


**THE SERVANT OF GOD
BROTHER ADRIÁN DEL CERRO
SÁNCHEZ, O.H.**

"By giving, you are sowing..."



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Brother José Ramón Pérez Acosta, O.H.**

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A SMALL VILLAGE IN TOLEDO

Five centuries have passed since a group of Spanish peasants from Torrecilla, near Toledo, founded the small and unassuming hamlet of Retamoso de la Jara along the banks of the two streams, Retamoso and Piloncillo. That small hamlet will go down in history as the birthplace of a man who was also modest and unassuming, Adrián del Cerro Sánchez, who today is worthy of veneration for having lived out his life committing his heart to the heart of the man who had stolen it from him: St John of God.

What had originally been called Valle de los Trigos and was later renamed Retamos ceased to be a hamlet of Torrecilla de la Jara after being granted



Immaculate Conception Parish, Retamoso de la Jara.

autonomy in 1926. Since 2004, its official name has been Retamoso de la Jara.

Adrián del Cerro Sánchez was born on 2 July 1923 into a humble, hard-working family, the fifth of six siblings: Braulio, Lorenzo, Antonia and Laura; his eldest brother, also named Adrián, had died when he was just two years old. Brother Adrián described his background in the following terms: *“My father was a very small farmer and my mother a seamstress. I attended elementary school at the village school and received my earliest education in a government school in my own village, which only had one teacher.”*

“I was born in a small village in Toledo, called Retamoso de la Jara, and it was there that Our Lord made me conscious of my vocation after completing military service when I was 27 years old. Mine was a small village with several farms.

We all worked on the farm. That is where I grew up and that is where my vocation was forged. We had a church, but we had no resident parish priest and so I used to go to confession to a visiting priest when he came to celebrate Mass in the village.”



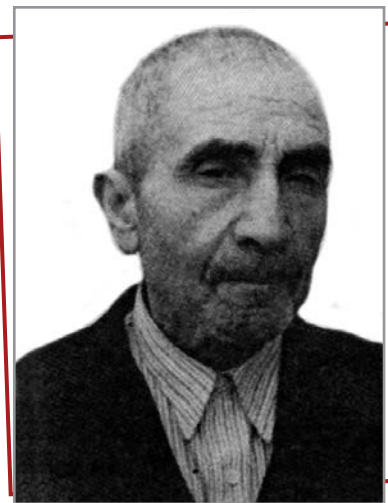
A Parish baptismal font, where Brother Adrián was baptised on 8 July 1923.

HIS GOOD PARENTS

His father, Dionisio del Cerro, was a farmer with a firm and strict character, but he was friendly, a good Christian, faithful to his religious duties, who taught his children good manners and to love Our Lord.

His mother, Marina Sánchez, was born in the village, and was a few years younger than his father, but she soon disappeared from little Adrián's life. His father and mother always attended Sunday Mass together, accompanying their children, and made sure that they said their evening prayers at bed-time.

One day, returning from a visit to a nearby town, Adrián's parents were caught in a heavy downpour. The torrential rain and the cold air in the Sierra took their toll on their health, and especially his mother Marina's, who caught pneumonia, which led to her death. Here is what Adrián said about his mother: *“Unfortunately I don't remember her: I was only three and a half at the time. But I do remember my father who took care of all of us.”*

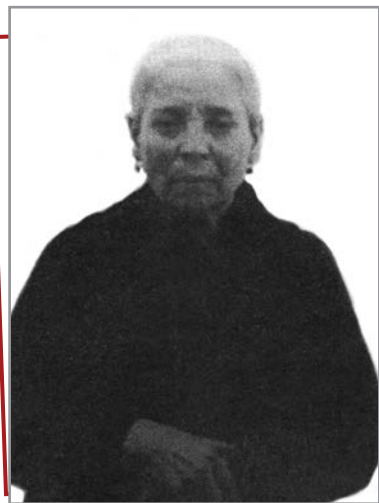


Dionisio, Brother Adrián's father.

Adrián's memories of his mother were vague as in a dream. He was too young to have vivid memories of that time, but there was one image that always stayed with him: the pain of the early death of his mother's first-born child, and Adrián's early loss of a mother's love. But he always felt that Our Lady and his mother in heaven continued to support and comfort him throughout his life.

Brother Adrián said that his elder sister Antonia and his cousin Eufemia were true mothers to him. His cousin's kindness and affection for him undoubtedly left a mark on Adrián and on his brothers' character.

Adrián described his house in the following words: *"When I was a child, my father built it new. He was from Galicia. We had a front door, two inner courtyards, three or four rooms and an attic where we used to store the grain, the wheat and chick-peas, produced on the farm. It was a simple and tranquil life."*



Eufemia, his cousin who was like a mother to him.

Adrián grew up surrounded by olive trees, fields, streams, immersed in the beauty of nature. His father made

sure that he learned to read and write so that, a little while later at the age of six, he was able to take lessons from a neighbour with the other village children in a small room. Adrián said of his father: "My father prayed a lot. I know one prayer he taught me and I have never forgotten it. My father loved going to Mass. For us children, he was a true example of faith. I remember seeing the pages of one of his prayer books worn out. Being a widower, he dedicated himself more to his children and enjoyed cooking, and his presence made a great contribution to my vocation, and he died at the age of 92."

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Adrián's life went on quietly without any particular events. As he grew older, he helped his father with the farm work, alternating his labour in the fields with his studies, particularly at times of the year when much more work was needed in the fields, marking the cycle of life: sowing the seed, and harvesting the olives and grapes. In the summer, farming demanded enormous efforts; the flock had to be cared for, and at harvest time they had to out spread the wheat before threshing it to separate the grain from the chaff.



Antonia, his elder sister.

These tasks sometimes prevented Adrián from attending Mass which he never wanted to miss, and this was a source of great regret.

Nevertheless, he did not go without enjoying carefree moments with his friends, joining in the village fiestas and dances that were organised in the village square accompanied by an accordion.

This is how he recalled his childhood: *"I was about fifteen years old and shared everything with the other boys; we were naughty and used to go to nearby villages to play with other boys, and had fun. It was a carefree and peaceful existence, free of bad habits and full of good things,"*

He loved singing, and had a very good singing voice. He sang Pepe Blanco's songs which were very popular at the time, and always hummed *"mi jaca, galopa con el viento..."* (my donkey, gallop with the wind...).



