

## BLESSED MIGUEL AUGUSTIN PRO

January 13, 1891 – November 23, 1927

*By Father David Skillman*



*Viva Cristo Rey!* “Long live Christ the King!” Such was the battle cry of the Cristeros who took up arms to fight for religious liberty during the religious persecution in Mexico in the early 1900s. Such was also the battle cry of priests and religious like Blessed Miguel Augustin Pro, men and women who took up spiritual arms, every bit as engrossed in the battle as their Cristero counterparts.

Miguel Pro was born January 13, 1891, and was known to be a happy and spirited child. Drawn by the Lord to religious life, he became a Jesuit novice at the age of 20 and was soon exiled from Mexico because of the religious persecutions that were part of the Mexican revolution. He lived in various places in the United States, Spain, Nicaragua, and Belgium, where he was ordained to the priesthood in 1925.

Having been allowed to return to Mexico in 1926, he took up a secret ministry, traveling throughout the country in disguise to provide for the spiritual needs of the country’s Catholics, especially by bringing them the sacraments. Through it all, his characteristic joy was evident. The daily threats he faced were not enough to conquer the joy of serving Jesus Christ. As a faithful and obedient son of the Church, Blessed Miguel knew that caring for the people’s spiritual needs was most important, but it was not enough. Their temporal needs also needed attention, and so he also dedicated himself to the corporal works of mercy, particularly by serving the poor of Mexico City.

Eventually Blessed Miguel was apprehended by the police and quickly sentenced to death by firing squad. Heroically, he forgave his executioners, spent his final moments in prayer, and moments before the fatal shot was fired proclaimed, *Viva Cristo Rey!*

The story of martyrs like Blessed Miguel Pro, so courageous in the face of persecution, are especially timely in our day, when religious liberty seems more and more threatened with each passing day. His soul configured to Christ the Priest through his ordination, he knew that no matter the threat, he must faithfully care for the spiritual and temporal needs of the people he was called to serve. At the heart of it all were the sacraments, which he literally risked his life to bring to others.

Blessed Miguel recognized the centrality of the Church’s sacramental life. He saw that, of the many things the priest does, celebrating the sacraments is most important. This makes sense in light of the Theology of the Body, for if we are bodily creatures, then God will come to us in and through sensible signs. As Blessed John Paul notes, this truth is present in Saint Paul’s words to the Ephesians (5:21-33). As Saint Paul considers the mystery of our faith made visible in the Sacrament of Marriage (“For this reason a man will leave his father and his mother and unite with his wife, and the two will form one flesh. This *mystery is great*; I say this with reference to Christ and the Church.”), he also notes the centrality of the *Most Blessed* Sacrament, the Holy Eucharist. Pope Saint John Paul II writes, “[T]he Eucharist...seems to be indicated by the following words about the nourishment of one’s own body: everyone nourishes and cares for his body ‘as Christ does with the Church, because we are members of his body’ (Eph 5:29-30). In fact, Christ nourishes the Church with his Body precisely in the Eucharist” (TOB 99:1). Blessed Miguel, a faithful priest, allowed himself to be an instrument through which Christ could continue to nourish His Bride, the Church, with His own Body. He gave himself to this mission so fully that it cost him his life.

We priests can learn two fundamental truths from Blessed Miguel. First of all, after the likeness of Christ, we are called to care for the whole person, body and soul. We are to encourage both the spiritual and the corporal works of mercy and to carry them out ourselves. Secondly, nothing, not even the threat of death, should stand between us and the accomplishing of our sacred mission. After offering ourselves to Christ at our ordination, our lives no longer are our own. No matter the danger, we should give ourselves totally to our spouse, the Church, and to the spiritual children entrusted to our care, particularly in the celebration of the sacraments of the Church.



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