

**Bl. Jose Olallo Valdes (Havana, Cuba) (1820-1889)**

*Nurse at Brothers Hospitallers of Saint John of God*

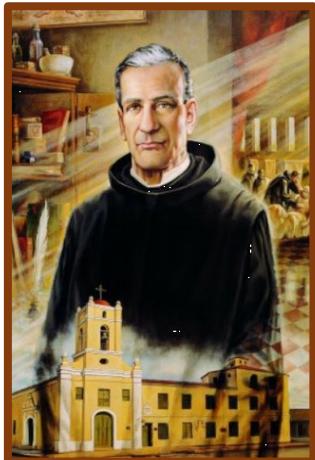
*hospital in Puerto Principe in April 1835.*

*Appointed head nurse of the hospitals in 1845.*

*Cared for people during cholera epidemic.*

*Treated wounded on both sides in the*

*Ten Years War in Cuba from 1868-1878.<sup>1</sup>*



**Jose Olallo Valdes** was born on February 12, 1820, in Havana Cuba. He was abandoned as an infant at the age of one month at the St. Joseph orphanage in Havana, Cuba.

A Cuban site relates:

His origin is a compelling argument for LIFE. A young woman, probably seduced and deceived, heartbroken with pain, is forced to part with her son from her womb. She does not want to abandon him, she leaves him in the arms of God, trusting that He will take care of him. This is how Father Tato Karel tells it: On March 15, 1820, while a persistent fog barely allowed people to be distinguished, a woman, wrapped in her shawl, as if she wanted to hide her face and a bundle, which she carried in her arms, headed towards Calle de Los Oficios. She stopped before a large

wooden gate, at number 59. She raised her eyes clouded with tears and could read on the pediment: Real Casa Cuna. She sighed deeply and pulled from under her cloak her bulk wrapped in a woolen scarf. She looked around and deposited the package on the turnstile by the door, placing a sealed envelope on top of it. With trembling hands, she picked up the bundle again. She clasped him in her arms, parted the scarf and placed a long kiss on him and then left him on the lathe again while she murmured: 'My God, I don't know what I'm going to do, but you know, Lord, that I can't do anything else. His father didn't even want to see him; if they find out in my house, they are capable of killing me. I can't raise him by myself. I put him in Your hands. You take care of him and help him to be good.' She tugged on the call cord. In the distance two timid chimes sounded. The woman let go of the cord as if it burned her hand. She took one last look around her. She crossed herself. She covered her face with her cloak and left quickly, getting lost in the narrow streets of the city. An hour later, Father Antonio Eusebio Ramos contemplated before him an almost newborn baby, with a white face and well dressed. Inside the envelope was a piece of paper written with a women's trembling hand, which said: *"The child was born on February 12. He is unbaptized"* With the name of Jose Olallo Valdes, he was baptized on March 15, 1820 by the priest Antonio Eusebio Ramos in the chapel of the Casa Cuna del Patriarca San Jose, which was run by the Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul in Havana.<sup>2</sup>

Jose lived at Casa Cuna de San Jose in Havana until age seven when he moved to the Benefencia orphanage which was also located in Havana. Seeing the frequent death of children in the almshouses, almost a daily occurrence, Olallo decided to consecrate his life to remedy human pain. At age 13-14, he was admitted to the Hospitaller Order of San Juan de Dios, in the community of the hospital of Saints Felipe and Santiago in Havana.<sup>3</sup>

That year he was assigned to work in the hospital in Puerto Principe (today Camaguey) where he completed his nursing training. He served as an assistant nurse, and then at age 25 became a "Senior Nurse" at the San Juan de Dios Hospital. A cholera epidemic decimated the

population soon after he had completed training during which Brother Olallo was observed to be an efficient, humble, accommodating, and self sacrificing nurse. He would take on the most difficult tasks and served the sick in an efficient, humble manner. He took on the most unpleasant tasks such as cleaning dirty chamber pots (bedpans), washing bloody cloths and carrying corpses. Despite his youth, people testified that he was the heart of the hospital.

He was chosen Prior of the Brother in Camaguey in 1856. The Archbishop of Santiago de Cuba recommended that he become a priest which he declined, desiring, instead, to continue his work in the hospital. He treated war wounded (1868-1878) during the Ten Years War in Cuba. He prevented the massacre of civilians ordered by Spanish forces. From 1876 upon the death of his last brother in the community and due to the suppression of religious orders by the Spanish government, he was the only surviving member of the Hospitallers in Cuba for the last 13 years of his life.

For 54 year, from 1835-1889, Brother Olallo worked in a hospital for poor and elderly, in the midst of lack of means, hunger, war, epidemics, slavery, political and social rivalries... In those 54 years he was absent from the hospital for one night only, and this was through no fault of his own. Upon the beatification of Blessed Jose Olallo-Valdes on November 29, 2008, in his homily, Cardinal Jose Saraiva Martins stated,

I would also like to mention his fearless intervention before the military authorities, defending the care of the weakest in the hospital. He sounded the bells signaling an attack and thus saved the population from carnage. His charitable care of the sick in prison before, during and after the war was also impressive. Father Olallo was also distinguished by his enthusiastic fidelity to the hospitable vocation as a diligent and meticulous nurse, caring and concerned for all. He was dedicated in particular to the physical, social, psychological and spiritual healing of the marginalized and the sickest, at a time in history in which the Camaguey society suffered great poverty and misery. He was, therefore, as has rightly been defined, "*a champion of Christian charity*", in solidarity with those whom he called "*his favorite brothers*." In his funeral monument there is a phrase that says: "Father Olallo, the poor who have died comforted by you await you, those you left without consolation pray for you... Father Olallo is a person who *trusted God completely*, aware that the presence of the Lord in history wants the good of all people.<sup>4</sup>

Blessed Jose Olallo-Valdes died on March 7, 1889 in Camaguey, Cuba from natural causes. He is buried at the chapel of the Brothers Hospitallers of Saint John of God hospital in Camaguey. He was declared venerable on December 16, 2006, and beatified on November 29, 2008.<sup>5,6</sup> both by Pope Benedict XVI. His beatification miracle involved the healing of three-year-old Daniela Cabrera Ramos. His beatification was celebrated at the Plaza de La Caridad, Camaguey in Cuba presided over by Cardinal Jose Saraiva Martins.<sup>7,8</sup>  
(Memorial - March 7)

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#### References:

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