

## EASTER IN THE CANARIES

# Processions, brotherhoods and the recreation of the Passion of Christ

By Sabine Virgin

Spain is a Catholic country and Easter here is, above all, a religious holiday, celebrated with solemnity and humility.

Whilst the Canarian tendency to combine religious festivals with the hustle and bustle of secular life continues during Easter, there is an almost gloomy atmosphere during the processions bearing the various religious images and the sound of dull, thudding drumbeats fill the streets of the old towns. In Tenerife, the particularly important processions are organised in La Orotava, Puerto de La Cruz, La Laguna, Candelaria and Adeje. Most of the major processions are organised by the so-called brotherhoods.

## What is a brotherhood?

The Hermandades (brotherhoods) are groups whose formation can be traced back to the beginning of the 19th century. At one time they were an exclusively male preserve; however, there are now also female members. There is a distinction drawn between the Hermandades which have the Christ figure as its centre and Cofradías, where the Virgin Mary is especially venerated. Vilehaldo Arzola González, active member of a Hermandad at the church of San Juan Bautista in La Orotava explained: “In La Orotava, for example, we have 15 different brotherhoods, some of which are 150 years old or even older. Many brotherhoods were founded in the 19th century. There were mergers between artisans and academics. The most respected brotherhood in La Orotava is the Hermandad of the Most Holy Christ. It consists of only 12 people and was formerly reserved solely for the nobility. Then there are fraternities that have been created by certain professional groups. For example, carpenters, artisans, doctors, lawyers and the like”.

He continued: “In the past, the brotherhoods had a further task apart from the religious framework. The members took care

of each others families. When one of the brothers died, it was part of their code that the rest of them would look after his widow and children”. In pre-social security days, this care was a blessing for the surviving family members.

Today, this social commitment remains an important element in the understanding of the brotherhoods. Most members inscribe their children as soon as they are born. The Hermandad is a matter of course in the lives of many families



↑ La Orotava: Members wear medals for identification



↑ Some members of the fraternities walk barefoot and/or carry a cross



↑ The figures can be a bit spooky

and the children grow up within its presence. This is why they do not admit any newcomers. The Brotherhoods in La Orotava wear dark suits and the most impressive processions take place on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday.

In some parishes the Holy Statues are wrapped in various colours during the processions. The colours have symbolic meaning, thus purple stands for suffering; black, which prevails mainly on Good Friday, stands for grief, and before and on Easter Sunday itself, other strong colours are used as a sign of resurrection and a new beginning.

## What stands out in La Laguna?

The representatives of the fraternities are quite different in La Laguna, which is the seat of the archbishopric of Tenerife. They dress themselves