

# BLESSED MIGUEL PRO

*“Blessed are they that suffer persecution  
for justice’ sake: for theirs is the kingdom of  
heaven.”*

—Matthew 5:10



*Miguel Agustin Pro*

Blessed Miguel Agustin Pro Juárez, S.J. (1891-1927) was martyred for the Faith in Mexico.

# BLESSED MIGUEL PRO

20TH-CENTURY MEXICAN MARTYR

*By*  
Ann Ball

*“Greater love than this no man hath, that  
a man lay down his life for his friends.”*

—John 15:13

TAN Books  
Charlotte, North Carolina

Copyright © 1996 by TAN Books.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the Publisher, except that brief selections may be quoted or copied for non-profit use without permission, provided that full credit is given.

Library of Congress Catalog Card No. 96-60532

ISBN: 978-0-89555-542-7

Printed and bound in the United States of America.

TAN Books  
Charlotte, North Carolina  
[www.TANBooks.com](http://www.TANBooks.com)  
2011

## DEDICATION

This book is lovingly dedicated to my son Raul, my grandchildren Austin, Max, Tori, Michael and “Angelito,” and to the youth of America. May the merry Mexican martyr, Miguel Pro, lead them with love and laughter to “*mi Padre Dios.*”



## CONTENTS

Author's Preface . . . . .	ix
Acknowledgments . . . . .	xiii
Introduction . . . . .	xv
Chapter 1: A Lively Childhood . . . . .	1
Chapter 2: Formative Years . . . . .	7
Chapter 3: Young Manhood . . . . .	11
Chapter 4: Mounting Political Tensions . . . . .	15
Chapter 5: Three Vocations . . . . .	19
Chapter 6: Flight from Mexico . . . . .	23
Chapter 7: A Priest at Last . . . . .	30
Chapter 8: Crosses of Body and Soul . . . . .	33
Chapter 9: Return to Mexico:	
The Church Goes Underground . . . . .	47
Chapter 10: The First Arrest . . . . .	54
Chapter 11: Works of Mercy . . . . .	58
Chapter 12: The Danger Increases . . . . .	68
Chapter 13: Capture! . . . . .	73
Chapter 14: Martyrdom . . . . .	79
Chapter 15: Favors From Heaven . . . . .	101
Appendix 1: Writings of Bl. Miguel Pro . . . . .	105
Appendix 2: Prayers . . . . .	111
Appendix 3: A Celebration in Honor of	
Bl. Miguel Pro . . . . .	115
Selected Bibliography . . . . .	118

## DECLARATION OF OBEDIENCE

In loving obedience to the decrees of several Roman Pontiffs, in particular those of Pope Urban VIII, I declare that I in no way intend to prejudge Holy Mother Church in the matter of Saints, sanctity, miracles and so forth. Final authority in such matters rests with the See of Rome, to whose judgment I willingly submit.

—Ann Ball



## AUTHOR'S PREFACE

My interest in the life of Bl. Miguel Pro, S.J., began over 25 years ago when I had barely begun to gather information for a book on modern saints. In my initial research on his life and martyrdom, I was captivated by his happy nature and spirit of joy combined with a deep seriousness of thought, his consuming zeal for souls, his passion for justice, his dedication to obedience and his strong devotion, as well as his sublime heroism.

After Fr. Pro's beatification I wrote a chaplet in his honor, which I had hoped would help his Cause in some way. My Bishop, the Most Rev. Joseph A. Fiorenza, issued an Imprimatur for the chaplet and expressed his hope that, by praying it, many would be brought closer to God through the intercession of Bl. Miguel Pro and that they would experience the deep faith and love for Christ the King which motivated and sustained Bl. Miguel in his priestly mission and martyrdom.

I firmly believe in the communion of Saints as defined by the Catholic Church, and for me Bl. Miguel is a friend, a counselor, a helper and a guide—not just a subject of my writings. Also, like my beloved patron St. John Bosco, he seems to bring forth love and laughter and happy surprises!

After the approval of the chaplet, through a long-time friend I met Carol and Lawrence Le Leux of ProVision,\* who were enthusiastic supporters of Bl. Miguel. About that same time, I located and was able to speak with the current vice postulator of Fr. Pro's Cause, Fr. Fernando Suarez Santoyo, S.J. From that point it seemed as if my merry Mexican martyr was pushing me to help him spread his joy across the United States, where so many Catholics today, especially our youth, are so badly in need of Christian heroes.

