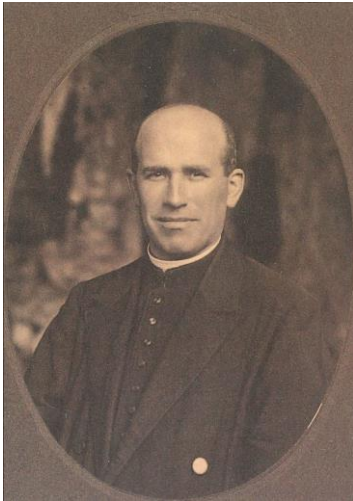


Blessed Miguel Leibar



On July 28, 1936, Father Miguel Leibar was the first Spanish religious to be shot by the revolutionary militias. This execution took place just ten days after the attempted military coup d'état against the Second Spanish Republic.

Because of the failed military coup, Spain was divided into two military and political zones. In addition, there was also a religious component involved in this division, because in the Spanish Civil War the contending sides transformed religion into an ideological component.

On the national side, the war was experienced as a religious war or "crusade" against communist atheism. Meanwhile, on the republican side, certain anticlerical intellectual elites and the working masses infected by anarchist and communist ideologies saw the Catholic Church as the class enemy to be destroyed, in imitation of Soviet Russia. The civilian authorities of the Republic, fearing that the Army and the Civil Guard would sympathize with the military rebels, decided to hand over the weapons to the workers. From that moment on, the militias of the leftist parties decided to implement the social revolution by violent means, carrying out arbitrary arrests and indiscriminate executions of innocent citizens.

When the coup d'état was declared, the Spanish Marianists had two schools in Madrid, one on Juan de Mena Street and the other, Nuestra Señora del Pilar, on Castelló Street. In addition, the headquarters of the Provincial Administration was in a tenement apartment at 21 Velázquez Street. The school of Juan de Mena was seized by the Young Red Guard to establish the "National Shooting School". The Colegio del Pilar was seized on Friday, July 24 by militiamen, police and members of the Republican Left and was transformed into a military hospital.

Father Leibar, who was a teacher and chaplain at the Colegio del Pilar, had to take over the direction of the religious when the coup d'état took place. Then, they decided that each of them would go to live in a previously assigned place of refuge. Father Miguel moved into the headquarters of the Provincial Administration on Velázquez Street. On July 28, anarchist militiamen broke into the apartment and threw all the furniture and documentation into the street, where they lit a huge bonfire. Then they

took Father Miguel and the two servants of the house to be shot on the outskirts of Madrid.



Father Leibar with a group of students from Vitoria in 1925.

Miguel Leibar Garay was born in 1885 in Aozaraza, Arechavaleta Valley (province of Guipuzcoa), where the Postulate of Escoriaza was located. The families of the valley, deeply Catholic, were very close to the Marianists and many of their children entered the Marianist Postulate. At the age of 13, young Miguel entered the Postulate, distinguishing himself by his lively intelligence, love of study, personal simplicity, family spirit and strong religious convictions.

The young Basque religious stood out because of his firmness of character, well-established authority and clear and efficient teaching method. He did not wish to become a priest, but at the invitation of his superiors, he accepted the call. He made his perpetual profession in 1907. In 1912, he entered the Seminary of Fribourg (Switzerland). Ordained in 1915, he returned to Spain and was appointed chaplain of the schools of Cadiz, Jerez de la Frontera and Vitoria and director of the San Sebastian School, standing out as a confessor much appreciated by the religious and the students. In 1930, however, when he fell ill of heart disease, his superiors assigned him as a teacher and chaplain at the Colegio del Pilar in Madrid. This was his home when the failed coup d'état of July 17, 1936, took place, marking the beginning of a civil war.

Father Miguel Leibar, along with 498 other Spanish martyrs (among them the young Marianists Joaquín Ochoa, Sabino Ayastuy and Florencio Arnaiz), was beatified on October 28, 2007, in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican.