

# Discovering a Catalonian Perspective on Miquel Domènech i Veciana, Second Bishop of Pittsburgh and First Bishop of Allegheny

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The idea for our trip to Tarragona was spontaneous, but then, most of our travel plans at the North American College are. In addition to Christmas and Easter breaks, the administration of the College encourages seminarians to leave Rome once a month and travel the rest of the continent — an opportunity to relax, but also a way to deepen our experience of the Catholic Church in its many diverse and meaningful manifestations in Europe and beyond. It's a tradition among us Pittsburgh seminarians in Rome to use one such travel period a year for a fraternal trip. With five full days available after final exams this past February, we knew that there was potential for something memorable. A few suggestions were put forth, but the most attractive was one that tied into the history of the diocese. We knew that our second bishop, the Vincentian missionary Michael Domenec, was a native of Spain and had died there while visiting his homeland in 1878. And it was decided: we — Father Mike Conway, Father Tom Schlupe, Adam Potter, Tom Gramc, and I — were going to Spain to see our bishop!

The details of the trip came together in a way that might best be described as providential. Consultation of some volumes of diocesan history revealed that Bishop Domenec had been laid to rest in the Cathedral of Tarragona, a seaside city in northeast Spain in the region of Catalonia,<sup>1</sup> not far from his birthplace of Reus (about 7.5 miles northwest of Tarragona). We wanted to be sure, however, that the tomb of Bishop Domenec was in a place that was open for visits, and that our two student-priests, Fathers Conway and Schlupe, could celebrate a Mass nearby. Not expecting an extensive response, I sent an inquiry to the cathedral's main office by email. A reply came a week later, but I was surprised to see that it came not from a secretary, but from the personal account of the cathedral's rector, *Mossèn* Josep Queraltó Serrano.<sup>2</sup> As it turned out,

*Mossèn* Queraltó had studied Canon Law at the Gregorian University in Rome with two priests from Pittsburgh: Father Brian Welding, current rector of Saint Paul Seminary, and Archbishop Bernard Hebda. As a self-professed friend of Pittsburgh, *Mossèn* Josep wanted to handle everything — he'd pick us up from the airport, host us at the archdiocesan seminary, and celebrate Mass with us at the altar near Bishop Domenec's tomb. Our Spanish pilgrimage was set for February 10 to 15.

Almost immediately upon establishing contact with *Mossèn* Josep, I realized that we would be treated to a unique historical and cultural perspective on Bishop Domenec's life. Only a half hour after his initial message, I received another email with a full transcription of the Latin text on the bishop's tomb. *Mossèn* Josep wrote that he knew it well; it was located in the cathedral's cloister, in the chapel of *Nuestra Señora de la Guía* (Our Lady of the Way). As a canon of the cathedral, he had celebrated Mass very often nearby. The text he provided, and which we later saw many times in person, read as follows:

*D. O. M. – Hic in Dño jacet – I. R. D. D. Michael Domenech et Veciana, – Pitsburgensis America Septentrionalis episcopus – Federatis in Statibus, – á Reusense civitate natales hausus, olim – S. Vicentii a Paulo congregationem vitá, – disciplinã ornavit; – Litterarum amore, studiorum diligentia, – religiosã professione etiam parissiorum – S. Lázari amplianit domum; – catholicam nec non ecclesiam zelo, vigili curã – centum ferè sacris – e radice structis fanis, scholarum, hospitalium – erectione nobilitavitque: – Tarracone postremum consecuturus brabium – obiit veluti Christi pauper, – die 7 Januarii an. 1878, – honorificentissimo conditus funere – pontif. an. 17 et. vero 62 – R. I. P.*

A translation of the above would be:

D. O. M.<sup>3</sup> — Here rests in the Lord the Most Eminent and Reverend Michael Domenech y Veciana, Bishop of Pittsburgh in the United States of North America. Taking his origins from the city of Reus, he once honored the Congregation of Saint Vincent de Paul with his life and instruction, and ennobled the House of Saint-Lazare in Paris<sup>4</sup> with his love of learning, diligence in study, and religious profession. And with zeal and watchful care he increased the glory of the Catholic Church with the construction of schools and hospitals, having built almost a hundred churches from the ground up. His final prize was to be won in Tarragona; he died poor like Christ on January 7, 1878 and was buried



**The Cathedral of Tarragona**

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with a most honorable funeral, having been a bishop for 17 years, and at 62 years of age. — May he rest in peace.

