



Bl. Miguel Pro

BORN 1891; DIED 1927
PRIEST AND MARTYR
FEAST DAY: NOVEMBER 23

THERE HAVE BEEN TIMES in history when being a priest was an automatic death sentence: sixteenth-century England, late eighteenth-century France, and early twentieth-century Mexico. Bl. Miguel Pro faced near-certain martyrdom by becoming a Jesuit priest in Mexico — and danced his way to glory.

Miguel was born in the town of Guadalupe in the state of Zacatecas in north-central Mexico. He was one of four brothers and three sisters who were the children of a well-off senior mining engineer, Miguel Pro, and his wife Josefita Juarez. Little Miguel's mother gave generously to the underpaid mine workers. He loved to be among the miners and eventually learned their dialect. He was also the family prankster, and was not above lying to carry out a joke. As a teenager he dated and, for a while, allowed his faith to falter and stopped going to Mass.

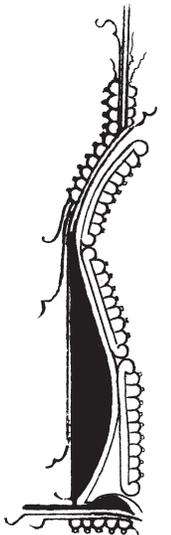
The entry of two of Miguel's sisters into religious life initially upset him dreadfully. His mother request-

ed that he go on a retreat to come to terms with his reaction. This resulted in an amazing conversion of heart, and he realized that God was calling him to the priesthood. He entered the Jesuit order when he was twenty — and became the comedian of the seminary.

The Mexican revolution, fiercely anti-Catholic throughout much of the nineteenth century, blazed up again as a consequence of yet another revolution in 1910 that eventually cost Miguel's parents their home and livelihood. It was during this period that he expressed a desire to suffer persecution for the sake of justice. In 1913, two years after he had entered the seminary,

the Jesuits had to disband the seminary. He began to perfect the art of disguise, treating the need to conceal his activities as an exciting game. Eventually, he and the other novices and seminarians made their way to Spain and then to Belgium, which is where he was ordained a priest at the age of thirty-four. He matured spiritually in these years, especially in his life of prayer. These were years, as well, of severe stomach illness which three surgeries failed to cure. Nevertheless, he was sent home to Mexico.

Within a month of his return home, public worship of



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any kind was forbidden by the Mexican government and all priests were subject to arrest. Initially unknown to be a priest, Miguel was able for a while to carry out his clandestine ministry in private homes in Mexico City. He was once arrested in a general sweep with his brothers, who were active lay Catholics, but he joked his way out of jail. Within months, however, he had to go into hiding because a warrant for his arrest had been issued.

For Miguel, “hiding” had a unique meaning. He resorted to a series of disguises to move around invisibly. Once he was a mechanic; another time, a cripple. He used his “rubber face” to change his appearance. Outwitting the police was great fun! On one occasion, chased by police, he asked a nearby girl for help, and the police completely ignored the two “lovebirds.” He received protection from the thousands of faithful Catholics who hungered for Mass and the sacraments, and who needed the food and clothing he obtained and distributed. Many thousands actively resisted the government’s persecution, and there were many horrific martyrdoms of priests, religious, and lay Catholics.

Things came to a climax for Miguel when an attempt was made to assassinate the former president of Mexico. Despite alibis, Miguel and two of his brothers, Humberto and Roberto, were arrested four days later. They

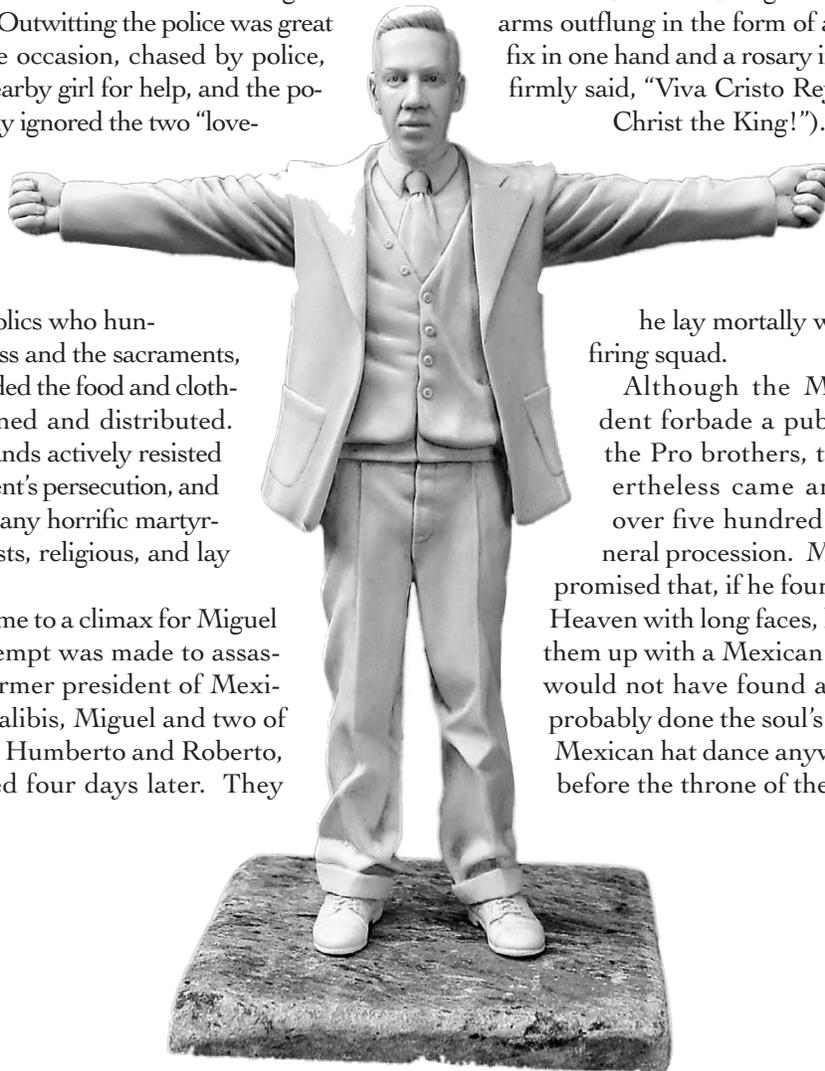
were illegally sentenced to death, although Roberto was eventually instead exiled to the United States. Miguel and Humberto were executed six days after their arrest.

In the time before his execution, Miguel acted openly as a priest. He gave his brother and other prisoners the sacraments, offered counsel to his jailer, offered forgiveness to the policeman who led him to his execution, and prayed for God’s forgiveness for the members of the firing squad. The government had invited the press, expecting that photographs would show the cowardice of Catholics. Instead, however, Miguel faced death with arms outflung in the form of a cross, a crucifix in one hand and a rosary in the other, and firmly said, “Viva Cristo Rey!” (“Long live Christ the King!”). He was killed

by a shot in the head by the leader of the firing squad as

he lay mortally wounded by the firing squad.

Although the Mexican president forbade a public funeral for the Pro brothers, thousands nevertheless came and there were over five hundred cars in the funeral procession. Miguel had once promised that, if he found any saints in Heaven with long faces, he would cheer them up with a Mexican hat dance. He would not have found any, but he has probably done the soul’s equivalent of a Mexican hat dance anyway, in worship before the throne of the Almighty.



Blessed Miguel Pro, by Peter Kelley