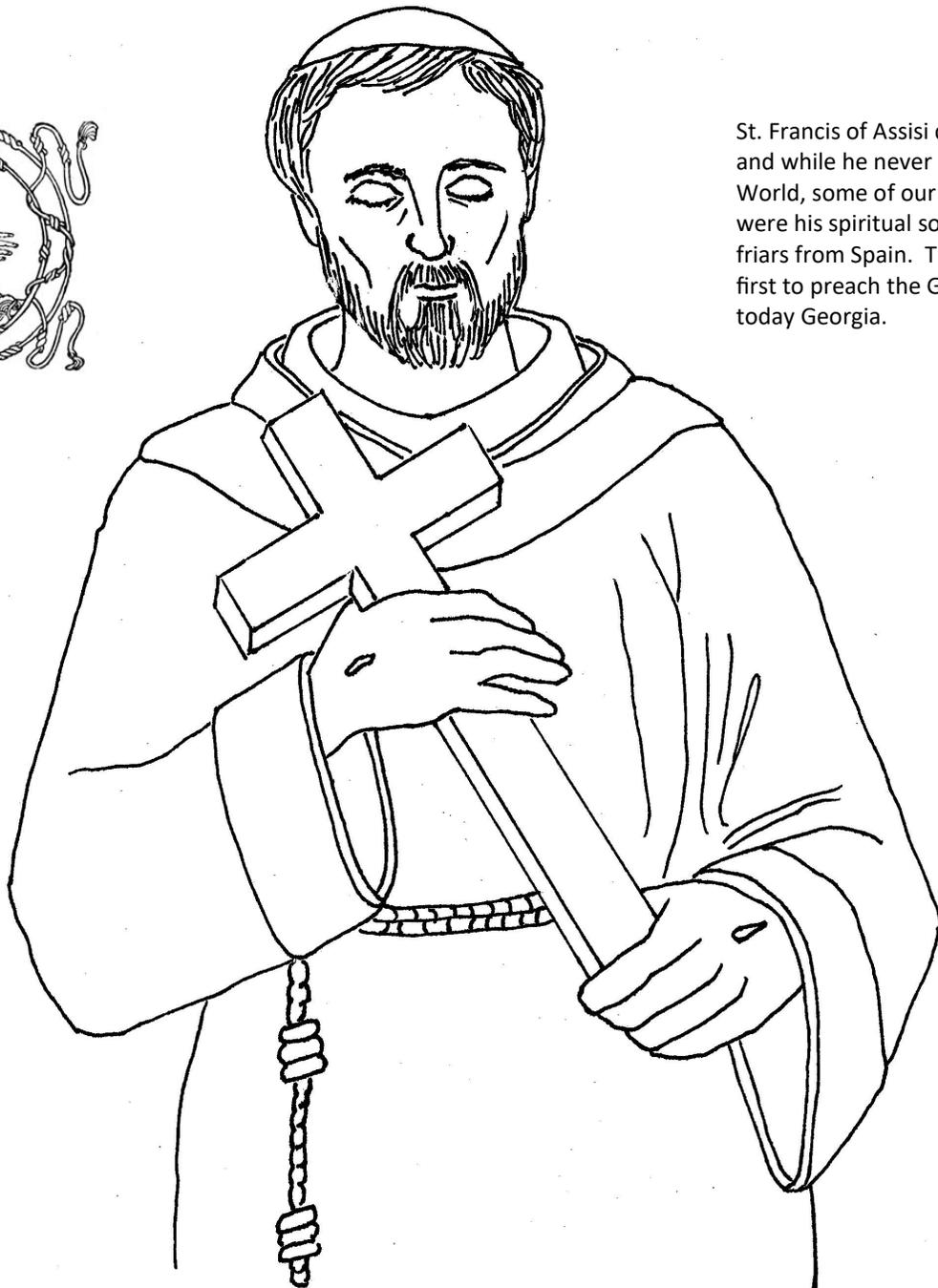


THE FIRST GEORGIA MISSIONS

# Our Southern Catholic Heritage



St. Francis of Assisi died in A.D. 1226, and while he never came to the New World, some of our earliest missionaries were his spiritual sons, the Franciscan friars from Spain. They were among the first to preach the Gospel in what is today Georgia.

# OUR FIVE GEORGIA MARTYRS

## A LEXICON OF TERMS

**RETABLO:** A Spanish word for a religious work of art that becomes a focus for prayer. A retablo can be a painting, like an icon, and usually includes a picture of our Lord or of a particular saint. Retablos were important to the missionaries who had to introduce a new people to Christianity, and helped compensate for the initial lack of shared vocabulary as the missionaries struggled to learn the languages of each tribe or nation they encountered. The oldest sacred images were treasured by the community, because so many faithful had prayed before that image from the earliest days of the Church in their lands. The first retablos in the New World would have come from Spain with the missionaries, but the missions themselves would become places where religious arts would flourish. Many American retablos of the Spanish colonial period are quaint in their style, slightly primitive, but nevertheless very beautiful. Sometimes retablos can be huge altar pieces or reredos that can include many statues and paintings.