This inscription began to paint a picture for us. While American accounts of his life focus on Bishop Domènec's activities as a missionary in Missouri and Philadelphia and his accomplishments (and difficulties) as bishop of our diocese, it is clear from reading the above that Bishop Domènec was not regarded in his homeland as merely an obscure bishop from some far-off part of the world, but as an illustrious missionary and propagator of the Catholic faith.

Our guide, *Mossèn* Josep, certainly seemed to agree. As we found when we met him in Barcelona on February 10, he had conducted extensive research on Bishop Domènec before our arrival. Considering his demanding positions as pastor of the cathedral parish, canon of the cathedral, and defender of the bond in the archdiocesan tribunal, we were extremely grateful for his attention to us and his interest in the purpose of our journey. We were practically treated as long-gone native sons ourselves, with *Mossèn* Josep giving us a gracious welcome, tours of the city and surrounding area, and even the opportunity to meet Archbishop Jaume Pujol Balcells, the current ordinary of the archdiocese.

As far as historical favors go, we were granted much more than just being able to see Bishop Domènec's tomb. We were also treated to scans from the parish register which note Domènec's baptism on December 27, 1816, a copy of the archdiocesan necrology recording extensive details about his last days and funeral rites, and a visit to nearby Reus (Bishop Domènec's birthplace). *Mossèn* also provided us with copies of a historical-archeological description of the Chapel of Our Lady of the Way, which transcribes the bishop's tomb inscription and makes some reference to his background. By the end of the trip, we felt that we had come to know our bishop very well.

For the benefit of the readers of this journal, I want to present some of the documents mentioned above in as compact a manner as possible. I will transcribe exactly the baptismal register, but will summarize the necrology, which consists of several pages. First, the baptismal register:

*Dit dia: En los fonts baptismals de la Yglesia Parroquial de Sant Pere de Reus Arquebisbat de Tarragona, per mi Joseph Font Pvre y Vicari de dita Yglesia, fou solemnement batejat, Miquel, Joan Joseph, nat avny á dos quarts de dos de la tarde, fill de Joseph Domenech Mestre Argenter de Reus y de Tecla Viciana del Masricar conjuges. Padrins Joan Bigayre Mestre Sastre y Estanquer de Reus y Josepha Bigayre y Masana de Vilafranca del Panades Bisbat de Barcelona. Avissats de doctrina y parentiu.*<sup>5</sup>

A translation of that baptismal record is as follows:

On the same day: in the baptismal font of the Parish Church of Saint Peter of Reus, Archdiocese of Tarragona, by me, Josep Font, Priest and Vicar of the said church, was solemnly

baptized Miquel Joan Josep,<sup>6</sup> born at half past two in the afternoon, son of Josep Domènec, master silversmith, of Reus, and Tecla Viciana<sup>7</sup> del Masricar, his wife. The godparents [were] Joan Bigayre, master tailor and tobacconist of Reus, and Josefa Bigayre i Masana from Vilafranca del Penedès, Diocese of Barcelona. Assured of religion and parentage.

The above, of course, is interesting in that it gives some details of Bishop Domènec's background. His father, as a master silversmith, while not a nobleman, was of high merchant class. Associates of the family, like Joan (John) Bigayre, were other similarly well-established merchants and tradesmen.

