

**Homily for November 25, 2001
Christ the King Cycle C**

By Father Charles Bowes

**2 Samuel 5:1-3
Colossians 1:12-20
Luke 23:35-43**

Long live Christ the King – Viva Christo Rey!

Two men die with our Lord Jesus at Calvary. Both make their prayers. The prayer of one is the shriek of an anxious heart. “Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us,” says one thief. He cannot understand his death. He feels the pain of judgment, but he refuses to accept it. Salvation for him is a way out, deliverance for the moment, and escape from the weight of the judgment destroying him.

The other recognizes death for what it is. “Have you no fear of God, for you are subject to the same condemnation? And indeed we have been condemned justly, for the sentence we received corresponds to our crimes, but this man has done nothing criminal. ...Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” He senses the pain that feels the deeper burden of his plight. Death is deserved. He has earned death as a reward. There is no escape from the judgment of death. He is doomed by the law that says he must die. Yet he finds deliverance. Die he must, but he will be delivered from death by a king, the King who dies with him and for him.

A thief who had served no one, asks the King to serve him. A dying man asks the dying Man to give him life. A man staring in the face of death sees the light of glory in the face of the dying Christ. An unruly criminal begs to live under the kingly power of a heavenly king. And with that prayer the thief gained paradise, a place in eternity with God.

Paradise is open to all who pray. We cannot claim immunity from death. We die because we are sinners. Yet by faith in the King who conquered death, we overcome death. This fact is dramatically portrayed in the story of Padre Miguel Pro, a twentieth century Mexican martyr – he had profound faith in Christ the King.

The Mexican Revolution that began in 1910 was especially hostile to the Church. In 1926 the government prohibited public church services in ordered clergy arrested. To carry out pastoral duties, clergy, such as Pro, had to go underground. For instance, he disguised himself as a mechanic in order to preach to a group of taxi drivers.

Padre Pro's life was one of cheerfulness. He once promised to cheer up any long-faced saints he found in heaven by performing the Mexican hat dance.

In November 1927, Pro and his brothers became the scapegoat for an assassination attempt on the

Mexican president general. Government authorities linked the Pro brothers to the attempt through a car that had belonged to one of the brothers. Even with solid alibis, Padre Pro and his brothers were captured and sentenced to death without a trial.

On 23 November Padre Pro was lead to the firing squad. One of the arresting police officers tearfully begged Pro to forgive him for what he had done. Placing his arm around the policeman's shoulders, Pro said, "You not only have my forgiveness, you also have my thanks." He told the members of the firing squad, "May God forgive you all."

Within earshot of the firing squad a man was shouting that he had in his hands a stay of execution to save the Pro brothers. At his last request 36 year old Pro asked to be able to pray. He knelt silently on the hard ground near a bullet-riddled wall. Standing up, he was offered a blindfold but refused. He suddenly outstretched his arms in the form of a cross and shouted, "Viva Christo Rey!" "Long live Christ the King!" Shots rang out from the firing squad and Padre Pro fell to the ground.

Newspaper reporters and photographers had been invited to the execution. Authorities had hoped they would portray members of the Church as cowards. Instead of making a mockery of the Church, photos of Pro's execution testified to his heroism. The distribution and even the possession of the photos were made a criminal act.

Padre Pro served as an example of a person of faith, courage, and ingenuity. He entrusted his life to his sovereign Lord, and was thus enabled to be fearless in the face of intolerance, violence, and death. His life is proof that we can find great strength in courage, great love and lasting hope in Christ the King.

Long live Christ the King –
Viva Christo Rey!