**FRANCISCANS:** The Franciscans are a religious order that follow after their founder, St. Francis of Assisi, who died in the thirteenth century. They are traditionally mendicants, that is beggars, who beg for their sustenance. They were one of the great missionary orders in the New World, and founded many missions and cities in the Western hemisphere. Franciscan men are not called monks, but friars (or sometimes frays).

**MISSIONS:** Since the time of St. Martin (d. 397), the Catholic Church has grown in the rural parts of the world by sending forth religious monks or friars, usually from a missionary order like the Franciscans, to establish communities and begin to introduce the Christian Faith to pagans (a term that means forest dwellers). Eventually those missions typically became a parish in a diocese, once the Church was well established in that new part of the world.



OUR FIVE GEORGIA MARTYRS  
MISSIONARIES TO THE GUALE!

*Fray Pedro de Corpa*

Fray Pedro de Corpa was born near the great city of Madrid, and as a young man, joined the Franciscans in Astorga, Spain. His confreres knew him to be a wise man of prayer and a good preacher, and yet Fray Pedro was not content to live out his life in Spain. He volunteered to work in the missions in the New World. By the time he was thirty-seven years old, he had already spent ten years in La Florida and New Spain, which included what is now Georgia and Florida. The Padre lived among the native Guale (pronounced “Wally”) at the Tolomato Mission, which is believed to have been located near Darien, Georgia (about fifty miles south of Savannah). This was the village where the great chief (or mico) of the Guale lived.

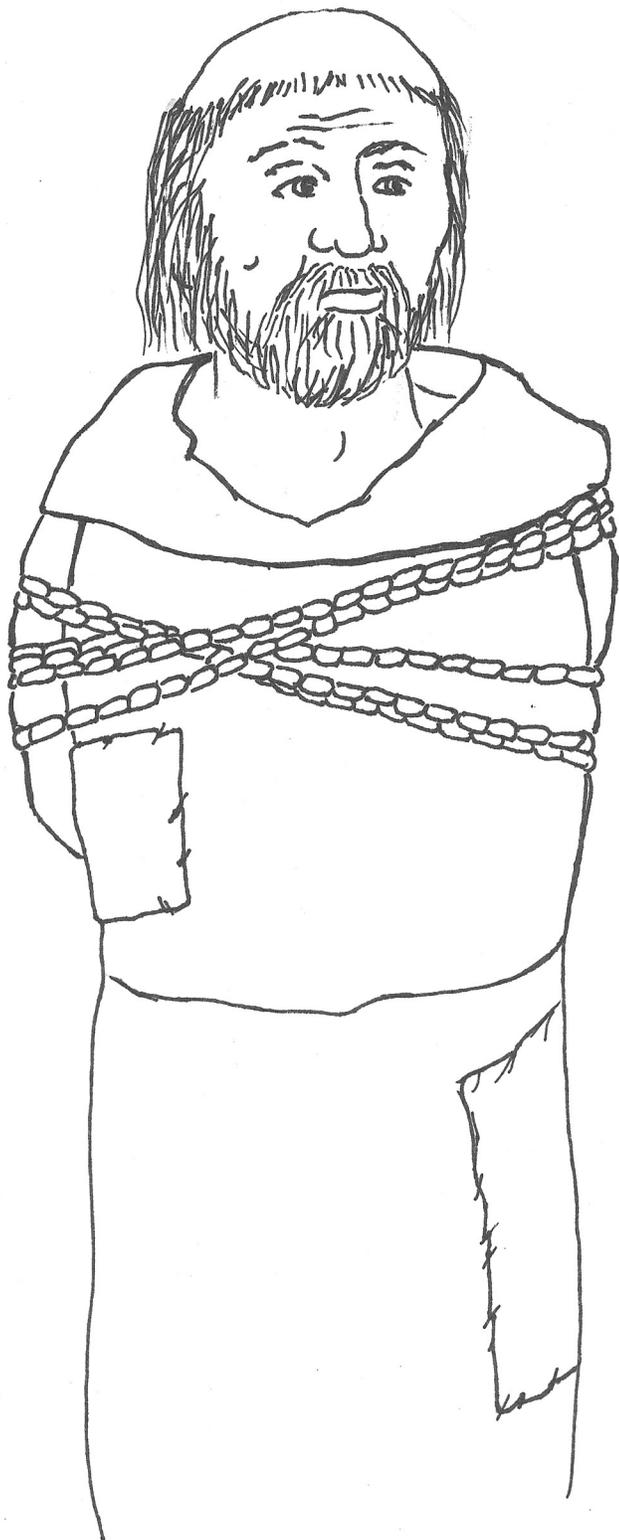
Fray Pedro had developed a fatherly knowledge of, and love for, the Guale. Even so, he knew there are certain truths that cannot be ignored and out of both duty and love, Fray Pedro admonished the young Guale prince, Juanillo, for his polygamy (that is, having more than one wife). Governor Menéndez and the Franciscan Friars trusted and respected Juanillo’s father, the chief of the Guale, so, consequently, they also trusted his son and heir, Juanillo.

But Juanillo was outraged at Fray Pedro’s gentle reproof, and thus, the rebellion of the Guale began with the martyrdom of Fray Pedro. The Guale, led by Juanillo, killed Fray Pedro in the early morning of September 14<sup>th</sup>, 1597 as he was preparing to offer Mass on the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. He had just finished praying Lauds and was about to walk over to the chapel. Accounts of the time indicate that the young men snuck up on him and clubbed him to death, chopping off his head, and shamefully displaying it upon a spike. Juanillo would go on to set off a chain of martyrdoms throughout the Franciscan missions.



OUR FIVE GEORGIA MARTYRS  
MISSIONARIES TO THE GUALE!

*Fray Blas Rodríguez*



Fray Blas Rodríguez was forty-five years old and a Franciscan of Santa Olalla. He was of the strict order of the Alcatarian reform and “discalced,” which meant he wore no shoes, even in winter. He had been ordained for seventeen years, seven of those years spent in the New World at the missions.

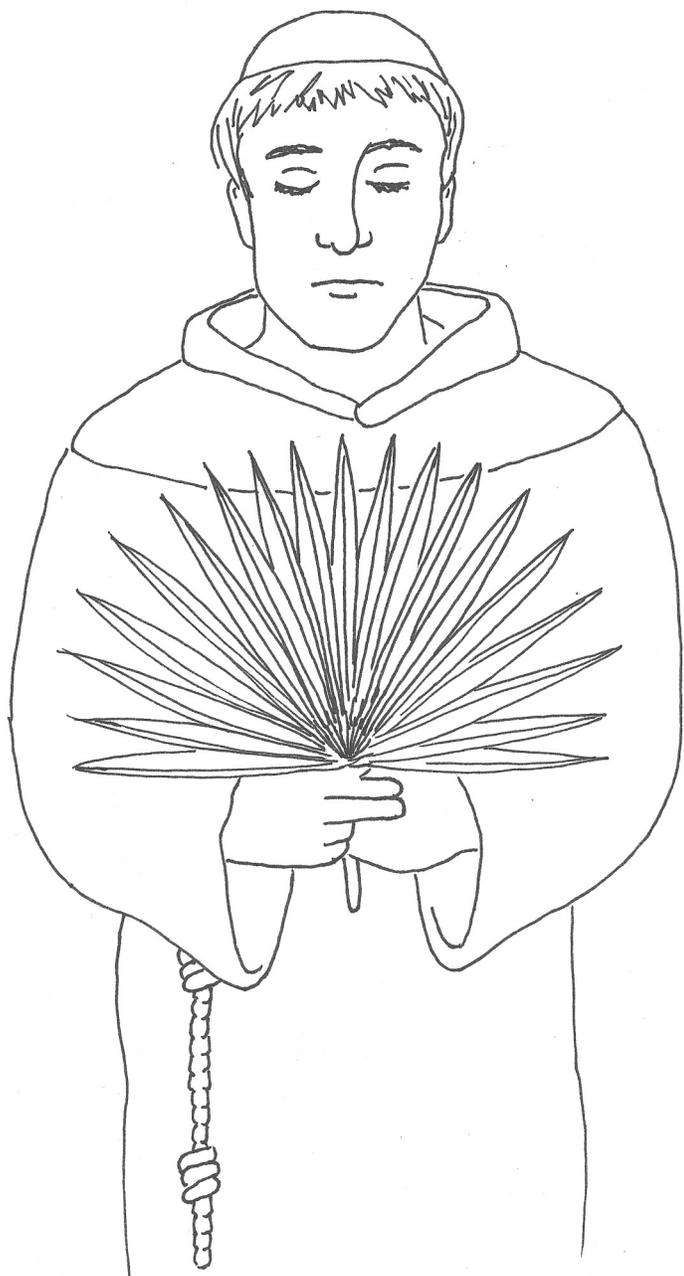
Prince Juanillo and his companion renegades respected Fray Blas’ age, if nothing else, and permitted him to celebrate Mass and preach to them one last time before they executed him. He was unafraid to die, but was deeply saddened by the murderous actions of Juanillo and his companions. Fray Blas, anxious that there should be no sacrilege, would have taken the remaining consecrated hosts from the tabernacle and consumed them. After Mass, the young men watched as Fray Blas gave away his personal affects to the residents of the mission. Then they bound the priest tightly with rope (they were mindful of his vigor – they knew he would stop them from their vandalism if left untied) and made him watch as they impiously vandalized the chapel. After ripping the priestly vestments, destroying the retablos, and ruining the sacred vessels, the rebels clubbed the priest to death on September 16<sup>th</sup>, 1597 at the Mission of Tupiqui.