The necrology account of Bishop Domènec's last days, which I will summarize, may benefit from some prior explanation. After the erection of Allegheny as a diocese separate from Pittsburgh in 1875, Domènec was made bishop of the new diocese. That decision, however, proved financially disastrous for the Diocese of Pittsburgh, and the new bishop of that diocese, John Tuigg, agitated for a solution. Bishop Domènec traveled to Rome in 1877 to present the problem to the Holy See. The judgment came down that Allegheny and Pittsburgh would be reunited, and Bishop Domènec resigned, leaving Tuigg as both Bishop of Pittsburgh and Apostolic Administrator of the Diocese of Allegheny until its suppression in 1889. Domènec was therefore left a bishop without a diocese to govern. (It is revealing to note how the Spanish sources about his life tend to call him Bishop of Pittsburgh rather than Bishop of Allegheny.) While passing through Catalonia in 1877 on a preaching tour, he became ill with pneumonia and died in Tarragona on January 7, 1878.

*Mossèn* Josep, while walking through Tarragona with us, would readily point out various landmarks that he had discovered had some connection with the life of our former bishop. One such was the old hospital, near the ancient Roman walls of Tarragona, where we were informed Bishop Domènec had died. The necrology account begins by describing how it was there that "Don Miguel Domènec y Veciana, former Bishop of Pittsburgh" received the holy Viaticum from the hands of the Archbishop of Tarragona<sup>8</sup> who was accompanied in that task by the all the canons and clergy of the cathedral, the college seminary, and many other faithful. The bishop died shortly after noon on January 7.

Afterwards, the funeral obsequies for the departed missionary bishop began. His body was placed in a nearby church while the cathedral chapter prayed the Office of the Dead. This vigil lasted until the afternoon of the next day. The archbishop himself then once again participated, singing "the three responses in procession, as usual, for the repose of the late illustrious bishop, who was placed in pontifical dress on a handsome bier."

On the next day, a general notice was sent out by newspaper to the inhabitants of the city, so that they could attend Bishop Domènec's burial in the cloister of the cathedral. The necrology notes that his remains were "brought to his final resting place with the same pomp and circumstance as the Archbishops." Moreover,

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the archdiocese “spared no expense, so that the burial and funeral rites would be a worthy representation of a prince of the Church who died suddenly while he was waiting for papal documents to take possession of his new diocese.”<sup>9</sup> The translation of his body from the smaller church to the great Metropolitan Cathedral of Tarragona was accompanied by civil officials, two military marching bands, and a large crowd of onlookers.

After describing the funeral rites, the necrology goes on to praise Bishop Domenech himself. It describes how he had “died in the manner of one who spent his life doing good for all, working and suffering persecution, to spread the Kingdom of Christ in remote regions,” and that he had “won many souls for Jesus Christ, erected many temples and shrines dedicated to the worship of the true God, and had many Catholic schools set up, since winning over children makes the conversion of parents and adults easier.”

The necrology then provides a biographical sketch of the bishop, beginning with his birth on December 27, 1816 to José Domenech<sup>10</sup> and Tecla Veciana and his early education under the Franciscans (taking care to note his “unblemished piety” as a student). It goes on to recount how in 1832, at age 16, young Domenech joined the missionaries of the Congregation of St. Vincent de Paul in Madrid, and made his novitiate there. In 1834, it continues, he was sent for further education in the town of Guissona in Catalonia. Political circumstances, however, necessitated the transfer of that community to Paris, which is where Domenech spent three years devoted to the study of theology. The necrology makes no mention of it, but it was in Paris that Domenech met Pennsylvania native Father John Timon (later, the first Bishop of Buffalo), a fellow Vincentian, who invited him to join the American mission.

The necrology then describes how at the age of twenty-two and one-half, Domenech received ordination to the priesthood with a special dispensation from the Holy Father (since the normal minimum age for ordination was then 25).<sup>11</sup> He was then sent to the missions in Missouri, where the account notes that he “achieved conversion to the true faith of many people mired in the Protestant heresy or in unbelief, becoming ‘everything to everyone,’ and earning the respect of many of these dissenters or unbelievers.” In 1845, he was appointed superior of the Vincentians in Philadelphia, in which place the necrology notes that he built “a grand church” dedicated to St. Vincent de Paul, “whose construction, which lasted ten years, cost two million *reals*.”