A new medal was struck, and the chaplets were produced. I wrote an article about Fr. Pro, which was published in *Our Sunday Visitor*, a national Catholic paper. In the article, I gave the address of ProVision for those who wanted more information. The paper immediately received a flood of letters from all across the United States from people who seemed hungry to know more about this happy martyr.

Although I could locate a number of articles and brief biographies in collected works in English, it seemed that the major biographies of Bl. Miguel were either in other languages or were out of print and difficult to find. In addition, the blessings and support of my Bishop and of Fr. Pro's vice postulator, the comments and blessings from Fr. Molinari (Postulator General of the Jesuits) and from Bishop Tamayo (the auxiliary Bishop of my diocese) and from Bishop

---

\* ProVision is a group of people dedicated to the promotion of Fr. Pro's Cause.

Ramirez of Las Cruces, as well as the requests, support and prayers of the Le Leux's and of so many others, all convinced me that a new work on Fr. Pro was needed.

Before his death Bl. Miguel told some of his friends that he believed that the offering of his life would be accepted and that martyrdom would be his key to Heaven. He then remarked jokingly that if he were allowed this favor, his friends should get their petitions ready, because from Heaven he would deal out favors as if they were a deck of cards.

It is my sincere prayer that this brief retelling of the story of the Mexican "Joker" will help him in some small way to continue his "game" of uniting hearts to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and of gaining souls for "*mi Padre Dios*"—"God my Father"—which was Bl. Miguel's favorite name for Divine Providence.

—Ann Ball



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My thanks are gratefully extended to these and other correspondents and friends—friends of mine and of Bl. Miguel:

Rev. Luis Diaz Borrundo, M.Sp.S.

Rev. John Boscoe, C.S.B.

Rev. Jack Broussard, C.S.B.

Rev. Enrique Cardenas, S.J. (R.I.P.), former Vice  
Postulator

Rev. A. Dragon, S.J. (R.I.P.)

Most Rev. Joseph A. Fiorenza, Bishop of Galveston-  
Houston

Rev. Richard Flores

Rev. Bill Frankenberger, C.S.B.

Rev. Troy Gately

Rev. Peter Gumpel, S.J.

Margaret Hotze

Lawrence and Carol Le Leux, ProVision

Sister Margaret Mary, M.C.

Rev. Paolo Molinari, S.J., Postulator General of the  
Jesuits

Rev. Max Murphy, C.S.B.

Jeanne Noxon

Most Rev. Ricardo Ramirez, C.S.B., Bishop of Las  
Cruces

Rev. Fernando Suarez Santoyo, S.J., Vice Postulator

Rev. Raphael O'Laughlin, C.S.B.

Very Rev. Enrique San Pedro, S.J. (R.I.P.), former  
Bishop of Brownsville

Most Rev. James T. Tamayo, Auxiliary Bishop of  
Galveston-Houston

Bea Whitfil

Bro. David Lopez, O.S.F.

Fausto Zelaya, Jr.

Without their help, encouragement and support,  
and especially their prayers, I could not have told this  
story. May God and our merry Mexican martyr bless  
them.

—Ann Ball

## INTRODUCTION

This is a book about one man's love of God, how with true Christian joy he worked for the good of souls and how he gave his life in defense of the Catholic Faith.

This is not a book on politics. Study as much as you like, the political situation of Mexico was, and is, complicated. In this brief work there is not space to include a definitive rendering of all the political motivations and actions in Mexico between 1890 and 1940. Other books detail the problems of the Catholic Church in Mexico.\* Most Americans can barely comprehend the situation; the fact that these things occurred so close to our own nation astounds many who think of Mexico only as a Catholic country, not as a persecuted one.

Fr. Pro was by no means the only Catholic to give his life for the Faith during the long, dark years of religious persecution in Mexico. Thousands of Catholics—priests, religious and laity—were harassed, tortured, killed or forced to flee their fatherland.

---

\* For details on the history of the Catholic Church in Mexico, see *Blood-Drenched Altars*, by Most Rev. Francis C. Kelley and *Mexican Martyrdom*, by Fr. Wilfrid Parsons, S.J. Both books are published by TAN Books.

A cause for beatification has been begun for a number of these heroes for the Faith; the heroic exploits of many live on only in the hearts of their families and in the memories of the people of their native regions. Two examples—one from the beginning and one from the end of the active persecution against the Church in Mexico—are briefly mentioned here.

### Fr. Mateo Correa

The holy priest who poured the living water over the infant Miguel Pro was Fr. Mateo Correa. Fr. Correa's life was crowned with his execution for refusing to break the seal of the confessional.