Braulio and Lorenzo,
Brother Adrián's brothers.

From a recent testimony by Prudencio Juarez, a neighbour of the Sanchez family about eleven years younger than Adrián, we know that on Saturday afternoons,

Adrián used to go to Bible class and although it was not particularly instructive, he listened willingly and learned from it.

There was a small orchard in Retamoso de la Jara where Adrián and Prudencio used to sit in the shade of a fig tree to read the Bible together on Sundays, because Adrián was very interested. One day they came across a passage referring to punishing enemies with the death penalty. Very shaken by what he was reading, the young Adrián commented: *"This cannot be right if God is Love"*.



Little Adrián on the right of the group,
with his sister Laura, brother Braulio
and a cousin. The Servant of God was
five years old.

A CHANGING SPAIN

The Spanish Civil War in the 1930s plunged the entire country into darkness, although it hardly touched the area around Retamoso. Adrián continued to lead a normal life, far from the horrors of war, but his elder brother suffered a gunshot wound at the front from which he recovered, but with repercussions on his health.

At the age of 21, young Adrián was also called to arms, his duties as a citizen required it, and he enlisted in Móstoles in March 1944 to start his training. He was later assigned to a Drivers' Barracks in Madrid, although he never drove a vehicle as he was never sent to the front.



Adrián at the age of 21, during military service in Móstoles (Madrid).

He remembers that time like this: *"In Móstoles, a small town in the Madrid countryside, I did nothing special. The years passed and I thought of becoming a carpenter, like a friend of mine; but I did my normal military service, that's all!"*

After two years of military service, he returned

to his village where he continued his daily work: the fields, the livestock, his friends, even some healthy friendships with a few girls who included Ovidia; but day after day, something new was taking shape in his heart. The more time passed, the more he felt the need to direct his life along a different course than traditional marriage. Evidently the idea of a Religious vocation was becoming clearer and clearer. He felt the need to consecrate his life to God.

He was 27 years old when he decided to talk to the village priest and confide his great desire to him: *"I want to consecrate my life to God, to serve my neighbour"*.

The priest asked him: *"Do you want to be a priest, or do you want to be a Brother? Do you know any Religious Congregations? Do you know the Brothers of St John of God?"*

Realising that he had no idea about any of the available options, the priest said: *"I tell you what: I will write to the Prior of the Hospitaller Brothers in Ciempozuelos to see what they say about it."* That was in the late summer of 1950.

In those years, the Hospitaller Brothers used to receive many requests from aspirants to the Order, many of whom lacked solid vocational foundations, and they would wait for them to apply again with more conviction and perseverance.

HIS ENTRY INTO THE POSTULANCY

The Jerez historian and writer, Antonio Mariscal Trujillo, who has authored a small and captivating book, *“Hermano Adrián, el Limosnero de Dios”*, (‘Brother Adrián, God’s Almoner’, which has been widely used for this short biography), says that although there is no trace of what the priest in Retamoso de la Jara had written to the Prior of Ciempozuelos, what we do know is that he very soon received the superior’s positive response. On 17 October 1950, accompanied by the priest, Adrián left his village to enter the Religious life in the Hospitaller Order in the Aspirantate at Ciempozuelos to serve God and his neighbour, and like St John of God, to do “everything for the love of God”.

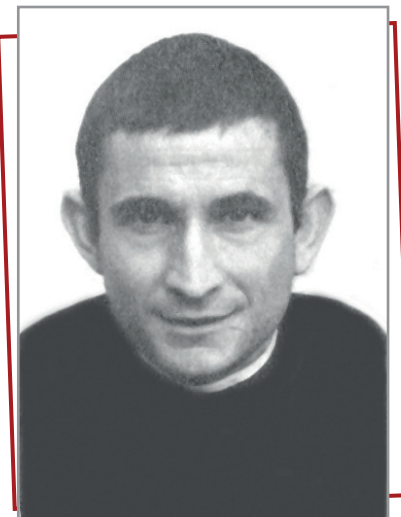
“My chosen vocation really put me to the test when I began my journey in Ciempozuelos, a psychiatric hospital with more than a thousand patients. My vocational response was at a very high cost, especially having to say goodbye to my family who were so dear to me.”

For a year and a half he stayed at Ciempozuelos for his initial formation, carrying out all kinds of tasks, looking after the patients who were being treated there; they were men with serious mental illnesses that required him to practise the virtue of patience and the ability to work, sacrifice and practise self-denial. *“In the wards for the mentally sick men we had to stand guard, do the cleaning, make the beds, and we were always kept busy at work and do-*

ing good: an exhausting experience. We had to keep to a strict time-table which meant that the pace of work was relentless and demanding. There was so much to do, and it was very tiring, but I had set my heart on becoming a Brother of St John of God, and to succeed by placing all my trust in God, in prayer and in whatever else was necessary”.

One day he was asked if he had ever thought of giving up and throwing in the towel, to which he replied: *‘I was tempted of course, and sometimes we were in really difficult situations, but then I would go to a priest. We had Brother priest belonging to the Order and after meeting him I would always come away feeling calm and happy again: he had a specially gentle approach and that encouraged me on.’*

On 25 April 1952 Adrián made his temporary profession of the vows of poverty, chastity, obedience and hospitality. This last vow, hospitality, obliges the Brothers of Saint John of God to care for the sick at all times, even at the risk of their own lives, creat-



1951 Brother Adrián, at the age of 28, as a novice.

ing the heroic decision to spend an entire lifetime dedicated to charity. This vow has led many Brothers to become martyrs of mercy.

Shortly after his profession, he was told that he would be assigned to the house at Jerez de la Frontera, which Adrián willingly accepted, just as he always accepted whatever instructions he was given by his superiors, honouring his vows to the letter.

