

VIBA CRISTO REY! BLESSED MIGUEL PRO JUAREZ

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 23, 2014

“Long Live Christ the King!”

Born in Guadalupe on January 12, 1891, Miguel Pro Juarez was the eldest son of Miguel Pro and Josefa Juarez.

Miguel was, from an early age, intensely spiritual and equally intense in his mischievousness, frequently exasperating his family with his humor and practical jokes. As a child he had a daring precociousness that sometimes went too far, tossing him into near death accidents and illnesses.

Miguel was particularly close to his older sister, and after she entered a cloistered convent he began to discern his own vocation, leading him to enter the Jesuit novitiate in El Llano, Michoacan at the age of 20.

He studied in Mexico until 1914 when a tidal wave of governmental anti-Catholicism crashed down upon Mexico, forcing the novitiate to disband and the order to flee to Los Gatos, California.

In 1915 Miguel was sent to a seminary in Spain, where he remained until 1924. By the time he was ordained a priest in Belgium in 1925, the political situation in Mexico had deteriorated: all Catholic churches were closed, bishops, priests, and religious were rounded up for deportation or imprisonment, and those caught trying to elude capture were shot. The celebration of the sacraments was punishable by imprisonment or death, and the Church was driven underground.

Fr. Pro received permission from his superiors to return to Mexico incognito and to carry on his ministry undercover. He slipped into Mexico City and immediately began celebrating Mass and distributing the sacraments – often under imminent threat of discovery by a police force charged with the task of ferreting out hidden pockets of Catholicism.

He became known throughout the city as the undercover priest who would show up in the middle of the night – dressed as a beggar or a street sweeper – to baptize infants, hear confessions, distribute Communion, or perform marriages. Several times, disguised as a policeman, he slipped

unnoticed into the police headquarters itself to bring the sacraments to Catholic prisoners before their execution. Using clandestine meeting places, a wardrobe of disguises, and coded messages to the underground Catholics, Fr. Pro carried on his priestly work for the Mexican faithful under his care.

In testimony at the process of beatification, it was reported that at the Consecration of the Mass he celebrated the day before he was arrested, a brilliant light surrounded his entire body and his face and hands and vestments shown so brightly that those attending Mass could not look directly at him.

The next day he and his brother were arrested, having been betrayed by an informant. They were put in jail and held without trial for ten days while the government trumped up false charges implicating Fr. Pro in an assassination attempt on the president-elect, Plutarco Calles.

On November 13, 1927, President Calles ordered Fr. Pro to be executed, ostensibly for his role in the assassination plot, but in reality for his defiance of the laws banning Catholicism. As Fr. Pro walked from his cell to the prison courtyard, he blessed the firing squad and then knelt and prayed silently for a few moments. Refusing a blindfold, he stood, faced the firing squad, and with a crucifix in one hand and a rosary in the other, he held his arms outstretched in the form of a cross and in a loud, clear voice cried out, "May God have mercy on you! May God bless you! Lord, Thou knowest that I am innocent! With all my heart I forgive my enemies!" As the soldiers lifted their rifles, he exclaimed in a loud voice, "Viva Cristo Rey!" - "Long live Christ the King!"

A volley rang out and Fr. Pro fell to the ground riddled with bullets. A soldier stepped up and discharged his rifle at point blank range into the priest's temple.

Fr. Miguel Pro was beatified on September 25, 1988 by Pope John Paul II.

[Biography courtesy of St. Francis of Assisi Religious Goods]

(Mexican government authorities were present, by order of the president, to take photos of the execution of Fr. Miguel Pro)