

HISTORY OF THE KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS MEXICAN MARTYRS



Portrait of the Mexican Martyrs at the Knights of Columbus Museum in New Haven.

The 1920s brought a revolution to Mexico, along with the widespread persecution of Catholics.

Missionaries were expelled from the country, Catholic seminaries and schools were closed, and the Church was forbidden to own property. Priests and laymen were told to denounce Jesus and their faith in public; if they refused, they faced not just punishment but torture and death.

During this time of oppression and cruelty, the Knights of Columbus did not retreat in Mexico but grew dramatically, from 400 members in 1918 to 43 councils and 6,000 members just five years later. In the United States at the time, the Knights handed out five million pamphlets that described the brutality of the Mexican government toward Catholics. As a result, the Mexican government greatly feared and eventually outlawed the Order.

Thousands of men, many of whom were Knights, would not bow to these threats or renounce their faith, and they often paid with their lives. They took a stand when that was the most difficult thing they could do, and their courage and devotion have echoed down through the decades.

Here are some of the stories of the Knights of Columbus who joined the ranks of the Mexican Martyrs and were among the 25 victims of religious persecution canonized in 2000 by Pope John Paul II.



FATHER MIGUEL DE LA MORA DE LA MORA

Father Miguel de la Mora de la Mora of Colima belonged to Council 2140. Along with several other priests, he publicly signed a letter opposing the anti-religious laws imposed by the government. He was soon arrested and, with his brother Regino looking on, Father de la Mora was executed without a trial by a single shot from a military officer as he prayed his rosary. It was Aug. 7, 1927.



FATHER PEDRO DE JESUS MALDONADO LUCERO

Father Pedro de Jesus Maldonado Lucero was a member of Council 2419. Forced to study for the priesthood in El Paso, Texas, because of the political situation in Mexico, he returned home after his ordination in 1918 despite the risk. Captured on Ash Wednesday, 1937, while distributing ashes to the faithful, Father Maldonado Lucero was so savagely beaten that one eye was forced from its socket. He died the next day at a local hospital. His tombstone aptly described this martyr in four words: "You are a priest."



FATHER JOSE MARIA ROBLES HURTADO

Father Jose Maria Robles Hurtado was a member of Council 1979. Ordained in 1913, he founded the Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Guadalajara when he was only 25. On June 25, 1927, he was arrested while preparing to celebrate Mass. Early the next morning, he was hanged from an oak tree, but not before he had forgiven his murderers and offered a prayer for his parish. He went so far as to place the rope around his own neck, so that none of his captors would hold the title of murderer.

FATHER RODRIGO AGUILAR ALEMÁN

Father Rodrigo Aguilar Alemán of Union de Tula in Jalisco was a member of Council 2330. After a warrant was issued for his arrest, he took refuge at the Colegio de San Ignacio in Ejutla, celebrating Mass and administering the sacraments.



Rather than escape when soldiers arrived, Father Aguilar Alemán remained at the seminary to burn the list of seminary students, and thus protect them from being known. When the soldiers demanded his identity, he told them only that he was a priest.

He was taken to the main square of Ejutla, where the seminary was located. He publicly forgave his killers, and then a soldier gave him the chance to save himself by giving the “right” answer to this question, “Who lives?”

But he replied, “Christ the King and Our Lady of Guadalupe.” The noose that had been secured to a mango tree was tightened, then relaxed twice. Each time it was relaxed, he was asked the same question and each time he gave the same response. The third time the noose was tightened, he died.

FATHER LUIS BATIZ SAINZ



Father Luis Batiz Sainz was born in 1870, and was a member of Council 2367. On Aug. 15, 1926, at Chalchihuites, Zacatecas, he and three layman – David Roldan, who was only 19 at the time, Salvador Lara and Manuel Morales – were put before a firing squad for refusing to submit to anti-religious laws. When Father Batiz Sainz asked the soldiers to free one of the captives, Manuel Morales, who had sons and daughters, Morales wouldn’t hear of it.

“I am dying for God,” he declared,” and God will care for my children.” Smiling, Father Batiz Sainz gave his friend absolution and said: “See you in heaven.”

FATHER MATEO CORREA MAGALLANES



Father Mateo Correa Magallanes, who was a member of Council 2140, was arrested and taken to Durango. While in prison, he was ordered by the commanding officer on Feb. 5, 1927, to hear the confessions of his fellow prisoners. Then the commander demanded to know what they had told him. Of course, Father Correa Magallanes wouldn’t violate the seal of confession, and so, the next day, he was taken to a local cemetery and executed by the soldiers.