In the drawing, Fray Blas wears a faded, worn, and patched Franciscan habit, indicating his many years in the New World (the usual cincture, or rope belt, of a Franciscan habit with three knots to indicate the Trinity is not shown; see the previous drawing of Fray Pedro).

# OUR FIVE GEORGIA MARTYRS MISSIONARIES TO THE GUALE!

## *Fray Miguel de Añon*

Fray Miguel de Añon had been in Georgia only two years (his brown Franciscan habit looks almost new compared to that of his confrere, Fray Blas) and would have been around the age of thirty-three. He had come from the Spanish Convento Santa Victoria and was a cultured man, the son of a nobleman. But he chose to become a devoted son of St. Francis, and therefore, renounced his father's fortune.



Padre Miguel seemed to be a man of destiny. He had been put in charge of Mission Santa Catalina, the oldest and largest mission to the Guale. He had great plans for its development: a fortified town with palisades and plazas, two wells, two white churches, a convent, and a great plaza. A bronze bell tolled to draw the Guale to prayers. So prosperous was the Mission Santa Catalina that Spain had considered moving Florida's capital there from St. Augustine. The Mission was seen more and more as the mother mission of what would eventually become dozens of missions to the Guale people.

With his own hands, Padre Miguel had erected the great cross at Mission Santa Catalina, hardly suspecting he would so soon be buried at its base. The padre was still getting to know the Guale; when he preached, he still relied on a translator (Fray Antonio de Badajoz), but the Guale clearly respected Fray Miguel. The local chief had even warned him and the others about the approaching war party, but the dedicated friars chose to stay at their posts at the mission. It might have had something to do with the liturgy for that day, September 17<sup>th</sup>, the Feast of the Stigmata of St. Francis. The Gospel reading for the Feast included the words, "Whosoever loses his life for my sake will gain it."

OUR FIVE GEORGIA MARTYRS  
MISSIONARIES TO THE GUALE!

*Fray Antonio de Badajoz*

Fray Antonio de Badajoz was a lay brother, Fray Miguel's interpreter, and principle catechist at the Mission of Santa Catalina. He was about thirty-eight years old. Fray Antonio had been in the missions for ten years, so he knew the languages of the indigenous peoples. In the drawing, his Franciscan habit is worn and patched at places. Like Fray Blas, Fray Antonio was of the strict order of the Alcatarian reform, so he always went barefoot. Antonio would have worn his hair with a tonsure (or shaved top) which was a sign that one belonged to holy orders or was a friar or monk. Fray Antonio clasps his hands before him, and a brown rosary is visible interwoven among his fingers.

The Rosary is a prayer that had developed over generations and had become officially standardized around the time of the Council of Trent, which had occurred only fourteen years prior to Fray Antonio's arrival in the New World. Archeologists have found parts of rosaries among the artifacts of the Spanish Missions in Georgia and Florida. Some of the rosaries found in Georgia were thought to have been on one of the voyages of Christopher Columbus when he sailed to what he called the New World. This was a New World to the Europeans, but the indigenous people had lived here for many centuries. To them, what was new was the Good News (the Gospel).

Our Lord tells us to go out into all the world and tell the good news of the Resurrection. Fray Antonio gave his life as an Apostle to the Guale. Over and over in the hours before he died, he prayed the Ave Maria. *Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with Thee. Blessed art Thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of Thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.*



# OUR FIVE GEORGIA MARTYRS MISSIONARIES TO THE GUALE!

## *Fray Francisco de Veráscola*

Fray Francisco de Veráscola was nicknamed “el Gigante.” He had been born into a relatively prosperous family of Basque heritage. He had arrived at the missions only two years earlier, and when the Guale boys met him, they were much impressed with this tall, broad shouldered, athletic man in his early thirties, and would coax him to join them in their football games.

Fray Francisco was a natural hunter, and despite the fact that he was a priest, the Franciscans would call upon him from time to time to be a bodyguard to visiting guests and dignitaries. He exuded strength and confidence, yet also the virtue of Christian joy. His handsome smile and gentle eyes helped the Guale trust this giant priest.

In this drawing, he has a dark stubble of beard. Our good Padre had been traveling down the low country waterways to trade with the missions to the south. The padres had to have wine and hosts to celebrate Mass, so they traded and brought things they needed up from St. Augustine. These men were rowers and would have had strong upper bodies.