The necrology attributes to these successes Bishop Domenech’s appointment as the Bishop of Pittsburgh and his episcopal consecration on December 8, 1860, “with the assistance of two archbishops and five bishops.”<sup>12</sup> The necrology finishes by recounting Bishop Domenech’s prior voyage to Rome to attend the 1862 canonization of the Martyrs of Japan and his attendance at the First Vatican Council (1869–1870), noting with some resignation that it had “done nothing but lightly outline the public life of that successor of the Apostles.”

A light outline it may have been, but it provided a fascinating angle on the life of Bishop Domenech — the perspective of his own people. He was seen as a zealous and effective missionary

and a prestigious native son. That was the impression that we, as seminarians of the diocese, took away from our five memorable days in Tarragona as well. We are grateful to *Mossèn* Josep Queraltó Serrano for his extraordinary hospitality and enthusiasm, and his generosity in sharing so much of the local history of Bishop Domenech with us.

While the various documents and places that we were shown helped us understand and appreciate the life of our second bishop with much greater profundity, the culmination of the visit was a Mass that Fathers Conway and Schlupe celebrated alongside *Mossèn* Josep on the morning of Saturday, February 14. They offered that Mass for the repose of Bishop Domenech’s soul, at an altar right next to his final resting place in the medieval cloister of the cathedral. More than anything else, that celebration strengthened and reconfirmed our diocesan connection to Michael Domenech, who, as we prayed, “has gone before us with the sign of faith and rests in the sleep of peace.”

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**Suggested reading** on the life of Bishop Domenech: (1) John Canova, “Bishop Michael Domenech and Bishop John Tuigg 1860–1889” in *Catholic Pittsburgh’s One Hundred Years 1843–1943* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1943), 38–52, (2) Sister Cecilia Murphy, R.S.M., *A Reevaluation of the Episcopacy of Michael Domenech, 1860–1877, Second Bishop of Pittsburgh and Only Bishop of Allegheny* (Ph.D. Diss., Saint Louis University, 1974), (3) “Part Two” [“New Bishop – New Problems,” “More About Domenech and Phelan,” and “A Suffering Bishop”] in John B. McDowell, *I Am Going to Tell You A Mystery: the Life of Bishop Richard Phelan, D.D., Fourth Bishop, Diocese of Pittsburgh* (Pittsburgh, 2002), 23–44, and (4) “The Right Reverend Michael Domenech, C.M., D.D. — 1860-1876, Second Bishop of Pittsburgh” in John B. McDowell, *A Brief History of the Pittsburgh Diocese* (Pittsburgh, 2005), 36–43.

### Endnotes

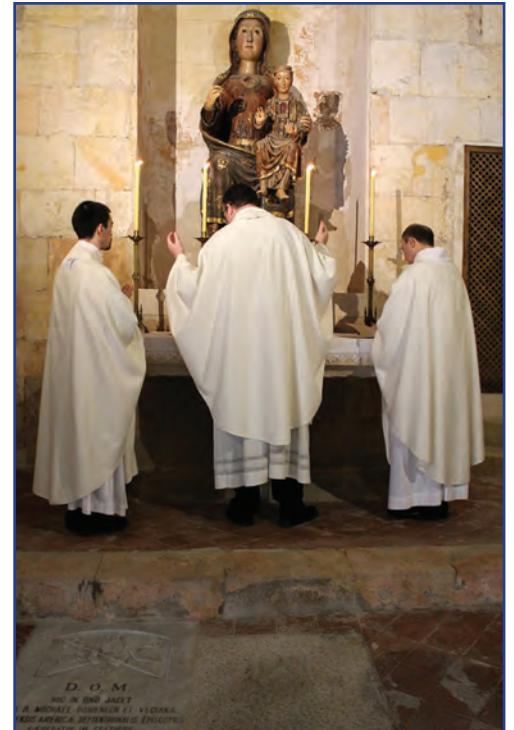
- 1 Catalonia comprises four Spanish provinces: Barcelona, Girona, Lleida, and Tarragona. It is bordered by France and Andorra to the north, and by the Mediterranean Sea on the east. Spanish and Catalan are official languages.
- 2 *Mossèn* is the Catalan-language term for “Father,” equivalent to our term “Monsignor,” except that it is used as a term of address for all priests.
- 3 D. O. M. is a standard Latin formula that is often seen in funerary inscriptions in Europe. It comes from an ancient Roman abbreviation, *I.O.M.*, for *Iovi Optimo Maximo* (“to Jupiter, greatest and best”), which was later Christianized to *Deo Optimo Maximo*, “to God, greatest and best.”
- 4 The Lazarite or Lazarist Fathers are a French branch of the Congregation of the Mission, also called the Vincentians. Bishop Domenech’s family left Spain in the early 1830s and came to France, where Domenech studied at the Vincentians’ College of Montolieu in Aude. After joining the order, he lived at the motherhouse of Saint-Lazare in Paris until 1838.
- 5 The text is from the baptismal register of the Priory Church of Saint Peter in Reus (*Església Prioral de Sant Pere de Reus*): book 20, folio 109, for the year 1816, on December 27. The original text is in a faded cursive script, and utilizes abbreviations. *Mn.* Josep Queraltó Serrano transcribed the text, which is in Catalan.

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- 6 As a native speaker of Catalan, Bishop Domeneç's full name at birth was *Miquel Joan Josep Domènec i Veciana*. As customary in Catalonian and Spanish-speaking cultures, a child takes both his father's and mother's surnames. In Spanish, which is also used in the area, the name would have been *Miguel Juan José Domènec y Veciana*. The surname *Domènec* appears to have been altered in the United States to "Domeneç," which is the spelling found in most diocesan sources in Pittsburgh. Moreover, as a missionary in the United States, Bishop Domeneç used the Anglicized spelling of "Michael" in preference to the Catalan *Miquel* or the Spanish *Miguel*.
- 7 While the baptismal register spells his mother's maiden name as *Viciana*, most other sources, such as the archdiocesan necrology record, use the standard spelling of *Veciana*.
- 8 The Archbishop of Tarragona at the time of Bishop Domeneç's death was Constantino Bonet y Zanuy (1808–1878), who died in October of the same year.
- 9 There seems to have been speculation that Bishop Domeneç, being between dioceses at the time, was about to receive a prestigious appointment in America.
- 10 Note that *José* is the Spanish equivalent for the Catalan name *Josep*.
- 11 According to the 1917 Code of Canon Law, the minimum age for ordination to the subdiaconate was 22 (*ante annum vicesimum primam completum*); to the diaconate, 23; and to the priesthood, 25 (Canon 975). The 1983 Code of Canon Law requires a minimum age of 26 for priests and 24 for transitional deacons (Canon 1031). Of course, Bishop Domeneç was ordained a priest before the promulgation of the 1917 Code. The situation before the codification of the body of legislation was very complex, with thousands of often contradictory norms in effect, but I provide the 1917 canon as a point of reference for what later became the standard age.
- 12 Domeneç was ordained bishop and installed by Archbishop Francis P. Kenrick of Baltimore in St. Paul Cathedral (Downtown), Pittsburgh. Appointed first bishop of Allegheny on January 11, 1876, Domeneç was installed in St. Peter Cathedral in the City of Allegheny on March 19, 1876.



**The high altar and choir stalls of the Cathedral of Tarragona.**



**Mass in the Chapel of Nuestra Señora de la Guía in the Cathedral of Tarragona, in front of the tomb of Bishop Domeneç. Father Michael Conway celebrant, Fathers Thomas Schlupe and Josep Queraltó Serrano, rector of the cathedral, concelebrating.** (Bishop Domeneç's tomb is visible at the bottom left.)

Map and all pictures courtesy of Alexander J. Schrenk.