

Priest of the Week:

Miguel Agustin Pro

Juarez was born on January 13, 1891, in the village of Guadalupe, Zacatecas, Mexico. As a child he was known for his sense of humor and practical jokes. Popular, handsome, and intelligent, many assumed that, like his father, he would have a profitable career in the mining business. Miguel was instead inspired to consider the priesthood by an older sister who entered a cloistered convent. In 1911, at the age of 20, he entered the Jesuit novitiate to become a priest.

However, the chaos of the Mexican Revolution that had started the year before soon effected his formation. By 1914, the anti-Catholic nature of the revolution had forced Miguel and his fellow seminarians to flee the country for the United States. He continued his formation in Europe and was ordained in 1925.

By this time the Mexican government, in the name of creating a new, Marxist inspired society, had begun to suppress Christianity. All churches, convents, and religious schools were closed. Clergy and religious were forced into exile or imprisoned by the government. Lay people who protested these actions were beaten, thrown in jail or shot. The penalty for priests caught operating in secret was death. This period represented one of the most brutal persecutions of the Church in modern history.

Into this situation, Fr. Pro asked for and received permission to return to Mexico to carryout an undercover ministry. Arriving in secret in 1926, he made his way to Mexico City. Using clandestine meeting places and a wardrobe of disguises Fr. Pro was able to avoid arrest for some time. Often meeting under cover of darkness he celebrated Mass, heard confessions, baptized infants, and performed marriages for the faithful under his care. Several times, while disguised as a police officer, he was able to slip unnoticed into police headquarters to bring the sacraments to prisoners before their executions.

On the information given by an informant, Fr. Pro, along with two of his brothers, was finally arrested at a safe house. In a trial that lasted a single day, he was found guilty and sentenced to death on false charges of having plotted the recent assassination of the president of Mexico. The real reason for the death sentence was the priest's defiance of the laws banning Catholicism.

Expecting Fr. Pro to beg for his life before his executioners, the government ordered journalists to photograph the event. It was thought that pictures of a cowardly priest published on the front page of the national newspapers would discredit the Church and be a warning to others. Instead, on the day of the execution, November 23, 1927, Fr. Pro calmly walked to the place of his death. After kneeling in prayer, he blessed and forgave the soldiers in the firing squad. Refusing a blindfold, he faced them and once again declared his innocence. Holding a rosary in one hand and crucifix in the other, he held out his arms in imitation of Christ on the cross and shouted "Viva Cristo Rey!" (Long live Christ the King!) when the order to fire was given. Apparently unnerved by Fr. Pro's witness, the soldiers' volley only wounded him. A final shot, this time at point blank range to the head, killed him. He was 36 years old.

Media coverage of the shooting, instead of demoralizing the government's opponents, only gave them renewed courage. Many in the resistance carried photos of the execution and recognized Fr. Pro as a martyr. Beatified in 1988 by Pope John Paul II, Blessed Miguel Pro today is seen as an example of Christian heroism in the 20th Century. His memorial day is celebrated in North America on November 23. Blessed Miguel Pro, pray for us!



Blessed Miguel Pro, S. J.
Martyr
1891-1927
This is the stance he took as he
was being shot.