



Knights of Columbus
Priest Martyrs of Mexico



The silver reliquary containing the relics of the six Knights of Columbus Priest Martyrs of Mexico that were canonized by Pope John Paul II in 2000.

History of the Knights of Columbus Priest Martyrs of Mexico

The 1920s brought a revolution to Mexico, along with 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 even 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 6,000 members in 43 councils just five years later. In the United States at the time, Knights handed out 5 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.



Mexican Martyrs Memorial Statue
Knights of Columbus Museum
New Haven, Connecticut

Thousands of Mexican Catholics, many of whom were Knights, would not bow to these threats or renounce their faith, so 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. Following are the stories of the six Knights of Columbus who were among the 25 Mexican Martyrs canonized by Pope John Paul II in 2000:



Father Luis Batiz Sainz was born in 1870, and was a member of Council 2367. On August 15, 1926, at Chalchihuites, Zacatecas, he and three laymen – David Roldan, who was only nineteen at the time, Salvador Lara, and Manuel Morales – were lined up in front of a firing squad for refusing to submit to President Plutarco Elias Calles's 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 Sainz gave his friend absolution and said: "See you in heaven."

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 twenty-five. 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.



That same year, **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 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.

Father Miguel de la Mora de la Mora of Colima also 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 on August 7, 1927, as he prayed his rosary.





Two months later, **Father Rodrigo Aguilar Alemán** of Union de Tula in Jalisco, and a member of Council 2330, met a similar fate. Rather than escape when the soldiers arrived, Father 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 a chance to save himself by giving the “right” answer to this question: “Who lives?” Father Aguilar Alemán would be spared if he simply said: “Long live the supreme government.” 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 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.”



In 2005, two other Knights, also Mexican Martyrs, were beatified. **Father Jose Trinidad Rangel Montaño**, a diocesan priest from Leon and member of Council 2484, and Claretian **Father Andres Sola Molist**, a Spaniard, and member of Council 1963. Both were executed for their faith in Rancho de San Joaquin, Mexico, in April 1927.

These men, and many thousands more, paid the ultimate sacrifice for their Catholic faith in Mexico during the 1920s and 1930s. But throughout that period, the Knights of Columbus in

Mexico kept the faith and hundreds gave their lives to protect their beliefs, some as martyrs and others in the armed *Cristero* movement.

Always an advocate of peaceful struggle against the government, Pius XI singled out the Knights of Columbus for praise in his 1926 encyclical *Iniquis Afflictisque*, writing: "First of all we mention the Knights of Columbus, an organization which is found in all states of the [Mexican] Republic and 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."

Mexican Knights, and the entire Church in Mexico, were consistently supported by the Knights in the United States who, in addition to distributing literature that informed the American people of the plight of the Church in Mexico, also lobbied President Calvin Coolidge to bring pressure to end the persecution. In 1926, Coolidge met with a delegation of Knights including Supreme Knight James Flaherty, future Supreme Knight Luke Hart and Supreme Director William Prout. Coolidge affirmed his administration's commitment to bringing about a resolution to the problems in Mexico.

Though the Knights had been outlawed in Mexico – even the Order's *Columbia* magazine was temporarily banned – the Knights of Columbus survived. In 2005, at the centennial convention in Mexico City, Supreme Knight Carl Anderson declared that Mexican Knights are "second to none" in their commitment to "our founding ideals and their devotion to the Catholic faith."

About the Relic Pilgrimage

During his installation as Supreme Knight at the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe in 2001, Carl Anderson was presented with a silver reliquary containing relics of the six Knights of Columbus Priest Martyrs of Mexico. It was at this installation that the new Supreme Knight solemnly dedicated his administration and the entire Order of the Knights of Columbus to the maternal intercession of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

To mark the centennial of the Knights of Columbus in Mexico, a pilgrimage of the reliquary began in Mexico City during the Knights of Columbus Board of Directors meeting held there in September 2005. From there, the reliquary traveled to cities throughout Mexico and now continues through the United States. The pilgrimage will conclude in Orlando at the 124th Supreme Convention in August 2006.

This pilgrimage seeks to promote knowledge of and devotion to the Knights of Columbus Priest Martyrs of Mexico and all those who sacrificed their lives for their faith during the Mexican persecution.





Prayer to the Knights of Columbus Priest Martyrs of Mexico

Almighty God, the martyrdom of Saint Mateo Correa Magallanes and his priest companions who were Knights of Columbus, reveals that violence and hatred are only overcome by the spirit of peace and charity; and it manifests your love for the nation of the Guadalupana. These brother Knights live on in our minds and hearts for as they sacrificed their lives for the sake of the Gospel, they witnessed that your love is eternal and your truth can never be compromised. Let their death-cry of fidelity to Jesus Christ encourage us to be courageous in faith and to remain loyal Knights of Columbus.

We make our prayer through Christ our Lord. Amen.