The Jerez hospital had been operating since the 17th century, and had passed through a very difficult period in its history between 1833 and 1851 with the expulsion of the Brothers and the expropriation of the hospital to raise funds to pay off the national public debt and broaden the social base of liberalism. When that period came to an end towards the end of the 19th century, the Brothers were able to resume their work during the restoration of the Order in Spain by Saint Benedict Menni, an Italian Brother and priest, who also founded the Sisters Hospitallers of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

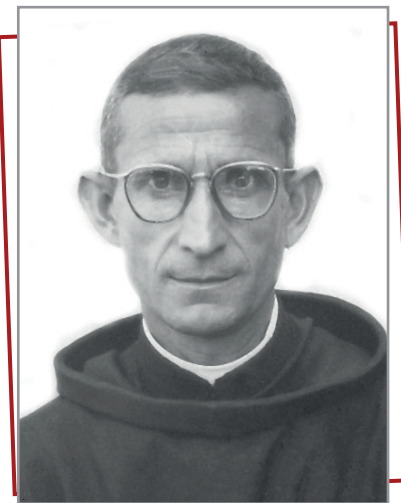
Later on, a distinguished woman from Jerez, Micaela de Paradas, donated land on the outskirts of the city, in a place called Bellavista, to the Brothers of St John of God, where the foundations of the Santa Rosalía Hospital were laid, named at the express wish of the benefactress after her mother, Rosalía. The new building was to be dedicated to treating children suffering from two terrible diseases that were rife at the time: polio and TB of the bone, both of which had terribly serious outcomes.

HIS ARRIVAL IN JEREZ DE LA FRONTERA

Brother Adrián arrived at the Jerez railway station in the evening of 15 September 1952, and accompanied by another Brother, headed straight for the Hospital.

Brother Adrián wrote: *"I arrived in Jerez three months after my profession, and stayed there for about six years from 1952 to 1958. There were many paralysed children, much loved by the local people; it was a very different kind of work from what I had been doing in Ciempozuelos. Life was more bearable. From dealing with the mentally ill to caring for children. Quite a different experience to our work in Ciempozuelos. Jerez was a very poor city."*

For many years, the Santa Rosalía Hospital had been one of Spain's most important hospitals, a benchmark and a flagship for the holistic treatment of thousands of children from all over Spain and Morocco. These were children suffering from polio and all its after-effects, and from other



1954 Brother Adrián at the age of 31, after his Profession.

bone diseases, mainly tuberculosis, which seriously threatened the future of those affected. The hospital also catered for the educational and occupational needs of the children in its care.

To take care of the poor children, especially those suffering from polio and tuberculosis, they had a magnificent medical team who deployed their skills generously and free of charge. Prominent among them was the eminent traumatologist, Dr José Girón Segura, who selflessly treated hundreds of children every year.

There were two fundamental aspects to implementing this treatment project: the medical aspect on the one hand, and the economic aspect on the

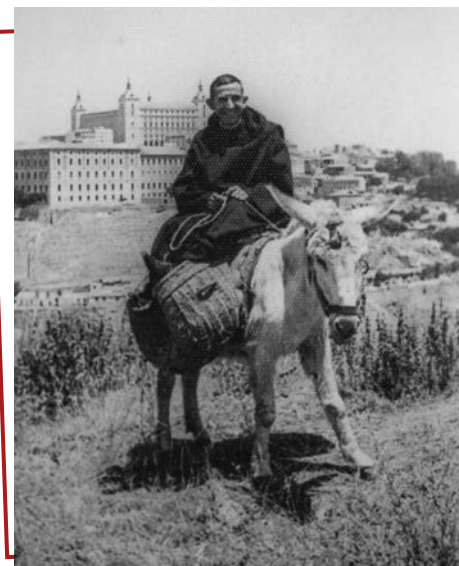


1956 the Servant of God with some young patients at the Santa Rosalía Hospital in Jerez.

other. How should they support this work when there was no institutional funding to count on? And that was where Brother Adrián's mission and passion came into play.

On his arrival in Jerez, the Superior of the Centre entrusted him with the hard task of "Almoner", the far from easy mission of begging for money to provide the best care for the children who had turned to the Brothers for care and assistance. Despite the hard work he was encouraged by his community who gave him their full support.

Brother Adrián started by walking the streets in Jerez, rich and poor alike, knocking at every door and begging people to offer whatever help they



1962 The Servant of God riding on a donkey towards Alcázar de Toledo.

could afford: some agreed to make a regular donation, others to help from time to time, but all with the same aim in mind – to keep the hospital going.

Businesses, wine-cellars, military barracks – they all soon became used to receiving the regular and punctual arrival of little Brother Adrián, clutching his black bag under his arm to collect what had been agreed and, of course, to try to attract more new benefactors.

Brother Adrián used to travel out to visit farms, ranches and farmhouses all over the Jerez countryside, come rain come shine, braving the wind and downpours; for him, every day of the year was a good day to brighten the lives of the children at the Hospital. The Brothers were not concerned if the donations were in kind: wheat, corn, chickpeas – everything was used to support their work, which not only meant covering the needs of the hospital but also providing sustenance to many families who relied on them, knowing that they would do anything to help alleviate their poverty.

When asked if he had ever had any trouble going from door to door, from farmstead to farmstead, he replied: *"I have experienced everything, but I have forgotten any trouble I experienced worth remembering. I do what I can, and I accept whatever people give me, but I try to go back again, and then again. I am always hopeful, and I am always successful. I try not to mind whatever less pleasant things people say about me, or what they might say to my face, because when you are asking for God and for others, everything is fine."*

LOOKING TO AFRICA

As the years went by, Brother Adrián continued to travel around the countryside visiting farms, and even venturing into more remote areas, and with Brother José Miguel Valdés, another Brother with whom he shared fraternal life, he used to visit towns and villages in an old "jeep". Brother José Miguel once suggested: *"Instead of travelling so many kilometres in search of a few sacks of grain to take to the consortium to be weighed, why not tell your friends to make a regular financial donation?"*

At first he was reluctant to give up his old ways of doing things, but he soon recognised the soundness of this idea, which was also very well received by his benefactors. Almsgiving had been 'modernised', and this new system of fundraising helped to increase the number, and the value, of the donors' subscriptions.

In 2006, Brother Adrián agreed to give an interview to Onda Jerez Televisión, and simply answered the questions they put to him:

What does being good mean to you? *"To be good means being sensitive. Doing good, but without thinking that we are being good. Being convinced that we can be better. If you think you are good, you must convince yourself that there are people who are better than you. Rather than trying to teach people, you have a lot to learn from others. If I think I am good, there will always be someone better than me. And then I learn!"*

What lessons did you learn in Jerez de la Frontera? *"I learnt to live by asking on behalf of others, and*

to thank the donors. That stimulates me a lot when I pray. I do not ask for myself, but for the Work of St John of God. I have been given the chance to help the sick in their beds. I offer myself to do those little services that they need most. Keeping the hospital clean from the early hours in the morning is greatly appreciated. Everything helps to improve their health."

