

Erna Putz/Franz Jägerstätter – Martyr



Erna Putz

# **Franz Jägerstätter**

# **Martyr**

A Shining Example in Dark Times

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# Foreword

The beatification of the Austrian martyr Franz Jägerstätter on 26<sup>th</sup> October 2007 in Linz Cathedral is an outstanding day, an expression of something which has grown stronger over the decades, reaching far beyond the borders of his homeland: a deep sense of the value of this farmer and father of a family who was executed in 1943, a victim of the unjust Nazi system which he rejected out of religious conscience. The Church is hereby expressly recognizing the courageous attitude of this faithful man, who still has so much to say to us today.

The commemoration of Franz Jägerstätter stands within the context of many interrelated aspects: his wife, his children and his family, the Church, through his beatification, questions of saintliness and martyrdom, social and political issues in the examination of our own wartime past, the war generation, inhumanity and the terror of the Nazis, and the ethical and educational issues of war and conscientious objection, non-violence, peace education and disarmament, of authority, conscience and obedience.

Franz Jägerstätter is a prophet with a global view and a penetrating insight which very few of his contemporaries had at that time; he is a shining example in his fidelity to the claims of his conscience, an advocate of non-violence and peace, a voice of warning against ideologies, a deep-believing person for whom God really was the core and centre of life. His prophetic witness to Christian truth is based on a clear, radical and far-sighted analysis of the barbarism of the inhuman and godless system of Nazism, its racial delusions, its ideology of war and deification of the state, as well as its declared program of annihilating Christianity and the Church. His educated, mature conscience led him to say a resolute 'No' to Nazism and he was executed due to his consistent refusal to take up arms as a soldier in Hitler's war.

Franz Jägerstätter himself venerated the Saints and saw them as guides, and he charted his own path in the footsteps of these intercessors and role models. As a witness to the Beatitudes, he gives the Gospel a human face. In this way, he can inspire people today to stay on the path of the Gospel. He looks at the Church from the perspective of the Kingdom of God, of becoming Jesus' successors and of open commitment to Jesus. "Shouldn't we Christians become true successors of Christ?"

Franz Jägerstätter also precipitates a crisis, a judgment on present-day styles of life and belief. A too-rapid familiarity with Jägerstätter would carry the risk of his being merely absorbed and neutralized, and also of kitschifying him, making him quaint, as happens in the case of quite a few Saints. Franz Jägerstätter does not allow himself to be merely looked up to, without at the same time posing a question about one's own life: and what about you? It's your situation that's being dealt with here, it's your motivation that's at issue, it's your God that's under debate! What part does sacrifice play in your own life? How seriously do you take the question of whether there's something in your life so big that you would, if necessary, be willing to die for it?

The present commemorative bringing to mind of Franz Jägerstätter confronts us all with a question that is simultaneously clarifying, encouraging and therefore salutary. This biography will enable us to get to know and to understand the path of his life and faith, his perception of responsibility and his willingness to fulfill the will of God with complete devotion – and enable us to comprehend the sign that God has given us in him.

Linz/Innsbruck, October 2007

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