



¡Viva Cristo Rey!

Novena to the Mexican Martyrs

Martyrs of Mexico

In the early 20th century, the Mexican government began a widespread persecution of Catholics. In 1926, priests, missionaries and members of religious orders were expelled from the country. Ignoring their right to religious freedom, the government under President Plutarco Elías Calles took control of churches, seminaries, convents and schools, thereby beginning the campaign to do away with all of the “fanatics” who professed their Catholic faith. In the face of violence and persecution, more than a million Mexicans migrated to the United States seeking refuge; others spontaneously organized to defend themselves against government oppression, some peacefully and others taking up arms under the banner of “Cristo Rey y Santa María de Guadalupe” (“Christ the King and Holy Mary of Guadalupe”). This was the beginning of what became known as the Cristiada or Cristero War. For three years (1926-1929), the Mexican people lived through violent persecution, in which priests and laypeople were ordered to renounce Christ in public. To refuse to do so meant facing not only punishment, but even torture and death. Thousands of Mexican Catholics gave witness to their faith or fought to defend it. In many cases, they paid for it with their lives. Their acts of love and bravery have echoed throughout the decades, and we remember their testimony today. Since the founding of its first council in Mexico in 1905, the Knights of Columbus has promoted and given witness to authentic Catholic citizenship. By the time of the 1924 Eucharistic Congress in Mexico City, there were already more than 50 K of C councils throughout the country — from Jiménez, Chihuahua, to Mérida, Yucatán. During the persecution, the Knights helped organize the League for the Defense of Religious Liberty, which brought together and organized the country’s main Catholic institutions. The League worked to raise the nation’s consciousness and demanded that the Mexican government respect the rights of its citizens. In the United States, meanwhile, the Knights created a fund to aid the exiled and the migrants. In addition,

they distributed five million flyers denouncing the brutality of the Mexican government toward Catholics. As a result, the Mexican government outlawed the Knights of Columbus and singled out its members for persecution. In his 1926 encyclical *Iniquis Afflictisque*, Pope Pius XI singled out the testimony and work of the Knights in Mexico, writing, “A word of very special praise is due those Catholic organizations, which during all these trying times have stood like soldiers’ side to side with the clergy... First of all, we mention the Knights of Columbus, an organization which is found in all the states of the Republic and which fortunately is made up of active and industrious members who, because of their practical lives and open profession of the Faith, as well as by their zeal in assisting the Church, have brought great honor upon themselves.” In 1926, a delegation from the Order, headed by Supreme Knight James A. Flaherty, met with U.S. President Calvin Coolidge and asked him to demand that Calles’ government put an end to religious persecution in Mexico. It wasn’t until 1929 that President Calles, through intervention from the U.S. ambassador Dwight Morrow, accepted the so-called agreements with Mexican bishops. These agreements stated that the churches could go back to celebrating Mass, and that the Cristeros – those who had fought to defend their rights – would be offered amnesty on the condition that they surrender their weapons. However, the government did not honor the agreements and continued to persecute Catholics in various degrees in the decades that followed. Finally in 1992, the constitution was reformed, giving legal recognition to religious associations in Mexico.

Overall, tens of thousands of Mexican Catholics were killed during the Mexican government’s persecution of Catholics in the early 20th century. Several of those killed during this persecution were members of the Knights of Columbus, including 6 men who have been declared saints and 3 who have been declared blessed. The feast day of the 6 men declared as saints is May 21 and the feast day of the 3 men declared as blessed is Nov. 20.

Daily Novena Prayer

Almighty and Eternal God, we thank you for the lives of the men who served you on earth as Knights of Columbus and were martyred during the persecution of your Church in Mexico. These Knights live on in our minds and hearts because by sacrificing their lives for the sake of the Gospel, they gave witness that your love is eternal and that the Truth can never accept compromise. Let their example encourage us to be brave witnesses of faith and to remain loyal to Christ the King. We make our prayer through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Our Father...

Hail Mary...

Glory be...

O Holy Mexican Martyrs, pray for us!

Our Lady of Guadalupe, pray for us!

Christ our King! Thy Kingdom Come!

¡Viva Cristo Rey y Santa María de Guadalupe!

Vivat Jesus!