One day the elderly Fr. Correa, obediently continuing his ministry to the people in his area, was taking Viaticum to a sick person when he was surprised by a group of soldiers. He consumed the Host in order that it not be desecrated and he was then taken before the military commander, where he was accused of being in league with the Catholic *Libertadores* (a group of men, also known as the *Cristeros*, who advocated force in order to achieve freedom for the Catholic Church).

Fr. Correa was sent to hear the Confessions of prisoners before they were executed. When the commander then demanded to know what the prisoners had told the priest in their Confessions, the brave confessor refused to say. He was shot on February 6, 1927.



## María de la Luz Camacho

When the former governor of Tabasco, Tomas Garrido Canabal, became the Minister of Agriculture in the cabinet of President Cárdenas in December of 1934, he brought to the capital his own personal shock troops, the *Rojinegros* ("Red Blacks"), a well-trained and disciplined semi-military body of young men and women. Garrido, the "Scourge of Tabasco," preached a mixture of socialism and fanatical anti-religion, and he held weekly "Red Saturdays" in which religious articles and books were burned to the accompaniment of dance and song. Houses and churches in the city were raided for the material for the weekly bonfire. Garrido then began to send his troops to the suburbs to hold demonstrations.

On December 30, 1934, about 50 or 60 of the *Rojinegros* gathered near the church of the Immaculate Conception at Coyoacan. Mass had begun. A group of about 20 lay persons, having been warned that the *Rojinegros* planned to burn the church, stood on the steps to defend the entrance at least long enough for the children inside to escape. The minutes ticked away. At last the revolutionaries charged forward, shouting, "*¡Viva la Revolución!*"

With her arms outstretched in the form of a cross, the valiant catechist and member of Catholic Action, María de la Luz Camacho, cried out, "*¡Viva Cristo Rey!*" ("Long live Christ the King!"). The pistols spoke,

and María and four men fell lifeless on the steps of the church. There was a moment of stunned silence, and then the unarmed crowd leaped at the assassins—who fled, armed though they were, and took refuge in the police station.

The assassins were imprisoned, but Garrido sent them a case of champagne to cheer them up. They were later released; nothing was done to them.

The funeral of María de la Luz and the others was a triumph, with thousands of people attending. After this incident the university students were stirred to the defense and the Rojinegros met opposition wherever they went, until June of that year (1934), when Garrido was forced out of the government in a purge, and he and his troops returned to Tabasco.



*Left:* Father Mateo Correa, who was executed in 1927 for refusing to break the seal of Confession.

*Right:* María de la Luz Camacho, who was shot by the Rojinegros in 1934 while defending the entrance of Immaculate Conception Church at Coyoacan.

# BLESSED MIGUEL PRO

*“And though in the sight of men, they  
suffered torments, their hope is full of  
immortality.”*

—Wisdom 3:4



## *Chapter 1*

### A LIVELY CHILDHOOD

There is more adventure, excitement and danger in the life of the Mexican priest Fr. Miguel Pro than in many modern spy thrillers. His life of danger began when, still only a toddler, he managed to escape the watchful eye of his nursemaid and crawl out onto a window ledge three stories above a busy street. There his horrified mother found and rescued him. A final dangerous episode would lead to his death in front of a firing squad at the age of 36.

Miguel was born on January 13, 1891, at Guadalupe, Zacatecas, near the center of one of Mexico's richest silver mining areas. He was the third child and the first son of Don Miguel Pro and his wife Josefa Juárez. Miguel's father, like his father before him, was a mining engineer.

Miguel was baptized three days after his birth in the Franciscan monastery's Nápoles chapel. He was given the lengthy and impressive name José Ramon Miguel Agustín Pro Juárez. His paternal grandparents were his godparents. A family treasure, a small container of water from the Holy Land, was used at the Baptism.

When Miguel was still a baby, the family moved to

Mexico City. There, in the family's large and spacious home, Miguel took his first steps. There, too, his investigative impulses and incessant physical activity constantly drew him into mischief.

Through the open windows, the baby listened daily to the hawking cries of the street vendors. One of these vendors, a shy Aztec woman, supplied the family with delicious fruit. This woman became a particular favorite of the young Miguel and often stopped to play with him, calling him her little "soul baby." She began to bring him treats, and one day she brought a large gourd filled with a small fruit called *tojocotes*. Before his family realized what he was up to, Miguel had greedily consumed half the fruit. This caused some type of poisoning, and Miguel became violently ill and congested and seemed in danger of death.

