



# Viva Cristo Rey!

"Long live Christ the King!  
Long live Our Lady of  
Guadalupe!"  
St José Sanchez del Rio

SENIOR RE NON-EXAM: A1 / A2 / A3 / D3 / E3 / F3 / H1

JCRE: LD 1.5 / 1.6 / 1.8 / 2.2 / 2.8 / 3.1 / 3.2

## MEXICO'S CRISTERO REBELLION



Did you know that, although seen as a country with a strong Catholic identity, the Catholic Church in Mexico actually went through fierce persecution and oppression during the 20th century, and was even outlawed, and active participating punishable by death?

Although previous governments had begun a clamp down on Catholicism since the Mexican War of Independence in the late 1800s, the rule of President Calles which began in the late 1920s saw the strictest and most violent enforcement of these laws: churches were closed and property confiscated, without recourse to legal protection. Mexican Catholics could be imprisoned for wearing religious items, saying "Adios" in public (*which literally means "with God"*). Public worship was a crime punishable by hanging or firing squad. Bishops were forced to take the Church underground. From 1926-1929, the Cristero Rebellion broke out with cries of "Viva Cristo Rey!" ("Long Live Christ the King!"), with a rebel army that grew both in size and in commitment for the right to religious freedom. Many priests, religious and lay people were martyred during this time.

## BLESSED MIGUEL PRO

Watch: [Father Miguel Agustin Pro, martyr](#) (Catholic News Agency)



Miguel Pro was born in Guadalupe on January 13, 1891, one of 11 children. From an early age, Miguel was both intensely prayerful and extremely mischievousness, traits that would serve him well in later life.

He entered the Jesuit novitiate at age 20 and studied in Mexico until 1914 when a tidal wave of anticlericalism and persecution crashed down upon Mexico. Having to leave his homeland, he was eventually ordained in Belgium in 1925. At this stage, Mexico was an incredibly dangerous place for Catholics, particularly priests. All Catholic Churches had been closed, bishops, priests, and religious were rounded up for deportation or imprisonment, and those caught trying to escape capture were shot. The celebration of the sacraments was punishable by imprisonment or death.

Fr. Pro knew that a return to Mexico would most likely be a death sentence, yet he requested permission to return to Mexico incognito and to carry on his ministry undercover.



Fr. Pro returned in secret to Mexico City and immediately began celebrating Mass and distributing the sacraments. He gained a reputation throughout the city as the undercover priest who would show up in the middle of the night dressed as a beggar or a street sweeper to perform baptisms and marriages, hear confessions and distribute Holy Communion. He even frequently dressed as a police officer to enable himself to bring sacraments to Catholic prisoners before their executions!

In 1927, Fr Pro and his brothers were falsely implicated in a failed attempt to assassinate President Calles and held without trial for ten days before the order to execute Fr Pro was given.

Facing the firing squad in the prison courtyard, Fr Pro blessed the soldiers, then knelt quietly in prayer. He refused to wear a blindfold, but rather stood facing his executioners, with his eyes wide open and his arms outstretched in the form of a cross, holding a crucifix in one hand and a rosary in the other.



Fr. Miguel Pro was beatified on September 25, 1988 by Pope John Paul II and his feastday is November 23rd.

Before his death he cried out, "May God have mercy on you! May God bless you! Lord, You know that I am innocent! With all my heart I forgive my enemies!" As the soldiers lifted their rifles, he exclaimed in a loud voice, "Viva Cristo Rey!" ("Long live Christ the King!") Gunshots rang out and Fr. Pro fell to the ground riddled with bullets.

Calles had his execution carefully photographed, hoping the pictures in the newspaper the following day would frighten the Cristeros, but they had the opposite effect. Tens of thousands of people attended his funeral procession, many carrying his execution photo.

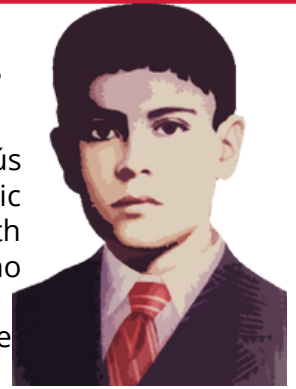


- ASCEND YOUTH MINISTRY (DIOCESE OF WATERFORD & LISMORE) -

# VIVA CRISTO REY: MEXICAN MARTYRS

## SAINT JOSE LUIS SANCHEZ DEL RIO

Watch: [Who was the Cristero Child José Sanchez del Rio? \(Rome Reports\)](#)



Courage and belief in a cause are not reserved for adults, as the life of José de Jesús Sánchez del Río clearly shows. Living at the height of the persecution of the Catholic Church in Mexico, José was assassinated for his faith, just one month shy of his 15th birthday. José was described as a “normal, healthy kid with a joyful character,” who studied his Catechism, and committed himself to involvement in parish activities which at the time were extremely dangerous. Risking his life, he received the sacraments as often as he could, and prayed the rosary every day with his family.



Painting by Rene Martinez Valdez

Despite his young age, José joined the Cristeros, a movement trying to defend religious liberty in the country. He carried out simple logistical tasks, but showed his bravery when he saved one of the Cristero leaders, Guizar Morfin. When Morfin's horse was shot, José quickly saw that his general was in danger of capture and gave him his horse, saying, “My general,” he said, “take my horse and save yourself. You are more needed by this cause than I am.” Morfin escaped, but José was not so lucky, and was beaten by the troops who led him away: “We’re going to see how much of a man you really are,” they taunted him.

During his imprisonment, he wrote a letter to his mother: “Do not be worried about my death, as this would make me suffer ... Be courageous and send me your blessing, together with the blessing of my father.”

Tragically highlighting the vicious nature of this conflict, José's own godfather, Picazo, was the one who sentenced him to death. He initially did not want to see his godson executed and made several offers to him, all of which José refused because he refused to deny his faith.

Before his execution on February 10, 1928, when his family received the news that he was to be shot, one of his aunts managed to bring him communion. As they led him to the cemetery of Sahuayo, the soldiers cruelly tortured him by cutting the bottoms of his feet with a knife and forced him to walk barefoot. At the cemetery, José was stabbed by the soldiers, but cried out “Long live Christ the King! Long live the Virgin of Guadalupe!”\* with each strike. José was then shot twice in the head, before being buried in a shallow grave. **Pope Francis canonized the 14-year-old martyr on October 16, 2016 and his feastday is February 10.**

\*referring to Our Lady of Guadalupe, the Patroness of Mexico



The story of the Cristero Movement, including the life and martyrdom of St José Sanchez del Rio, was portrayed in the Hollywood Movie, “For Greater Glory”. **Please note this movie is rated R because of its violent content.**

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WATCH EWTN'S DOCUMENTARY "FOR GREATER GLORY": THE TRUE STORY OF THE CRISTEROS FOR A MORE DETAILED HISTORY OF THE MEXICAN CRISTERO REVOLT.



What is your **initial reaction** to the lives of these Mexican martyrs?

### SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES:



1. Imagine you could **interview** Blessed Miguel Pro or St José Sanchez del Rio, before their execution. What questions would you want to ask them?
2. If you were to direct a movie about the life of Blessed Miguel Pro, what key moments would you choose and why? (Create a story board with key images)



3. Study the painting by Rene Martinez Valdez of St José above - how does this represent his life and death?

4. The Italian Blessed, Pier Giorgio Frassati, a contemporary of the Mexican martyrs, said, “**To live without faith, without a heritage to defend, without battling constantly for truth, is not to live but to 'get along'; we must never just 'get along'.**” How would you apply this quote to the Cristero movement?