Fray Francisco de Veráscola could easily have defended himself, but he did not want to harm the Guale people whom he loved. He had just returned by canoe and was about to unload the supplies for the mission, tired and happy to be home. The rebellious men attacked him by surprise, killing him as he disembarked from his journey. He had probably even waved to the assassins on the shore, but his welcome was to be a violent one.



# OUR FIVE GEORGIA MARTYRS

## THE AMAZING LOST TRIBE

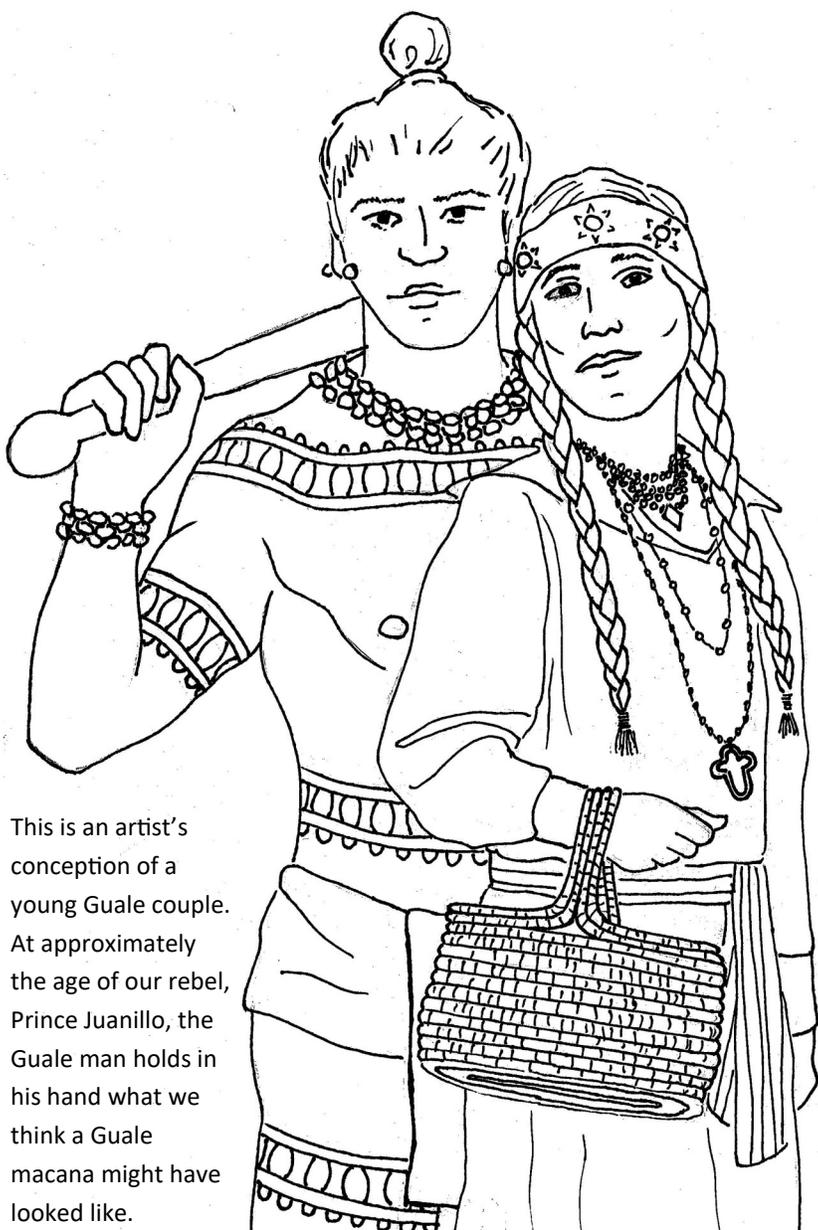
### OF THE GUALE!

The Guale lived between the Ogeechee and the Altamaha rivers on the coast of what is today Georgia. Most of the Guale were enslaved or wiped out by the English pirates who raided and destroyed the old Spanish Franciscan missions of Georgia. The surviving Guale moved south to St. Augustine and regrouped, building a new settlement named after their ancient lost high chieftain's ancestral village of Tolomato that the English had destroyed. When the English came

to destroy St. Augustine, they burned the newer Tolomato to the ground, too. Consequently, some of the remaining Guale immigrated to Cuba and others moved west to what is today Mississippi. It was an ignominious end to these ancient people who had lived in this land for centuries, but while they were among the first to be driven out, they would not be the last.

The policy of the Spanish was not to drive native people off their land, but to organize and draw them into the Church through a series of missions. The Guale invited the missionaries into their lands, and accepted baptism as so many ancient European tribes had in ages past. But their story was not unlike other stories.

With the Gospel comes change, and sometimes these changes are hard to accept, so some missionaries met resistance and even death. Still, the Franciscans saw the Guale and all native people not as savages to be abandoned to their pagan gods, but a people noble and great, a people who needed to hear of the Christ, who is the King of all the nations!

