



## Padre Pro *A Modern Martyr*

by Brother Dominic, M.I.C.M. Tertiary

Without a trace of fear or hesitancy, he walked to the wall, and tranquilly faced the firing squad. He stretched forth his hands in the form of a cross, refused a blindfold, and cried out: "With all my heart I forgive my enemies." Then, just before the order to fire was given, he quietly uttered the glorious ejaculation of the Mexican martyrs: *Viva Cristo Rey!* "Long live Christ the King!"

Five uplifted rifles, a sharp explosion, silently ascending white smoke puffs, and the beloved Father Jose Ramon Miguel Agustin Pro Juarez, S.J., idol of the Mexican people, fell dead, riddled with bullets.

This sad event took place at ten thirty-eight in the morning of November 23, 1927. The victim was born thirty-six years before to Josefa and Miguel Pro on January 13, 1891, in the town of Guadalupe, Mexico.

Don Miguel and his wife were the happy parents of eleven children. Miguel, Jr., was the third born. Four died in infancy. The two eldest, Maria de la Concepcion and Maria de la Luz, became Sisters of the Good Shepherd. Two of the boys, Miguel and his younger brother Humberto, were martyred. The rest of the children, Ana Maria, Edmundo Jose, and Roberto married.

There is no way to get a total picture of the life of Father Pro without first focusing on the

background against which that life was molded. Ever since the great captain, Hernando Cortez, gained possession of Mexico in 1521 in the name of Spain, the country had maintained its Catholic moorings. But there had been a succession of attempts to sever Mexico from the mother country.

The first separtist movement was organized by a parish priest named Hidalgo y Costillo in 1810. Having rallied the peasantry under the banner of Our Lady of Guadalupe, the priest-soldier formed a formidable army and dealt several severe blows to the government forces. In the end, however, Hidalgo's overconfident troops were disastrously defeated and he was captured and shot. His efforts were revived by

another priest named Morelos, who, likewise, was snagged by the Spanish forces and put to death in 1815.

But soon afterwards the royalist general, Iturbide, renounced his allegiance to Spain, due to the liberal and pro-Masonic turn of events in his mother country, and joined his forces with those of the separatist leader Guerrero. In no time the royalists had lost virtually all their support, and the separatists succeeded in having the independence of Mexico formally declared in 1821. Iturbide, the general, became Agustin I, the emperor, and for one year the nation was an American empire.

Though, under Agustin, the

Mexicans enjoyed full religious freedom, the Masonic forces, already spilling over into the heart of their country from the United States, motivated a strong movement towards a republican system of government; which movement, in 1823, succeeded in pressuring the Emperor to abdicate and eventually to flee for his life. A year later, Iturbide, who loved his country greatly, thought that it would be safe to return from his exile in Italy, a miscalculation which cost him his life. Immediately upon entering the country he was arrested and executed. The religious freedom maintained by the unfortunate Emperor had been undone by the republicans.



The Pro family:  
(standing, left) Edmundo, Miguel (our hero), and Ana Maria;  
(sitting) Maria de la Concepcion, Roberto, Senora Pro, Humberto,  
Senor Pro, and Maria de la Luz

Mexico would probably have remained a far less anticlerical nation had it not been for the introduction of Freemasonry by the first American consul, Joel Poinsett, who served in that post from 1825-1829. His interest in rare flowers, which immortalized his name in the plant he introduced to the United States, the red-leaved poinsettia, was a strange diversion for one who was so steeped in subversive activity.

By 1876, after much unrest and several revolutions, Porfirio Diaz gained the presidency by force, and for thirty-four years ruled as a relatively benevolent dictator. Catholics, (that is, ninety-five percent of the people), were happier in those years under Diaz; for, during his regime, all anti-religious laws, though still on the books, were held in abeyance, and the Church flourished anew. Nevertheless, Freemasonry continued its insidious campaign by cleverly manipulating its own candidates into high political positions and causing practicing Catholics to be removed from such offices.

Diaz fell from power in 1911. This was due to the military advantage and popular support the Mexican soldiers and working people gave to Francisco Madero, whose rallying cry was for social reform. Madero's triumph, however, was short-lived. Just two years after he was elected president, a military coup, led by General Victoriano Huerta, overthrew him. Madero was treacherously slain in prison. Under Huerta the Church was more free to preach the kingdom

of God than it had been under his predecessor.

After 1915, when Huerta fell, the names of Venustiano Carranza, Alvaro Obregon, and Plutarco Calles, three successive dictators who launched openly anti-Catholic policies, will forever stain the pages of Mexican history. It was under the last mentioned Calles, that a most fierce and bloody persecution of the Church ravaged the nation. In the years from 1926-1929 he was responsible for the execution of one hundred and sixty priests and hundreds of lay men and women...and even children. It was during this reign of terror that Padre Pro won the martyr's crown.

From his tenderest years Miguel Pro's character was a blend of deep seriousness and an irrepressible love of merriment. He was jovial and good-humored. As one who knew him remarked: "Father Pro was an actor, he could laugh one minute and cry the next; in fact, he would laugh with one side of his face and cry with the other."