Where do you draw your inner strength from?
"I am not the strong one; it is God who gives me the strength I need. It is God's grace working with me."

His mission to help the poor often took him to Ceuta and Melilla. He used to make these visits accompanied by a handful of Brothers, and while he was always intent on spending as little as possible on himself, he would take advantage of the hospitality offered by local convents.

He used to go to both cities in search of benefactors to collaborate with the work of the Brothers in



2006 Brother Adrián, being interviewed on Canal Sur TV.

Jerez and almost invariably returned with requests from families, both Christian and Muslim, asking if they could take their children suffering from polio to be treated at the House of the Brothers of St John of God. Adrián left no request unanswered, and even though he was always reluctant to seek favours, he never abandoned anyone to their fate, which is why Ceuta and Melilla were so happy to see him there, and rewarded him with substantial offerings.

SOLEMN PROFESSION

On 26 April 1955, in Ciempozuelos, Brother Adrián made his solemn profession as a Brother of St John of God. In the years that followed he always



1955 Solemn profession at the age of 32. Jerez de la Frontera.

recalled this date as one of the happiest and most significant days in his life.

In October 1958 he received news from the Provincial Superior that he was to be transferred to the "Our Lady of Peace" Home in Madrid, dedicated to treating mental illness. It was obvious that Adrián was very much at home in Jerez and was very content with the work he was doing there, but because of his vow of obedience he accepted his new assignment with pleasure and absolute trust in God.

In December 1959, he was transferred to Ciempozuelos to take up the post of Vice Prior, and following the 1962 Provincial Chapter, he was transferred back to Jerez where he would remain for the rest of his life.



Brother Adrián praying before the crucifix.

BACK TO JEREZ FOREVER

When the Superior asked him where he wanted to go, he did not hesitate for a single moment: *"To Jerez, if possible"*. He was overjoyed to return to Jerez, to 'his' Hospital, with 'his' children, and with his black bag under his arm, ready to resume the journey to which he had devoted so much energy. And it was here that the Lord was to show him a new way of showing sceptics that being devoted to assisting people in need filled people's hearts with boundless love and manifested the providential work of God.

Very often the people of Jerez, who were familiar with Brother Adrián's mission, would stop their cars when they saw him walking down the street and offer to give him a lift wherever he wanted to



The young almoner in the streets of Jerez de la Frontera.

go, even if it was not on their route. To honour his vow of poverty, he tried to save money by not using public transport.

As time passed, the Brothers managed to buy a small car so that they could broaden their range of work. On his mission, Brother Adrián was always accompanied by two faithful co-workers from the Centre, his good friend Julián, who suffered from the serious after-effects of polio, and Juan Leal. Surely the Lord must have rewarded them for going on those endless fundraising journeys, whose aim was to make life more dignified and comfortable for the many children being cared for in the Hospital.

In Ceuta, Brother Adrián's arrival was a major event. He not only visited his potential benefactors, house to house, but he organised events to receive donations. He used to take his beloved 'stone altar server' with him, which was simply a little statue of



Brother Adrián having fun with the children in the ward.

a child dressed as an altar server, holding a piggy bank. His visits to Ceuta and Melilla were also rewarded by being left the legacy of a Moroccan land-owning woman who was familiar with the work of the Brothers of St John of God.

During his stay there he was offered hospitality with the Brothers of the Christian Schools, the Lasalian Brothers.

In 1963, a nationwide vaccination campaign against polio was launched in Spain, leading to the eradication of this terrible disease some years later. Advances in pharmacology also made it possible to control tuberculosis even when it had not been completely eradicated, but all these circumstances meant that the Brothers could look forward to new future challenges.

Although polio and tuberculosis were almost wiped out, there was still a small number of children in the Hospital, primarily to be cared for and to complete their schooling, but also to treat the still evident after-effects of the disease.

SOUGHT AFTER BY THE POOR

Brother John of God Orquín has written that Brother Adrián had an intense experience of St John of God's begging spirit, convinced that helping the poor meant helping oneself. And this work led him to a very real discovery that broke his heart, that the

sufferings caused by poverty, not only by the children being cared for in the Hospital but also in so many homes whose families' inability to afford the bare essentials for survival was plunging them into utter destitution. So he would walk the streets every day, driven by a renewed sense of purpose, ready to confront the sufferings of others and accompanied by some benefactor who would be faced with first-hand evidence of the extreme destitution those people had to endure.

The Servant of God was always there at his daily appointment with 'poverty', always ready to respond to people's demands. With the money he raised he used to pay people's electricity and water bills, and medicines many families could not afford, or pay their rent and meet any other need within the bounds of his possibilities.



The Servant of God assisting a child at meal time.

On Fridays, he used to distribute food for everyone: oil, chickpeas, rice and whatever else he had received from his benefactors.

So many people used to seek his assistance that in order to avoid interfering too much in the life of the Hospital he used to distribute the food only on Fridays, although people in dire need would still come to see him on any day and at all hours, knowing that they would not leave empty-handed.

In 1972, the first contract was concluded with the National Health Service and the hospital's health care work was officially recognised. The Order in Jerez worked in the modern health care facility named after St John Grande. The hospital worked hard to help clear the endless surgical waiting lists for all the illnesses that the National Health Service referred to it.

In 1975, a further step forward was taken with the inauguration of a paediatric medical and surgical service, with the capacity to take in sixty children accompanied by their mother.

The development of the paediatric clinic, which required ever shorter hospital stays, shifted the focus on the elderly, especially in the field of internal medicine. Brother Adrián was always attentive to the most lonely patients and who needed help to feed themselves, or to get out of bed, and anything else. After a long day spent begging, he would return to the hospital and put on his white coat to devote himself to the sick patients who were in the greatest need of assistance.

NURSING STUDIES

In order to acquire a professional qualification, he resumed his studies for a nursing degree at the school in Ciempozuelos. Another important moment in his life as a Hospitaller Brother began for him. In spite of his professional qualification, he had no intention of abandoning his primary commitment as a beggar, and he always stayed close to the poor and families in difficulty, always taking charge of paying their utility bills, providing medicines, procuring childcare and so many other things they needed. He never gave up helping the poor and needy families. Charity was his fixation.