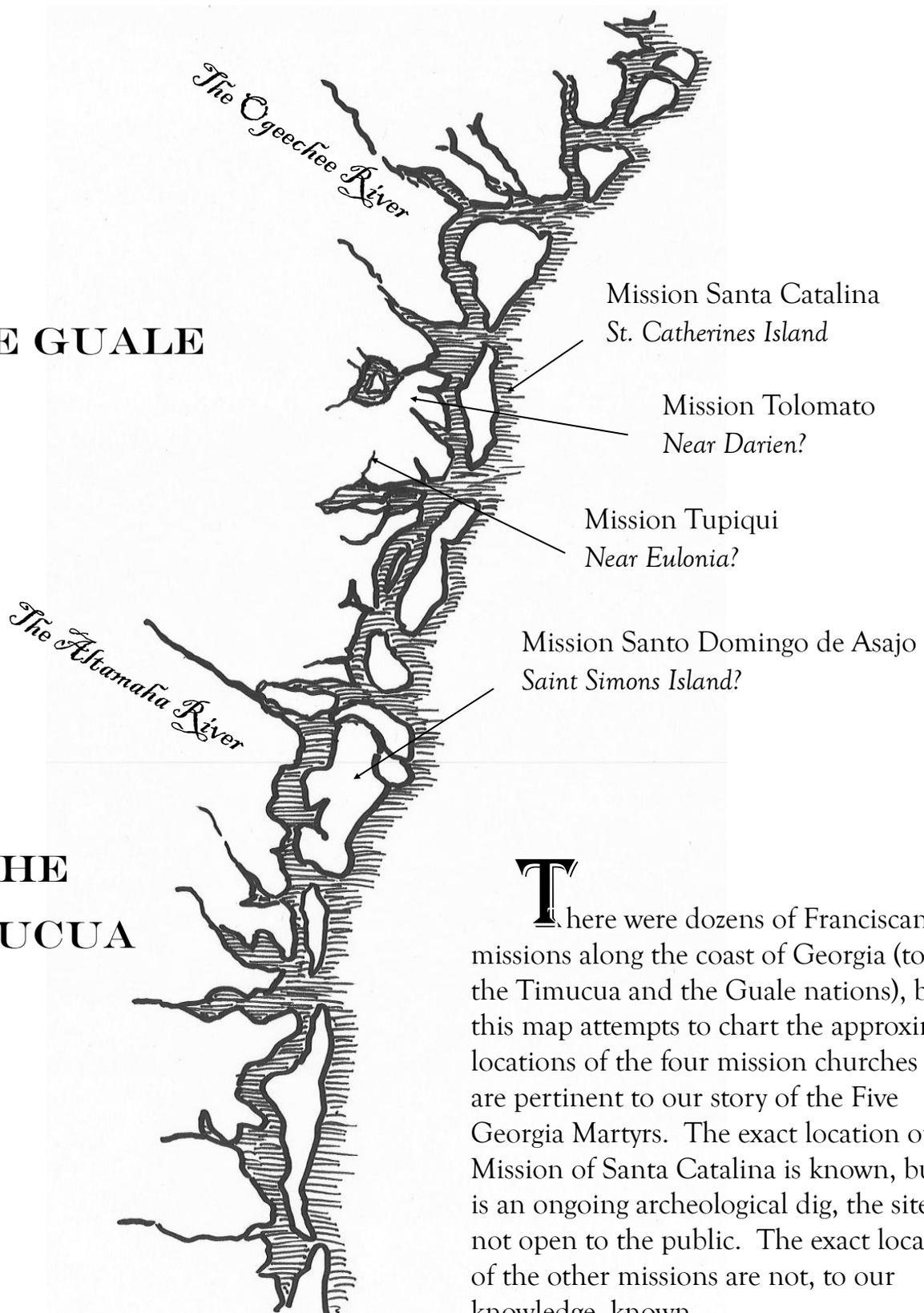


This is an artist's conception of a young Guale couple. At approximately the age of our rebel, Prince Juanillo, the Guale man holds in his hand what we think a Guale macana might have looked like.

# SOME OF THE LOST MISSIONS OF GEORGIA

## THE FRANCISCAN MISSIONS

### THE GUALE



### THE TIMUCUA

**T**here were dozens of Franciscan missions along the coast of Georgia (to both the Timucua and the Guale nations), but this map attempts to chart the approximate locations of the four mission churches that are pertinent to our story of the Five Georgia Martyrs. The exact location of the Mission of Santa Catalina is known, but as it is an ongoing archeological dig, the site is not open to the public. The exact locations of the other missions are not, to our knowledge, known.