Day 1

St. Luis Batis Sáinz

(Sept. 13, 1870 – Aug. 15, 1926)

Intention: *That God may grant us the wisdom to live with our eyes fixed on Heaven - carrying out His Will each day and placing our trust entirely in Him.*

Father Luis Batis Sáinz was a parish priest in the village of Chalchihuites, Zacatecas, and a member of Council 2367 in Durango. On Aug. 15, 1926, he and three laymen — David Roldán (who was only 19 years old), Salvador Lara and Manuel Morales — were lined up in front of a firing squad for having participated in meetings of different Catholic groups and for having violated anti-Catholic legislation. When Father Luis Batis asked for Manuel Morales' freedom, explaining that he had children, Manuel interrupted, saying, "I am dying for God, and God will care for my children." Smiling, Father Batis absolved him and said, "I'll see you in heaven."

St. Luis Batis Sáinz, pray for us!

Pray the Novena Prayer.



Day 2

St. José María Robles Hurtado

(May 3, 1888 – June 26, 1927)

Intention: *That all Christians who have been persecuted for their Faith be given a spirit of forgiveness and peace despite the injustices perpetrated against them.*

Father José María Robles Hurtado was a member of Council 1979 in Guadalajara, Jalisco. He was ordained a priest in 1913 and founded the Congregation of the Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus when he was only 25 years old. On June 25, 1927, he was arrested as he prepared to celebrate Mass. The following morning, he was brought to an oak tree to be hanged, but before his executioners could carry out the sentence, he forgave them and said a prayer for his parish. Father José María even approached a farmer he knew well, whose task was to place the noose around his neck. He told the farmer, “Friend, do not dirty yourself,” and, taking the noose, he placed it around his own neck. He was then executed.

St. José María Robles Hurtado, pray for us!

Pray the Novena Prayer.



Day 3

St. Mateo Correa Magallanes

(July 23, 1866 – Feb. 6, 1927)

Intention: *That God may grant us a love and desire for the Sacraments and the graces they bestow upon us.*

Father Mateo Correa Magallanes was a member of Council 2140 in Zacatecas. He was arrested in Durango, and while in prison, the general in charge ordered him to hear the other prisoners' confessions. After doing so, the general ordered him to disclose what the prisoners had said during confession. Father Mateo Correa answered, "I'll never do it!" When the infuriated general threatened to shoot him, Father Mateo Correa responded, "You forget, general, that a priest must keep the secrecy of confession. I am ready to die." The next day, he was brought to Durango's Panteón de Oriente and was killed in a hail of bullets.

St. Mateo Correa Magallanes, pray for us!

Pray the Novena Prayer.



Day 4

St. Miguel de la Mora de la Mora

(June 19, 1874 – Aug. 7, 1927)

Intention: *That God may grant families, and all Christians, the wisdom and courage to live the Faith in a secular society.*

Father Miguel de la Mora de la Mora was a member of Council 2140 in Zacatecas. He had been the chaplain of the Cathedral of Colima since 1918. In 1926, along with other priests, he publicly signed a manifesto rejecting the anti-religious laws. The bishop and his priests were prosecuted and many were exiled. Others, like Father Miguel de la Mora, went underground in order to continue offering the sacraments. One day, he was discovered and seized by a general. Intending to force him to reopen the cathedral under government control, the authorities freed him on bond. On Aug. 7, 1927, Father Miguel de la Mora was able to escape the city along with his brother, but while traveling, he was discovered and arrested. When the general found out, he ordered the priest's execution without trial. Praying with his rosary in hand, Father Miguel de la Mora was shot in the presence of his brother, whom the authorities then allowed to go free.

St. Miguel de la Mora de la Mora, pray for us!

Pray the Novena Prayer.



Day 5

St. Pedro de Jesús Maldonado Lucero

(June 15, 1892 – Feb. 11, 1937)

Intention: *That members of the clergy and religious life may carry out their vocations to serve Christ, the Church and all people with devotion and zeal.*

Father Pedro de Jesús Maldonado Lucero was a member of Council 2419 in the city of Chihuahua. In 1918, he was ordained a priest in El Paso, Texas. In 1924, he was named parish priest for the village of Santa Isabel in Chihuahua. He was able to exercise his ministry until 1934, the year in which he was exiled to El Paso. Despite fearing for his life, he returned to Santa Isabel. Heedless of his own precarious health, he unceasingly celebrated the sacraments. Persecuted for being a priest, he had to leave Santa Isabel and stay in a nearby town, Boquilla del Río. On Feb. 10, 1937, Ash Wednesday, he was detained and taken to Santa Isabel's town hall, where he was brutally beaten. According to witnesses, he had a broken skull and his entire body was covered in lacerations. When the bishop heard of this, he interceded on his behalf before the governor. The governor ordered the priest brought to the city of Chihuahua, where he died on Feb. 11 as a result of his injuries. His headstone describes the martyr in four words: "You are a priest."