By the spring of 1992, the Hospital had completed a major refurbishment, culminating in the inauguration of the present-day St John Grande Hos-



1962 Brother Adrián in the Rehabilitation Unit at the Santa Rosalía Hospital.

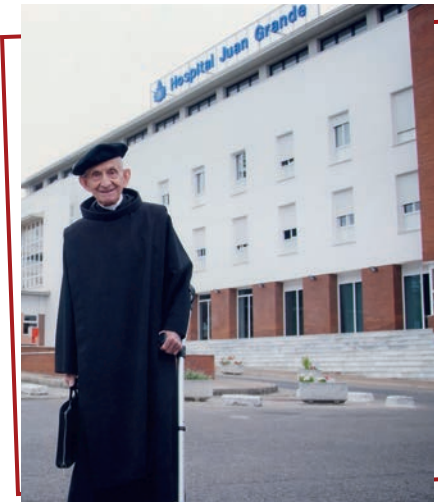
pital, equipped with modern inpatient floors, new operating theatres, outpatient clinics, rehabilitation and radiology.

The foundation stone was blessed by the Bishop of the Diocese of Asidonia-Jerez, Mgr Rafael Bellido Caro, in the presence of Brother Brian O'Donnell, the Superior General of the Order, and Brother Julián Sánchez Bravo, the Provincial Superior.

In the meantime, the old plan to refurbish the old part of the hospital to create the new 'Geriatric Home' for the loving care of the elderly came to fruition.

In 2001, the Home was inaugurated in the presence of Superior General Brother Pascual Piles Ferrando and the Provincial Superior, Brother José Ramón Pérez Acosta.

It goes without saying that the first person to get up in the morning and the last one to go to bed was Brother Adrián. In his white coat, working tirelessly, surrounded by so many old people, he fed them, pushed



Brother Adrián on the forecourt of the Jerez de la Frontera hospital.

wheelchairs and got on with whatever was needed. He never went to bed without visiting the patients and generally checking the house, turning off any lights left on unnecessarily, closing any doors that were not closed properly and getting everything ready to ensure a peaceful night.

Speaking of lights, he also used to switch off the ultraviolet light that was supposed to be left on constantly, as well as the ultraviolet light on the access door to the operating theatres. He did the same to the water taps, always intent on never wasting anything.

But the funny thing is that his Superior at the time, Brother Juan de Dio Orquín, had ordered Brother Adrián not to switch the lights off, and since he always obeyed orders he came up with the idea of slightly unscrewing the bulbs of certain lights that he considered excessive, remaining obedient by not turning off the lights, while still helping to save money.

He had such a deep devotion to Our Lady that on the great Feast Days of the Immaculate Conception and other Marian Solemnities he could hardly contain his enthusiasm and, as the celebration of Mass began he would take the microphone and invite the congregation to reflect on the meaning of the feast and the virtues of the Our Lord's Mother.

Moreover, when he was visiting the wineries – where most of his benefactors lived and worked – he would sometimes stand on a wine barrel and speak about his experience as a alms-beggar and almoner, and his daily routine. And those who sometimes offered to accompany him did so out

of friendship and for the pleasure of talking to him and hearing his advice. It was thanks to his way of doing things and his character, prudence and discretion, that everyone considered him to be a saint.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS WITH HIS WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT

His journalist friend, Manuel Liaño, interviewed him in 1986, and wrote: *"We love and admire him because we would all like to be like our blessed Brother Adrián, a man of God who entered completely into the hearts of the people of Jerez, both high-ranking and ordinary people, a man who clearly saw through everything, with heartfelt honesty and candour, and for his immense work on behalf of the needy. We cannot imagine what a great man and what great humanity are hidden in the small body of this son of Castile, because what we see in him is a 'trotter' in a black cassock, a real athlete of God, in whom there is a potential saint."*

The fact remains that everyone who knew him sensed that they were in the presence of someone who was very special, a man sent by God, and who was happy to help the poorest of the poor.

Here are a few of the most significant answers by Brother Adrián in the course of his interview which reveal a little more about him.

What is your working day like? *"I usually get up at six in the morning and go to bed after eleven at night. I don't get paid overtime. God and people repay me more than enough."*

Do you have any little hobbies or bad habits? *"I like the bullfight. I laugh a lot with Tipy Coll. I love the songs of Valderrama and Pepe Blanco. I don't know any of today's singers because I don't have time. I also like to read a lot."*

To do your work, didn't they give you a motorbike? *"Yes, a motorbike, but it was only used for the hospital: I relied more on my own two feet"*

Weren't you happy with this gift? *"Yes, but one day while learning to ride it I fell off. So I prefer walking. My friends in Jerez drive me anywhere I need to go"*

Have you ever sacrificed yourself 'for the love of God'? *"Many times. This is what the Cross is all about, and the whole point of the Religious Life"*

Have you never felt ashamed to beg for alms? *"No – I am not ashamed of begging. But I found it very hard to overcome my shyness"*

Would you have preferred to be something different from the begging friar? *"I feel very comfortable with myself as I am, because I think that is what God is asking me to be. To stop begging would mean stopping doing much good to the poor. I thank God for having enabled me to undertake this mission so easily, and also because I have learnt so much from the people of Jerez"*

JOHN GRANDE DECLARED SAINT

1996 was to be an important year for the Church, for Jerez de la Frontera and for the Brothers of Saint John of God. Brother Adrián del Cerro travelled to Rome together with other Brothers and the delegation of citizens of Jerez, accompanied by their beloved Bishop, Bishop Rafael Bellido, for the canonisation of Saint John Grande.

John Paul II granted a special audience to the Brothers of St John of God, and Brother Adrián was there wearing his green scarf around his neck, full of warmth and enormous affection and respect for the Vicar of Christ with whom he spoke for a few



1996 Brother Adrián in Rome for the canonisation of St John Grande.

moments. Bursting with happiness and joy, Brother Adrián approached the Supreme Pontiff, took his hands and said: *"Holy Father, the Church, the Hospitaller Order and Jerez are with the Pope"*. And reacting to the wonderful surprise of Brother Adrián's presence and overwhelming warmth, the Holy Father responded with a blessing that left a huge impression on the faithful follower of St John of God. Holding hands with the person who is now Saint John Paul II was the most deeply-felt and beautiful experience in Brother Adrián's life. He recalled this moment many times in Jerez and felt his vocation to dedicate himself to God, the Church and the poor even more deeply.

