

TRACING VARELA'S LIFE (1788 – 1853)



1788 – Havana, Cuba

Félix Varela is born into a military family. Orphaned at the age of 3, he goes to live with his grandfather, who commands the Spanish colonial troops in St. Augustine, Florida.

1802 – Havana, Cuba

Young Varela attends the Seminary of San Carlos and is ordained as a priest. Continuing his studies, he becomes a renowned professor, writes widely used textbooks on philosophy, mathematics, and science, and pioneers the study of constitutional democracy in Latin America. He will later be called "the Benjamin Franklin of Cuba."

1823 – New York City

Varela escapes to America and helps build up the Catholic Church in New York as parish priest and vicar general. He gains renown as an eloquent orator against anti-Catholic bigotry and a model of selfless Christian charity, courageously visiting the sick during a cholera epidemic and giving freely to the poor.

1792 – St. Augustine, Florida

Raised in the Spanish colonial garrison, Varela studies Latin and scripture with Irish priests. Horrified by slavery and violence, he is drawn to the priestly life. When his grandfather offers to send him to officer's training, the 14-year-old Varela refuses.

1821 – Cádiz, Spain

As a delegate from Cuba to the Spanish Cortes, Varela advocates in favor of democracy and independence for Spain's colonies. He is marked for execution when King Ferdinand VII returns to power.

1850 – St. Augustine, Florida

In poor health, Varela returns to the city of his childhood. At his passing in 1853, locals crowd his sickroom, hoping to be blessed by the holy man.