# OUR FIVE GEORGIA MARTYRS

## THE FRANCISCAN MISSIONS

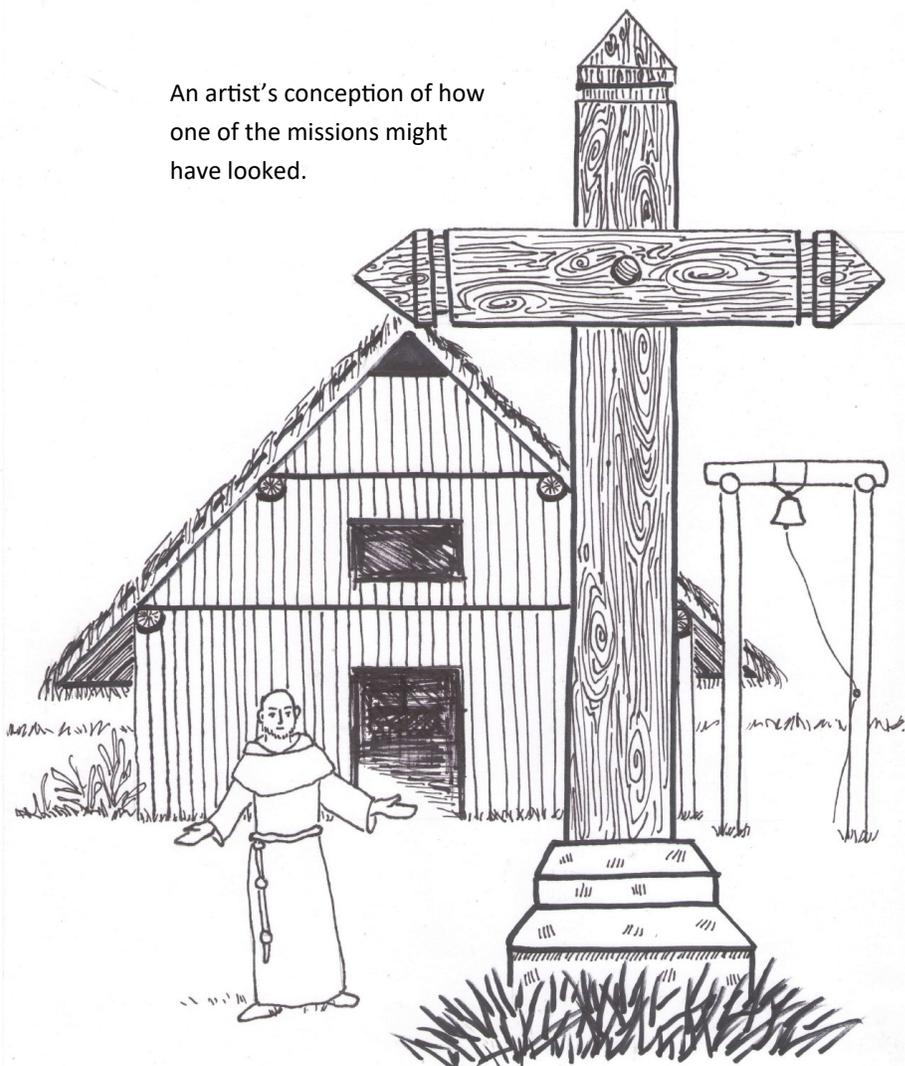
The Spanish Missions of Georgia were all burned to the ground by English pirates centuries ago. Even the knowledge of the whereabouts of the sites of these once thriving Catholic communities is, for the most part, lost. The indigenous people the missions served (like the Apalachee, the Timucua, the Guale, and others) were wiped out by the English, and with them, the memory of their customs and heritage. The low country woodlands have reclaimed these sites, but there had been dozens of Spanish missions along the coast of what is today Georgia, and in some cases, these missions were already a century or more old when the Spanish missionaries began to establish their missions on the west coast of California.

Because the living memory and sites are lost in history, we are left to speculate to some extent about how the missions might have looked. Archaeologists help us now and then when they find the sites and study them. The Catholic Church is also good at keeping lists and records that help us piece things together. We also have other Franciscan missions in similar places that did survive that help us complete the picture.

We know that the churches were painted white, made out of timber, and wattle and daub, with thatched roofs. They would have had mission bells, a mission cross, plazas, and a convent for the friars. Often times, the chief's house and council house would face the mission churches. Inside, the missions would have looked a lot like our own parish church with a high altar, an ambo, holy pictures, a baptismal font, and a confessional.

But missions were more than just a place where the Guale would come to Mass and daily prayers. They were whole villages filled with the Catholic faithful, and beneath the mission church's sandy floor were buried their Catholic forebears.

An artist's conception of how one of the missions might have looked.



