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**For Immediate Release**

**Vatican Approves: Five Priests Who Freely Gave Their Lives  
in 1873 Yellow Fever Epidemic in Shreveport  
on Track to Become Saints**

Five priests who died in Shreveport in the 1873 Yellow Fever epidemic are now recognized as **Servants of God**, the first of four steps in the canonization process (becoming recognized as saints). The Vatican reported this unprecedented news by five formal letters in Latin to Most Reverend Bishop Francis I. Malone, Bishop of Shreveport, on November 30, 2020.

In the late summer of 1873, Shreveport was besieged by the third worst epidemic of Yellow Fever recorded in U.S. history, losing one-fourth of its population. One Roman Catholic priest, who refused to leave the sick and the dying and four others who knowingly entered the quarantined areas, were among the city's dead. Each priest made the free and voluntary offer of life and heroic acceptance of a premature and horrific Yellow Fever death, in the act of charity.

The Vatican's Congregation for the Causes of the Saints has reviewed their stories and has granted Diocese of Shreveport permission to begin the process of gathering evidence of the sanctity of the lives and the cult of devotion to

**Father Jean Pierre** (first Catholic pastor of Shreveport, who ministered in the Parishes of Caddo, Bossier, DeSoto, Webster & Claiborne);

**Father Isidore A. Quémerais** (first assistant priest of Shreveport, who also served in Rapides & Avoyelles parishes);

**Father Jean-Marie Biler** (Chaplain of the Convent & Novitiate of St. Vincent's on Fairfield);

**Father Louis Gergaud** (first pastor of St. Matthew's in Monroe, who also ministered in the Parishes of Ouachita, Morehouse, Union, Webster, Claiborne, Caldwell & Franklin);

and **Father François LeVézouët** (founding pastor of St. John the Baptist Church in Many, who ministered throughout Sabine and Natchitoches parishes.

The next step is to be declared Venerable, which occurs upon conclusion of a more in-depth investigation at the Vatican. There has never before been any sainthood cause from northern Louisiana, making this an especially historic development for the region. The fact that their cause is proceeding during a time of pandemic is a noteworthy historic parallel.

The question of opening a cause for beatification and canonization has led to extensive research done into their lives for a book-length manuscript, podcast, and graphic novel project currently underway by Father Peter Mangum, Rector of the Cathedral of St. John Berchmans, W. Ryan Smith, and Dr. Cheryl White, that sets the biographies of the priests in the broader narrative of the 1873 Shreveport epidemic. (Soon to be published: *The Surest Path to Heaven: 1873 Shreveport Martyrs.*)

Their sacrifice is well-remembered in Shreveport history, memorialized in stained glass at Holy Trinity Church in downtown, the persistent recounting of their stories across nearly 150 years of news

reports and histories of Shreveport. Shreveport's "Pierre Ave." is named in honor of the first pastor of Holy Trinity – Fr. Jean Pierre.

In 2023 north Louisiana will commemorate the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Yellow Fever epidemic in Shreveport.

Bishop Malone said in his press conference of December 8, 2020:

I am still within my first year here as the bishop of the 16 northernmost parishes of Louisiana but I learned quickly of the extraordinary zeal of these earliest of missionary priests to our area, which culminated in the free offer of their lives in the Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1873. The stories of their lives, up to their deaths in the epidemic, are truly extraordinary.

In May of this year, I wrote to the Vatican asking that they review their lives with the view of possibly beginning the cause of beatification and canonization. I have asked you here today to inform you that, late last month, I received notification from the Vatican's Congregation for the Causes of the Saints stating that there are no obstacles for us to pursue the process for beatification and canonization for these five priests.

It is my joy, on this feast of the Immaculate Conception and from this historic church, to announce that we may refer to them as "Servants of God." This is the first of four steps in this process. The next being declared Venerable by the Vatican. Then, God-willing, with miracles attributed to these Servants of God, they could be recognized as Blessed and later as Saint.

To be declared a saint requires two miracles each, confirmed by the Vatican. The culmination of this process may very well, in fact, most likely will take place in a number of decades. Today is the needed first step toward that goal.

Permit me to read to you what the official representative of His Holiness Pope Francis in the United States, (his ambassador to the US) wrote in October, two months ago, about our five priests:

**I commend to you the story of these five priests ... This episode in the history of the American Church is a needed message for our Western world in the current age. It highlights a model of sanctity that is attainable for all of the faithful. Most importantly, it points to the salvation of souls as the ultimate horizon for us all ... As missionary priests from Brittany who answered a call to leave their homeland and travel to the frontier of Louisiana, they labored with piety and unselfish dedication, inspired by charity, before offering their own lives for the sake of their fellow man during the devastating Yellow Fever Epidemic, which occurred from August to November 1873 in Shreveport... These holy priests live on in the memory of the people not only because of their apostolic work in helping to build the Church in that part of Louisiana, but above all because of their heroic sacrifices.**

I will now sign the Decree of Recognition, which says, in part:

Herewith we recognize as worthy of special consideration and honor these five priests who made a free and voluntary offer of their lives, inspired and sustained by charity, and persevered with this determination unto death in pure and final fulfillment of Christian virtue on God's earth, to ease the suffering of humanity. They are thus deserving of admiration and imitation and are to be henceforth known as Servants of God,

Servant of God Isidore Quémerais  
Servant of God Jean Pierre

Servant of God Jean Marie Biler  
Servant of God Louis Gergaud,  
and Servant of God François LeVézouët.

As they once cared for the citizens of this city, regardless of religion, race, economic standing and age, we call upon their intercessions now for the citizens of this city in which they died and in the communities where they served, throughout northern Louisiana

Again, thank you for your presence here. we will hand out to you press releases.  
In invite John Mark to come back to this podium and to field your questions.  
Thank you.

For the full story, visit [www.ShreveportMartyrs.org](http://www.ShreveportMartyrs.org)

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