St. Pedro de Jesús Maldonado Lucero, pray for us!

Pray the Novena Prayer.



Day 6

St. Rodrigo Aguilar Alemán

(Feb. 13, 1875 – Oct. 28, 1927)

Intention: *That all Knights of Columbus may serve as examples of what it means to be a Catholic man, willing to die for Christ and one another each day.*

Father Rodrigo Aguilar Alemán was an interim parish priest in Unión de Tula and a member of Council 2330 in Ciudad Guzmán, Jalisco. He was wanted for arrest for being a priest and because of this left the village of Unión de Tula, taking refuge in Ejutla. On Oct. 27, 1927, some 600 federal soldiers captured the town. He was found giving a Latin exam to a seminarian, and although they attempted to flee, they were surrounded. When asked who he was, Father Rodrigo Aguilar responded, “I am a priest.” They arrested him during the early morning hours of Oct. 28 and brought him to the plaza to be hanged. Underneath the mango tree from which he would eventually swing, he blessed the noose, forgave his executioners and gave his rosary to one of them. Putting him to the test, one of them offered not to hang him if he shouted, “Long live the supreme government!” He answered, “Long live Christ the King and Holy Mary of Guadalupe!” After pulling on the rope and lifting him into the air, they lowered him and asked, “Who lives?” “Christ the King and Holy Mary of Guadalupe!” he responded. Again, he was raised and lowered. “Who lives?” they asked, with crude taunts. In agony, he said firmly, “Christ the King and Holy Mary of Guadalupe!” Once again, he was raised up, this time to heaven.

St. Rodrigo Aguilar Alemán, pray for us!

Pray the Novena Prayer.



Day 7

Blessed Andrés Solá y Molist

(Oct. 7, 1895 – Apr. 25, 1927)

Intention: *That all missionaries may share the zeal of the holy martyrs and faithfully spread the Gospel to the ends of the earth.*

Father Andrés Solá y Molist, a member of Council 1962, was a Claretian priest from Spain who was serving as a missionary in León. While ministering in León, the Mexican authorities found him after he had offered Mass in someone's house. They suspected that he was a priest and had him arrested. He was falsely accused and found guilty of derailing a train on nearby tracks by the Mexican authorities, along with Father José Trinidad Rangel Montaña and Leonardo Pérez Larios. The three of them were shot and killed together at the location where the train was derailed. Father Solá died at the age of 31 on Apr. 25, 1927.

Blessed Andrés Solá y Molist, pray for us!

Pray the Novena Prayer.



Day 8

Blessed José Trinidad Rangel Montañón

(June 4, 1887 – Apr. 25, 1927)

Intention: *That we may offer ourselves generously to all those whom God is calling us to help.*

Father José Trinidad Rangel Montañón, a member of Council 2484 in San Felipe, Guanajuato, was a diocesan priest from León. His superior offered him the opportunity to celebrate the Holy Week liturgies in the nearby town of San Francisco del Rincón. Father Rangel accepted this offer despite the persecution Catholics were facing in Mexico at that time. He was discovered by the authorities on Apr. 22, the Friday of Easter Week. After being brought back to León, he was interrogated and tortured before being shot and killed with Father Andrés Solá y Molist and Leonardo Pérez Larios. He died at the age of 39 on Apr. 25, 1927.

Blessed José Trinidad Rangel Montañón, pray for us!

Pray the Novena Prayer.



Day 9

Blessed Leonardo Pérez Larios

(Nov. 28, 1882 – Apr. 25, 1927)

Intention: *That elected officials, judges and other public authorities be granted the wisdom to protect the right of Christians to practice their faith.*

Leonardo Pérez Larios, a member of Council 1962, was a devout layman. He wanted to become a priest, but he was unable to because he had to take care of his family members (much like how Blessed Michael McGivney was temporarily unable to enter seminary because he had to help his family financially). Though he was not a priest, the Mexican authorities mistakenly thought he was a member of the clergy because he was caught with Father Andrés Solá y Molist after he had celebrated Mass. He truthfully told them that he was not a priest, but still confessed to being a Catholic. He was then arrested along with Father Solá and martyred with him and Father José Trinidad Rangel Montaña at the age of 43.

Blessed Leonardo Pérez Larios, pray for us!

Pray the Novena Prayer.

Some of the historical and biographical content in this work is derived from Stephen Singular's book *By Their Works* and Msgr. Ramiro Valdés' work *Tuyo es el Reino*.

Cover: Painting of the Knights of Columbus Mexican Martyrs by Martha Orozco.



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