A few years later, the Brothers in Jerez opened the Geriatric Centre, extending their service to help the most needy people. And our exceptional Brother Adrián remained a prominent part of the mission for his unassuming appearance and his total readiness to be involved. Dr Jaén Esquivel wrote some beautiful verses dedicated to Brother Adrián, entitled:

"A habit and his shoes: ... he asks for nothing more"

A habit and his shoes
to be able to walk.
To beg for others.
What an example of humility!
A candid smile on his face
and fire in his eyes
burning with love
wherever he goes.

He asks for nothing more
than a habit and his shoes
to be able to walk.
To give to people with nothing
and to beg from those who have more.
Small, fragile without,
a pure volcano of love and kindness within:
This is Brother Adrián
Who asks for nothing more
than a habit and his shoes
to walk on to Glory'.

Celebrating his Golden Jubilee, the diocesan bishop, Bishop Juan del Río Martín, ended his homily by speaking about Brother Adrián's simplicity and the good he did for everyone, rich and poor, with his constant dedication to others: *'Adrián, Jerez thanks you for your exemplary behaviour.'*

FIFTY YEARS OF PROFESSION

In 2002, Brother Adrián celebrated 50 years of his Religious profession in Jerez, which he said was one of the happiest days in his life. His love for his neighbour knew no bounds and his dedication was taken to the extreme. The only limit he set himself was obedience to his Superior, who forced him to take time off to rest, which he saw as time wasted. In 2003 he was honoured by the whole of Jerez. The City Corporation awarded him the Gold Medal of the City of Jerez. The award ceremony was unfor-

gettable. An avenue in the nearby Barriada de San Juan de Dios has been named after him, "Avenida Hermano Adrián". In the days following the award the press was full of praise for Brother Adrián: *"He looks like a young boy from the way he walks so fast and his constant coming and going, always helping others... one of the best-loved and most admired people in Jerez... 'a wandering saint', as I often say because that is what he is. A man blessed by God, a indefatigable worker, who always stands at the side of whoever is in need of anything'.*



2002, 50th anniversary of his Religious profession at the Shrine of Saint John Grande.

One of his neighbours, with the typical sense of humour of the people of the blessed land of Andalusia, shouted out to him: *"But little Brother Adrián has made off with the hunger of many people!"*

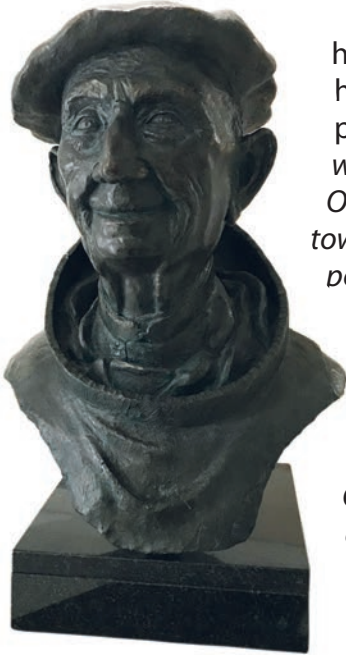
This small and lively man aroused great admiration. A glance from him opened doors and hearts, and it was very difficult, not to say impossible, to deny Brother Adrián anything, whether rich or poor, or only with what they could afford. People were always willing to give alms for the most vulnerable.



2003 Award of the Gold Medal by the City of Jerez de la Frontera.

THE ECHO OF HIS 50TH ANNIVERSARY

The media reported the 50th anniversary of his profession, drawing attention to his reputation as a media personality, but he declared: *'I don't deserve what they are saying about me. I am just an ordinary friar, a Brother like so many others. It is true that the celebration of my 50 years as a Hospitaller Brother was an impressive event, I did not ask for anything and I was touched by the heartfelt support of the people.'*



The bust of Brother Adrián placed at the entrance of the San Juan Grande hospital.

When asked whether he had seen any miracles in his lifetime, he would reply: *"Many miracles happen, we just don't notice them. One day as I was leaving the town hall in Ceuta, an electric pole fell across the street and ended up at my feet. I was within a hair's breadth of being crushed by the pole, but nothing happened to me. I ran to the Church to thank God, because I was starting to live again."*

Dr Cosano, the Centre's radiologist, persuaded him to pose for him in order to sculpt a bust as a tribute to him to be

placed at the entrance of his beloved home, the St John Grande Hospital.

On 9 September 2010, in an intimate ceremony, the bust of Brother Adrián was unveiled and has been standing guard over the entrance to the Hospital ever since. The unveiling ceremony was attended by the Provincial Superior of the Betica Province, Brother Julián Sánchez Bravo. Although the bust does not show his black satchel, it does depict his equally inseparable black beret that was always associated with Brother Adrián.

Gaspar de Torrecera described him well in his beautiful article "Brother Sun" published in the Jerez daily on 6 August 1991: *"A small, diligent, lively figure. Brother Adrián, always dressed in the black habit of the Order of St John of God and wearing a cap in winter, contrasting with the immaculate white coats of his fellow Hospitaller Brothers. Every day he can be seen traipsing around the most out-of-the-way corners of the city with an important mission: to beg for alms to help the many needy people who come to him, a task he performs every single day without exception, regardless of the heat and rain, or the cold which has quite often caused him serious respiratory problems. Neither illness, nor advice, nor even the prohibitions of his Prior have managed to make him desist from his commitment to charity."*

"Brother Adrián reminds me of another young man who arrived in Jerez in 1546 from Carmona (Seville) selling cloth in the company of his father, and who stayed on for the rest of his life. The name of this youth of seventeen was John whose surname was Grande,

and his heart was infinitely more 'Grande-Great' because he always found room there for anyone who needed him. He stayed in Jerez, caring for prisoners, the sick and the needy, founding several hospitals and joining the Order of St John of God. He died of the plague while nursing the dying during an epidemic that devastated Jerez in 1600." Those who are continuing the Work of Saint John Grande today remain faithful to their mission, giving everyone all their tenderness and care to all those who fall into difficulties in life. And the memory of that young man from Carmona, whose humility led him to change his surname from "Grande" ('Great') to "Pecador" ('Sinner'), continued to live on in Jerez, and was kept alive every time by Brother Adrián when he went out walking along its ancient streets.



Brother Adrián, an old man always on the go.