# OUR FIVE GEORGIA MARTYRS

## THE SACRAMENT

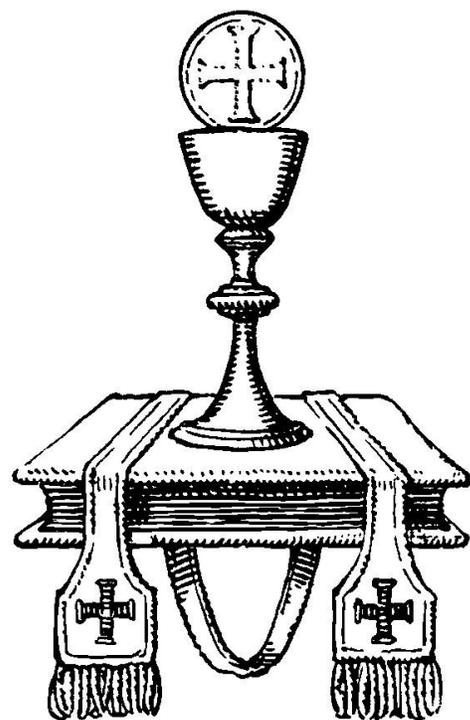
### OF HOLY MATRIMONY

Today, in our world, there is so much confusion about marriage. We forget the clear teachings of our Lord and of His Church that marriage is reserved for one man and one woman, that it is for life, and that it is meant to be a Holy Sacrament of the Church, wherein the Church can bless the union of two baptized Christians who begin a life together as husband and wife. The priest presides at the wedding, but it is the man and woman who confect the Sacrament of Marriage by entering into a covenant with each other and the Lord. Their love is meant to be both unitive and procreative, that is, their love should be opened to the reality of children. While not every married couple can have children, all Catholics should see children as a blessing by which their love is manifested in new life. Children are our future, and without them, we have no future at all.

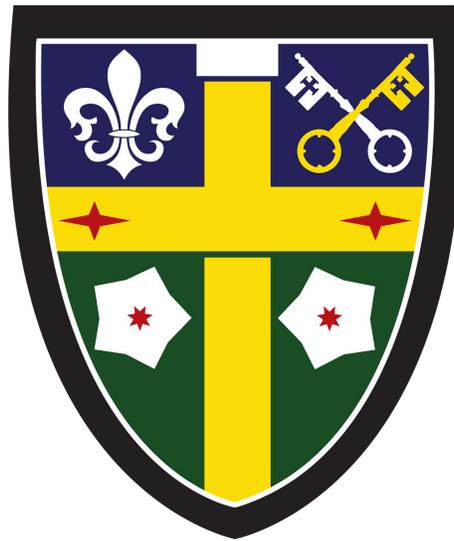
Perhaps not surprisingly then, at the time of our Five Georgia Martyrs, the great Sacrament of Holy Matrimony was also misunderstood. The new Protestant sects that were forming in the sixteenth century argued that marriage was just a contract between two persons and that the state, not the Church, should be the one who oversaw it as a legal contract. Martin Luther, a priest who started the Protestant Reformation in Germany and eventually married a nun, was not interested in what the Church had to say about marriage. The English king, Henry VIII, wanted a divorce from his Spanish queen, Catherine of Aragon, and when the pope would not give it to him, he, too, broke away from Rome.

Regardless of what the Protestants said, the Catholic Church held firm to the truth that marriage is a Sacrament in the eyes of God, and that it is something not to be trifled with. And so, when the Guale prince, Juanillo, insisted that he could have multiple wives and that the Church should accept it, our Spanish Missionaries stood up heroically for the teachings of the Church. For this reason, they were martyred.

As Catholics, our Church's teaching on marriage has often been at odds with the world's fickle notions about things, but we are meant to be steadfast voices in our day and age, too. We must stand up for the truth of the Sacrament of Marriage which models how much the Lord loves His own bride, the Church. Today, when we stand up to defend marriage, we may find ourselves, like our Georgia Martyrs, at odds with the madness of our world.



OUR LADY OF  
THE MOUNTAINS  
ROMAN CATHOLIC  
CHURCH



JASPER, GEORGIA

We would like to thank native Georgian and now Florida resident artist, Dan Nichols, who painted the retablo of the Five Georgia Martyrs that is now a part of the parish patrimony of Our Lady of the Mountains Catholic Church in Jasper, Georgia. We thank Pamela Gardner, catechist and children's book artist, for the illustrations in this coloring book which are based on the retablo. We would also like to thank Dr. Paul Thigpen and Katherine Ragan for their research and help in getting to know better our Missionary martyrs and the Guale people. We are grateful for so many who have given so much of their time in the aid of this project.

We do not seek to profit from any of this material. We make this freely available in hopes that other parishes will use it freely to teach the Catholics of the American South about this important chapter in our Catholic heritage. You can find this coloring book student handout in both English and Spanish, and an Instructor's Guide on our website, [olmjasper.com](http://olmjasper.com). Click on the *About* tab, then click on *Parochial Patrimony* and scroll to the links at the bottom and click on *Our Five Georgia Martyrs*.