After several days, during which his Aztec friend sat sorrowfully by his bed, anguished at what her gift had wrought and pleading with the Virgin of Guadalupe for the child's life, Miguel's fevers left. Apparently he had also suffered a brain fever, and the small victim was left with the vacuous stare and open mouth of an imbecile.

For a year the baby was sick and could not utter a syllable. A new fever developed, following bouts with measles and whooping cough, and the threat to his life seemed even greater than it had the previous year. Miguel suffered convulsions, and the doctors announced that death was imminent. The family gath-

ered sadly around the child's bed to wait for the end. Suddenly, Don Miguel snatched the insensible form of his son from the crib, and holding the baby out toward an image of Our Lady of Guadalupe, he cried out, "My Mother, give me back my son!"

In the silence that followed, the startled witnesses saw the baby give an immense shudder and vomit a great bloody mass of phlegm at his father. The danger was over.

Within a few days, the baby was restored to full health. He looked at his adoring mother and said, "Mama, I want a cocol" (a variety of roll which had always been his favorite). The happy mother caught Miguel up and hugged him, crying, "Come here, my little cocol!" Years later, when he was hiding from the police, Miguel frequently signed his letters to his fellow Christians with the nickname "Cocol."

From childhood, laughter and high spirits were hallmarks of Miguel's personality. He was constantly in motion, physically and mentally. A born clown, Miguel was blessed with a sunny disposition and a playfulness that enriched the family's nightly gatherings. The five-year-old Miguel would enthusiastically entertain the family by reciting verses, performing charades or directing his sisters in little skits. Seeing his son's talent, Don Miguel presented the little boy with a tiny theater, and Miguel's mother helped him shop for the puppets that he needed to people it. Years later, his dramatic ability remained. A friend remarked that

Miguel was a born actor and could laugh one minute and cry the next. He went on to say that Miguel could laugh with one side of his face and cry with the other.

Punishment was rare in the Pro household; instead, Don Miguel encouraged the good behavior of his children with a Saturday ritual whereby some “good angels” brought small gifts to those of the children who had behaved exceptionally well that week. Those omitted from the favors of the “angels” strove to be remembered the following week. Miguel did earn a spanking, however, when at the age of five he threw a minor temper fit in a store while on an outing with his mother and sisters. Later, the very sight of the little white horse which had occasioned the fit was enough to bring tears to his eyes, and he once remarked, “For that thing I made my mother weep!”

Another occasion for discipline came about the day that Miguel destroyed his sisters’ dolls. As his excuse, Miguel gave the fact that he was carrying on a “battle”—for which he was dressed in the little general’s uniform he had received as a Christmas present—and he had stabbed and beheaded the recalcitrant dolls because they had refused to move. His father replied that, in that case, Miguel’s punishment was due to the face that Miguel had moved too much.

When Miguel was six, the family moved to the northern industrial city of Monterrey, where Miguel began formal classes in a private school run by two sisters, the Señoritas Sánchez. For the active little boy,



fun and curiosity still took priority. One day he even skipped school in order to see the arrival of the snow-covered trains at the large train station in the city.

Other anecdotes, too, are recorded of Miguel's school years. There was the time he presented a lizard to his teacher as a "gift," the time he "charged" candy at a local store until his mother received the bill and he received his just reward, and the time he and another boy got into a real battle over a new hat that Miguel had worn to school. The other boy had ruined the new hat by pulling it down on Miguel's head, so Miguel jumped in with ready fists. On Miguel's return home, his mother noticed his black eye and asked what had happened. When he told her about the fight, she commented that he seemed to have gotten the worst of it. "Oh, no," he replied, "the other boy has two black eyes!"

In 1889 Don Miguel was transferred from Monterrey back to Zacatecas, where he became the senior engineer at the Concepción del Oro mine. He was concerned by the lack of good schools in the rough mining area, but he did not want to separate his close-knit family. Seven-year-old Miguel and his five brothers and sisters happily packed for what seemed to them only a new adventure.

Housing was also lacking in Zacatecas, so the family lived for a time in the local hotel while a new home was being built. During this time, the protective parents tried to isolate their children from other travelers

who were staying in the hotel, and they forbade the children to mingle with them. The inquisitive Miguel, while not failing in obedience, managed to hold hurried conversations with some bullfighters on his way to and from supper at the hotel dining room. Their brilliant costumes excited the lively little boy, who, on his return to the Pro family quarters, would mimic the bullfighters in a pleasing parody for his admiring sisters. Years later, when often evading the vigilance of Calles' spies, Miguel sometimes recounted stories of his narrow escapes using the terms of a bullfighter to enliven the telling.