BROTHER ADRIÁN'S LETTERS

Brother Adrián wrote volumes of letters to his benefactors, family, siblings, friends and supporters, revealing his apostolic spirit, Gospel-driven zeal, concern for people and eagerness to tell everyone about the goodness of his heart and his faith in God. His relatives said *'Every time one of his letters arrived we were all overjoyed and we used to pass it on from one to another until the whole family had read it'*. All his letters reflected the greatness of an intensely happy soul and fulfilled by his mission.

His benefactors always received timely information about the projects, programmes and work of the hospital and its Social Service. Letters and replies reveal who this Brother was and how much he meant in their lives, over and above any donations they made. To some he offered his poems with which he touched their hearts. One man, who was operated on at the Hospital as a child and remained at the Centre as an adult, wrote a long letter about him, which we have summarised in the following words: *"When Brother Adrián came to the Hospital, I was very impressed, because when I spoke to him I felt something different than when speaking to others. When he was driven all over the countryside on Mondays begging for alms, he ate as much as he could and slept in the van. This was his routine all week long until Friday. Sometimes I would ask the Servant of God, who was in charge of the children's pavilion, if he wanted to stay with them on Saturdays and Sundays, he al-*

ways said that he did, and I never heard him complain or look bothered or annoyed. During the years I was in Jerez, I never heard anyone complain about him – quite the opposite, in fact: he was praised and loved by everyone. Whenever I went to Jerez, the first thing I did was to go and see him and hug him, because he was a true saint... when you were by his side you sensed an inner joy that you had never feel with anyone else”

THE DAY OF HIS FALL

A man like Brother Adrián could only stay on his feet thanks to his intense prayer life, which drove him to collect himself in prayer before almsgiving, during hospitality and after every daily community act. For Brother Adrián, prayer was the foundation of all his activities, and it was obvious that he lived as a person wholly united with his Lord. Every moment of his life seemed to be marked by his living in the presence of God. Praying the rosary revealed his tender and filial devotion to Our Lady. Brother Adrián also thanked God when he recovered from an accidental fall, which we will now examine.

One night he fell out of bed, fracturing two vertebrae, and although he was in great pain and unable to switch on the light in his room, he managed to get up and sit up, patiently waiting for dawn, not wishing to disturb or wake anyone in the house.

A harsh winter had left him with a bout of pneumonia from which he struggled to recover. Age, which spares no-one, the after-effects of pneumonia and an accidental fall out of bed changed Broth-

er Adrián who was no longer quite the same man; but although his ailments were beginning to weaken him, he still found a way to continue his mission.

One morning around noon, disregarding orders for the first and only time in his life, he went out to some offices in Jerez where he was to be given a generous donation, and despite having been advised not to go out, he crossed through a building site where he lost his footing, and fell heavily to the ground.

In pain and dishevelled, he called out for help, but his voice could barely be heard. He lay on the ground for several minutes, praying and invoking St John of God and Our Lady until he was rescued by a group of people leaving the office. He had fractured his hip and wrist which, at his age, could cause seri-



Brother Adrián in a wheel-chair after his fall.

ous problems. He eventually recovered but it took several months, and nothing was quite the same as before. The fall had left him slightly disabled but his magnanimity and his enormous enthusiasm seemed to increase rather than weaken.

Times had moved on, and changed circumstances meant having to change the way he was helping the people who needed him, especially on Fridays. Something had to be worked out, however revolutionary it might seem.

Social work at the St John Grande Hospital expanded all the time. The demands that they were endeavouring to meet were many, and always urgent: clothes, shoes, medicines, bills to pay, electricity, water, rent, etc., but Brother Adrián still wanted to go much further still.

Brother Guillermo García Rodríguez, the Superior of the Centre, came up with an idea, perhaps a pipe-dream, but why not try! Steps were taken to engage cooperation with businesses and organisations, especially wholesalers, to purchase food, baby products, items for personal and household hygiene, preserves, basic foods such as oil and milk, at the right price that would allow the project to come to fruition.

This was the first initial phase of the Social Bursar's Office in which the needs of a number of families in straitened financial circumstances could be met, once they had been referred by the Centre's social services and other entities, including the local authorities. Families in need were asked to par-

ticipate by making a token contribution. A ceiling was set on the amount each family could purchase, paying eight euros to buy food worth about fifty. Apart from any other consideration, this made the aid more dignified and gave families the opportunity to prioritise their needs.

THE CREATION OF THE SOCIAL BURSAR'S OFFICE

The dream finally became reality. As Brother Adrián's strength waned, the Social Bursar's Office dedicated to him was launched on 22 September 2011.



Brother Adrián in the Social Bursar's Office.

In addition to the Provincial Superior, Brother Julián Sánchez, and the Superior of the Centre, Brother Guillermo García, the inauguration was attended by the Superior General of the Order, Brother Donatus Forkan, and the Mayor of Jerez.

Brother Adrián could hardly believe his eyes when this modern facility, run exclusively by volunteers meeting at least part of his ambitions became reality, because Brother Adrián was never satisfied with whatever he did for others. The 130 families that initially turned to the Social Bursar's Office increased in number week by week.

The Servant of God needed ever more help because his physical condition no longer permitted him to lead a regular community life. He therefore joined the community of elderly Brothers who needed more attention and care.

IN COMMUNION WITH HIS ELDER CONFRÈRES

"The Lord granted me the honour and privilege, after so many years in the Order as a co-worker doctor," says Dr Alfonso Muñoz, "to be able to make my small contribution to these elderly Brothers by helping them to have breakfast, and I said, "Do you realise that more than 500 years of hospitality are seated around this table?"

"I believe, in all sincerity, that it was actually St John of God who really hand-picked the caregivers to run this blessed Unit 5 for the elderly Brothers, with some

encouragement from St John Grande; for the Brothers were being cared for by angels of the Lord as if they were their own parents or grandparents, who offered them so much affection."

"One day, although Brother Adrián was already very old and found it hard to muster much strength, while still overflowing with joy, he told me that he wanted to meet my grandson, my first grandson, Carlitos, and of course I and my wife took him to see him. When Brother Adrián sat him on his lap, his smile could have been immortalised if we had been able to take a photo that would have gone down in history, but unfortunately in those days not so many mobile phones were capable of capturing such moments, but the Servant of God's blessing will forever accompany Carlitos, who was only a few months old at the time."

