Bishop Peña was joined at the Mass by Msgr. Juan Nicolau and Father John Lasseigne, an Oblate, as principal concelebrants, along with other priests of the Diocese.

Bishop Peña said he has many pleasant memories of Father Azpiazu, who was often called “Padre Happy” because of his unbreakable smile. “He was a true Oblate of Mary Immaculate. His deep missionary concern for the poor and his devotion to Mary are what moved him to bring the statue of Our Lady of San Juan de Los Lagos to San Juan, Texas.

“We can see the fruit of his work in the beautiful Basilica of Our Lady of San Juan del Valle, now visited by thousands of pilgrims from throughout Texas, from Mexico and from 28 States of the Union. Through the intercession of Nuestra Señora de San Juan del Valle, may the Lord grant him his merited reward.”

Bishop Peña said that each time Father Azpiazu was invited to return to the Valley to visit the new shrine he declined and told the bishop, “It is not necessary. All that you tell me is the work of God, the Virgin Mary and the pilgrims. It is not the work of this Oblate of Mary Immaculate.”

The shrine was designated a national shrine in 1998 and the following year Pope John Paul II designated it as a minor basilica. The basilica now draws approximately 20,000 pilgrims each week.

During the Mass, Bishop Peña addressed Father Azpiazu saying, “Father José Maria Azpiazu, Father Happy, we have brought you here, perhaps against your wishes, not to glorify you, but to give glory to God. We thank him for having blessed you with a missionary heart and a Marian heart. We thank him for having chosen you...as an instrument for good, here in San Juan, in Texas, in Mexico, and in much of the United States and even Canada.”

Following the Mass, Father Azpiazu’s body was returned to San Antonio for a Rosary on Aug. 2 and a Mass of Christian burial celebrated on Aug. 3 at the Immaculate Conception Memorial Chapel. Father Azpiazu was laid to rest at the Oblate Cemetery.

In lieu of flowers, memorial gifts may be made to the: “Seminarist Scholarship Fund,” Oblate Missions, P.O. Box 659432, San Antonio, Texas 78265-9432.