

Why October 21?

A Brief History of St. Gaspar's Feast

All who share in devotion to Gaspar know that his feast is celebrated on October 21, but not everyone knows that it was not always celebrated on this date. Many ask why this date was chosen. Here we make a bit of an *excursus* on the various dates on which the feast was celebrated and on what prompted the selection of October 21.

The feast of a saint is usually celebrated on a date of significance in his or her life, e.g., the date of birth, death, canonization, etc. Gaspar's feast could not be celebrated on his birthday, January 6, because it is (in many places, at least) the Solemnity of the Epiphany. For the same reason it was not judged opportune to celebrate it on the date of his death, December 28, since the Feast of the Holy Innocents occurs on that date. By a decree of the Sacred Congregation of Rites of April 12, 1905, the feast of Blessed Gaspar del Bufalo was assigned to July 15 for the Missionaries of the Precious Blood and for the Adorers of the Precious Blood. The diocese of Rome, on the other hand, chose the date of June 23 for its own calendar. In order to maintain uniformity with the diocese of Rome, the Missionaries and the Adorers sought the faculty of celebrating the feast on June 23 as well. The Congregation granted this request on November 28, 1906.

But since the Feast of the Sacred Heart sometimes fell on June 23, impeding the celebration of the feast of Blessed Gaspar, the Missionaries and Adorers obtained permission to celebrate the feast on December 30 (decree of the Sacred Congregation of Rites, September 27, 1913) and then on December 29 (decree of July 23, 1914). The diocese of Rome, however, fixed the feast of Blessed Gaspar on January 4. These dates remained in force even after the canonization of Gaspar on June 12, 1954. That explains why Blessed John XXIII went to venerate St. Gaspar on January 4, 1963, in the church of Santa Maria in Trivio: the diocese of Rome was celebrating his feast on that day.

Following the publication of the new Code of Liturgical Rubrics in 1960, the feast of St. Gaspar had to be transferred out of the octave of Christmas and consequently became *moveable*, that is, in some years it would be celebrated on January 2 and in others on January 3. To eliminate the inconvenience caused by this "mobility," the Missionaries of the Precious Blood obtained from the Sacred Congregation of Rites, by decree of May 14, 1962, the right to celebrate the feast of St. Gaspar on October 21. Thus the Missionaries and the Adorers have celebrated the feast of Gaspar on October 21 and in 1973 the Diocese of Rome also adopted this date. It is also possible

that in certain places and for particular reasons to celebrate the feast of St. Gaspar on another date.

What were the reasons for choosing October 21? They were above all pastoral reasons. The feast was set for October 21, wrote Don Giuseppe Quattrino, then provincial of the Italian Province, "...for the convenience of all the churches of the Institute in Italy and abroad. At this time of the year one avoids the harsh weather of winter and the students of the colleges and schools directed by the Missionaries can participate." Added to these reasons were others linked to Gaspar's life: his mother, Annunziata Quartieroni, died on October 20, 1811, and his father, Antonio del Bufalo, on October 31, 1831. In addition, since October is the month of the missions, what could be more suitable for celebrating the feast of a great missionary and founder of a missionary Congregation, whose members are currently involved in missions *ad gentes*?

Taken from a footnote in: Beniamino Conti, CPPS, *San Gaspare del Bufalo, Apostolo del Preziosissimo Sangue*. (Roma: 2002)

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