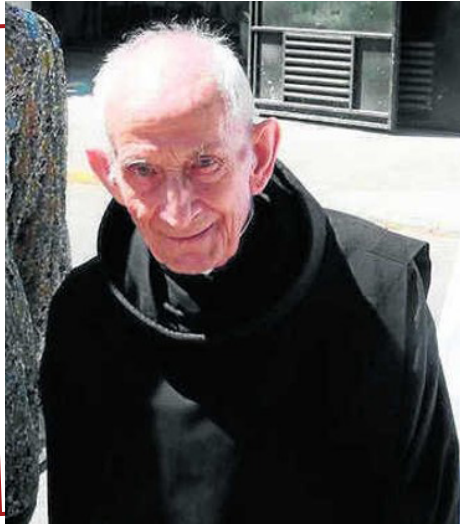


The Servant of God in during Spiritual Reading.

YOU WILL BE ABLE TO TELL THEM BY THEIR FRUITS

In sun and rain, along rough country tracks, carrying sacks or helping to transport the sick, the Almoner Brothers have always won over the hearts of the people of the city for whom they were donated. Brother Adrián del Cerro expanded his work so far and wide around the city of Jerez that all those who knew him well lost no opportunity to give him a helping hand.

But this small flame of charity died quietly and silently on 8 August 2015 at the age of 92. His remains



Brother Adrián, ready for Heaven.

lie in the Shrine of St John Grande at the feet of the “Virgin Candelaria”, another great love of his life. For the people of Jerez, that day they had lost a saint.

After the funeral Mass attended by the choir he himself had helped to found, the Brothers prepared his coffin for burial in the Shrine. A large plaque bearing the symbol of the Order on the left and a relief of the Servant of God on the right, has commemorated him ever since with these words as his epitaph: *“By giving, you are sowing, not knowing what you will reap; you may feel you are sowing little seed, but God is not content with giving you little fruit,*



Brother Adrián at the Shrine of St John Grande.

and he takes that little seed to give you fruits in abundance."

We cannot recall all the tributes and praises paid to this unassuming man of God, Brother Adrián, who is now in heaven, leaving us with a tangible way of living the Gospel of mercy, hope and joy through service. So many tributes have been voiced recalling this humble Servant of God that continue to resonate in the hearts of all those who have known him: *"His was an intense life wholly dedicated to charity"; "an example of dedication and fidelity to people in greatest need"; "he has left us a legacy of faith and goodness"; "he is the Saint John Grande of the 20th century"; "he was the protagonist of a work that had touched everyone's heart"; "an angel who achieved his goal to the very end"; "pacing the pathways of glory he*



The Servant of God's funeral.

will continue to help us"; "Brother Adrián, our eternal stroller".

A few years ago, Gabriel Álvarez wrote in the press: *'Keep it up, Brother Adrián. One day we will all boast that we have met a saint. One day we will be able to confirm that there have been people who have witnessed goodness in its purest form, who have discovered it in that small body that has spent half a century going around houses, farmsteads and good families, collecting what was needed to take care of those who, in their misery, have been helped by the hard work of this man from Toledo by birth, and from Jerez by adoption.'*

"I will retire on the day of my burial: then I will be able to say that I am tired," the Servant of God had once said in life when asked about when we would



Brother Adrián's welcoming smile.

retire and rest. We have no doubt that he is now enjoying eternal rest in the Father's house.

No-one will be able to forget him, least of all those of us who lived with him and were able to witness his hospitality and holiness every day of his life. His fame of holiness continues to spread, and we trust that, one day, Brother Adrián will be acknowledged and offered by the Church as a model of a Gospel-inspired life for others to emulate. Today, we treasure the unforgettable memory of a Brother of St John of God who lived his life only to offer love and, for the love of God, to offer his life.



The Tomb of the Servant of God.

INTERCESSORY PRAYER

Lord Jesus, who passed through this world doing good and healing all illnesses, and approached those who were suffering, bringing them blessing and comfort, allow me to help those most in need, to learn to accept pain with love, and may it continue to bear witness to your merciful heart.

Thank you for giving Brother Adrián to the world, faithful follower of St John of God, Your presence alongside the poor and sick and grant me through his intercession the grace that humbly and with confidence I ask you...

Amen

Our Father, Hail Mary and Glory Be.

With ecclesiastical approval
According to the Decrees of Urban VIII

Please report the graces received to:

Vice Postulador

Orden Hospitalaria de San Juan de Dios

Edificio San Juan de Dios

Herreros de Tejada, 3

28016 MADRID

Email: vicepostulador@sjd.es

THE EARTHLY LIFE OF BROTHER ADRIÁN DEL CERRO

1. Retamoso de la Jara.

Adrián del Cerro was born on 2 July 1923 at Retamoso de la Jara (Toledo). He lost his mother at the age of three and a half, leaving his father with five children to whom he gave a Christian upbringing. At the age of 21, he did his military service.

2. Ciempozuelos.

In October 1950, he joined the Hospitaller Order of St John of God as a postulant, in the San José Psychiatric Hospital in Ciempozuelos (Madrid), where he made his novitiate and his simple and solemn professions.

3. Jerez de la Frontera.

He began his work with children suffering from poliomyelitis and bone tuberculosis, and his service of begging for alms for the St Rosalia and Blessed John Grande Hospital. His tireless service of begging for alms took him as far afield as Cadiz, Ceuta, Melilla, Morocco and Huelva.

4. Madrid.

His new assignment to the 'Neuropsychiatric Clinic of Our Lady of Peace' brought him back into

contact with the mentally ill; this was a new centre that the Brothers of St John of God had been longing to establish.

5. Ciempozuelos.

He returned to Ciempozuelos as Vice Prior, and for three years he demonstrated his best qualities of hospitality, humility and simple dedication.

6. Jerez (Cadiz).

He agreed to pursue his mission as a hospitaller alms beggar, which he never gave up, while at the same time completing his nursing studies and dedicating himself body and soul to the poorest and most needy people. Jerez acknowledged his spirit of charity by honouring him with the Jerez Gold Medal and naming a street after him. From 1962 to 2015 he devoted himself entirely to begging for alms which further enhanced his fame of holiness and his efforts to reach beyond the impossible.

He established the Social Bursar's Office which today bears his name and continues to help vulnerable families. He died on 8 August 2015, at the age of 92 and 63 years of Religious Profession.

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