

Blessed Miguel Pro

Blessed Miguel Pro was born in Guadalupe, Mexico, on Jan. 13, 1891, to Josefa Juarez and Miguel Pro, little Miguel was blessed with a warm family and a happy childhood. How different his adult life would be!

Forced to flee

Miguel, 20 years old, entered the Jesuit novitiate at El Llano, Michoacan, on Aug. 10, 1911. His formation for the priesthood coincided with the most violent period in Mexican history, including a brutal and persistent persecution of the Catholic Church. While Miguel was studying theology, revolutionaries were fighting to topple the established order. Sadly, the fight became more and more vicious, particularly toward the Church. In 1914, Miguel and his fellow novices had to flee Mexico to Los Gatos, California. The superiors of the order feared that the seminarians would be killed (as many priests, nuns and laypeople already had been), and they hoped that the seminarians would return to Mexico as priests.

While the battle raged in his home country, Miguel spent the next 12 years completing his training for the priesthood in Spain and Nicaragua. Throughout his involuntary exile, Miguel matured in his vocation.

He battled sickness, suffering stomach ailments almost every day; but through it all, he developed a keen sense of humor, playing tricks on his classmates. Another habit gained strength too: his prayer, to which he devoted so much time that other seminarians became curious. Miguel told them, "If I don't pray well, I shall lose my vocation." From then on Miguel was "the one who played and the one who prayed."

On Aug. 31, 1925, Miguel was ordained at Enghien, Belgium, where he had spent his last year of theology. The day was bittersweet because his family could not be present and,

worse, they were suffering under the cruel presidency of Plutarco Elias Calles, who had come to power in 1924. Miguel's fellow ordinands were able to bless their parents and siblings in person. Miguel could only do the next best thing: He spread photographs of his family across his bed and blessed them with all his heart.

After ordination, Miguel was sent to Charleroi, Belgium, to work with miners, but in only three months he became sick again. After medical treatments failed to improve his health, Miguel received permission to return to Mexico. The thought was that being home might be salubrious, or at least he could die on his own soil. When Miguel reached Veracruz, Mexico, in July 1926, the anti-Catholicism in his home country had intensified. Public worship was suspended by the bishops.

One advantage to Miguel coming home at the worst possible moment for a Catholic priest was that he was unknown as a priest. He was able to slip into Mexico City and begin a clandestine ministry. Nothing seemed to deter him – not his illnesses and not the persecution. He became adept at using costumes to enter homes or other buildings, even prisons; he would dress as a miner, a businessman, a policeman – whatever the occasion called for. The disguises enabled him to baptize infants, bless marriages, hear confessions; to maintain a sacramental ministry.

If celebrating the sacraments under such conditions was not difficult enough, Miguel also carried out the corporal works of mercy with great success. Making his rounds, Miguel might find an object worth selling or he might encounter a wealthy person whom he would persuade to give alms. In a letter, Miguel writes: "Once I was walking along with a woman's purse that was quite cute (the purse not the woman) ..." He then relates how he was able to sell the purse and give the money to a needy family. His craftiness allowed him to provide not only spiritual care, but also food, clothing and shelter. A month before he died, Miguel was reportedly paying rent for 96

poor families.

Plutarco Elias Calles, the Mexican president, considered Miguel a thorn in his side, and he made it known that he wanted Father Pro dead, not alive. More false charges followed, and when Miguel was caught, Calles ordered his execution. On Nov. 23, 1927, Father Miguel Pro was martyred by Mexican police. His feast day is November 23.