

EASTER 6 B

WB

John 15: 9-17

**Miguel Pro**

Many years ago, a report on religious freedom revealed that seven out of 10 people in the world are unable to freely live out their faith.

It also found that Christianity is the most persecuted religion in the world, with at least 200 million suffering from discrimination.

It was always so back to Peter, Paul, Steven, Agnes, Felicity, and countless others. Think of the French Revolution that killed clergy and religious, and which turned the Cathedral of Notre Dame into the ***“temple of reason”*** with prostitutes lolling on the altar.

Think of the priests' holes (little secret closets) hiding priests in late medieval England.

Think of the Nazis, imprisonment,  
And the death of thousands of Polish Priests.

Think today how in the very cradle of Christianity, the Middle Eastern Christians are being persecuted and fleeing in great numbers.

This was the same situation in 1900's Mexico when the government launched a fierce persecution of the church.

This is where our story of the brave priest, Miguel Pro, a stand-in for so many like him, begins.

Miguel pro was born in 1891 in Guadalupe, Mexico.

He was a precocious, high-spirited, risk-taking child.

He was quite close to his older sister  
and when she entered the convent,  
he began to feel a call to become a priest.

But that would wait.

There were girls and the expected career  
of managing his father's successful business.

Eventually like Francis of Assisi, he gave it all up  
and entered the Jesuit novitiate in Mexico when he was 20 years old.  
He was there until 1914 when it became intolerable.

Just four years earlier, the government had unleashed  
a tidal wave of persecution against the Catholic Church,  
and it was quickly becoming more severe.

Accordingly, along with other Jesuit seminarians,

Miguel had to flee to the United States to a Jesuit house in California  
and, from there, in 1915 he was sent to a seminary in Spain  
where he remained to continue his preparation for the priesthood.  
He was ordained in Belgium in 1925.

Miguel suffered from severe stomach problems  
and underwent several operations. Still, his health did not improve,  
and so, his superiors felt that it would be better for him  
to return to Mexico despite the ongoing persecution there.

He returned in the summer of 1926.

Restrictions against the Catholic Church had grown even more severe.

Catholics were not allowed to teach in schools.

Public worship was forbidden outside of churches,

religious organizations could not own property,

clergy were forbidden to wear their Roman collars

or habits in public,

and priests who criticized the government

were subjected to five years of imprisonment.

Since the churches were closed, Miguel went into hiding

to secretly minister to the Mexican Catholics,

both spiritually and physically, especially the poor.

Hunted by the secret Police, like Sherlock Holmes

he donned many disguises. Sometimes he was a beggar,

sometimes a police officer (so he could bring communion

to death row Catholics),

and sometimes he was disguised as a businessman.

Eventually he became a wanted man

when he and his brother Roberto were falsely accused of a bomb attempt

against the Mexican president,

although the one who was involved in the attempt

testified that Miguel and Roberto had no part in it.

Nevertheless, the brothers were betrayed.

Roberto was spared but Miguel, because he was Catholic priest,

was sentenced to death by facing a firing squad

without any legal process.

On November 23<sup>rd</sup>. 1927, at his firing range,  
he stretched out his arms in the form of a cross,  
forgave his soon-to-be executioners, refused the blindfold,  
and died shouting, ***“Long live Christ the King!”***

The president had the execution photographed  
and spread the pictures on the Nation’s Front pages  
as a warning to others,  
but the pictures had the opposite effect in rallying the opposition.

We can still view these photographs.

We can see Miguel kneeling in prayer before his execution.  
We can see him standing against the fence  
with his arms outstretched. We can see a Saint!.

He was beatified in 1988 by Pope John Paul II who, ironically,  
54 years after Miguel Pro’s execution, visited Mexico.

I say ironically because the laws were still on the books,  
and the Pope still in all his papal garb,  
was technically forbidden to enter the country.

He was welcomed by a president and wildly cheered by the people.

Miguel Pro: a witness to the faith like the countless others  
in both the past and present.

I just thought that I'd share his story to remind us  
that our faith is still being bought at a great price. Amen.