When he was a young boy, his mother once took him on her lap and told him about the martyrdom of a saintly Franciscan which had occurred many years before. Little Miguel embraced his mother and exclaimed: "Mother darling, I also would love to die a martyr's death!"

Clasping her little son to her bosom, she replied with tears in her eyes: "May God hear you, child. But that is too great a happiness for me."

### A Narrow Escape from Death

There were two occasions when little Miguel should have been taken to the world beyond, but was miraculously saved. I will relate just one.

It happened that a certain Aztec woman, who idolized little Miguel, one time fed him a large quantity of fruit, not realizing that it was bad. As a result the small child was stricken with a very serious malady. The sickness suddenly infected the youngster's brain. This tragic development caused the doctors to give up hope, saying that he would either die, or live on as an imbecile.

For one whole year Miguel lived on, unable to speak, scarcely recognizing his beloved parents. Finally his condition became acute and death was imminent. His father, who loved his son dearly, was beside himself with grief. Yet trusting with childlike confidence in the Mother of God, he took the lad in his arms, and kneeling down before a likeness of our Lady of Guadalupe, he held out his sick son before the image, pleading for the holy Virgin's intercession with all his heart: "*Madre mia*, give me back my son."

In the dead silence that followed, the startled witnesses saw Miguel shudder convulsively, come out of his death trance, and vomit up a quantity of blood. Such a spectacular physical manifestation reanimated the doctors, who declared that the child's recovery was now a strong possibility. A few days later he was completely restored to health, mentally and physically.

As the future martyr grew older, the playfulness that had marked his childhood developed into a sunny, jovial, and prankish, but personable disposition. This lightheartedness of his highlighted the evenings which all the members of his family spent at home in the Mexican family tradition. In Senor Pro's *casa* Miguel could always be counted on to chase away the doldrums. But he was at times also over-mischievous, and had more than once to be corrected by his father, who did not fail to use the strap.

On one such occasion, when Miguel was about five, his mother took him with her to the store. There the young boy made an awful scene, stubbornly insisting that his mother buy him a small white marble horse, even though she had already purchased other gifts for him. Senora Pro finally gave in and bought the ornament. When they arrived home, and Papa Pro heard what had happened, he not only gave Miguel the strap, but made him kneel before the family and ask pardon. In the end, the marble horse was placed on Mr. Pro's desk. Over the years, the mere sight of it caused young Miguel much remorse, and he was once heard to say, "For this *thing* I made my mother weep."

When Miguel Agustin was six, his father's mining business took him to Monterrey. The house they had rented was close to the home of the Governor, and every morning at eight o'clock Miguel would watch the soldiers march to salute the flag. Captivated by this display of uniforms and sound of

drums, he was inspired to invent a game. He would play the part of a soldier who had been wounded on the battlefield while capturing the enemy flag. Then his older sister, Concepcion, had to take the role of a Sister of Charity who would come and dress his wound. Suddenly, while she was supporting him, a devastating blast would bring them both to a tragic end. The grim drama required considerable rehearsal before such a "tear jerking" episode could be effectively enacted for the edification of their little sister. Though this was just a passing diversion, little did the young hero realize that he would one day lie riddled with bullets in a courtyard of Mexico City, slain as a soldier of Christ the King.

The following year the Pro family was on the move again. This time it was to the rude mining center, Concepcion del Oro. This privileged town was to be the place of their most permanent residence. The year was 1898.

St. Joseph's day, March 19, was the day chosen by Miguel, Concepcion, and Maria de la Luz, for the reception of their first Holy Communion. It was also the feastday of their mother Josefina. Heaven was watching the holy spectacle with a special interest as Fr. Correa, the parish priest, brought Our Lord for the first time to these dear little children. At that time no one could possibly know the destiny of that blessed foursome. But God had planned that each of them would glorify Him in a special way. Two were marked for martyrdom: the priest, Fr. Correa, who was slain

at the outset of Calles' reign of terror; and the little boy. And two were marked as future brides of Christ.

Even as a youngster Miguel had a wonderful insight into the simple truths of the Faith. This was once brought out in an amusing manner, typical of his forthright nature. It seems that the Pros had, for a period of time, employed a Protestant woman to tutor the children. Once in a while they invited her to dine with the family. On one occasion little Miguel, the "man of the house," insisted on leading the mealtime grace. He said the Our Father and then followed with the Hail Mary. The teacher remained silent during the second prayer. When he was finished, he abruptly declared to their guest that only the Catholic religion was complete, and asked: "What is religion without love of the Blessed Virgin?" Don Miguel and Dona Josefa looked at their son in startled silence.

In 1902, a new college was opened at Saltillo, close to the Pro's home. Since it was highly recommended by friends, Don Miguel sent his son to this school. Previous to his decision to do so, he had been given the assurance by the rector that, although the college was not Catholic, all the boys would enjoy full freedom to practice their religion. However, on the very first Sunday after Miguel's arrival, he was denied permission to attend Mass. And on several successive Sundays, he was compelled to be present with all the pupils in the Protestant chapel. The indignant young