

MIGUEL ÁNGEL QUIROGA (MICHEL) A life with "berraquera"

"Berraquera" is a word used in Colombia to express strength, courage, decision and dedication. Our brother Miguel Angel Quiroga had a sign in his room that said precisely this: A LIFE WITH BERRAQUERA. For him the source of a life lived in this way was in Jesus and his Gospel. Perhaps that is why he did not hesitate to confront an illegal and violent group that was trying to hold as a prisoner someone who was traveling with him. As a result, he was shot in the heart and died. The date was September 18, 1998. He was then 26 years old.

Michel was born in 1972 in a peasant family in the Colombian department of Cundinamarca. However, his family soon moved to Bogotá where he grew up and where he met the Marianists. It was in this contact that his vocation was born. He made his first vows in 1992. In January 1998, he was assigned to the Marianist community of Lloró, located in the department of Chocó. This is an area of jungle and large rivers, located on the Pacific coast, inhabited by a population descended from ethnic groups of African origin as well as indigenous communities.



In those years, it was a territory plagued by violence provoked by guerrillas, the army and paramilitary groups. This violence always brought harm to the civilian population who suffered the abuses of one or the other. On the day of his murder, Michel was traveling along the river with José María Gutiérrez, Marianist pastor of the parish of Lloró, and a group of about 40 people. A group of paramilitaries intercepted them. Without any authority to do so, the paramilitaries asked for their documentation. There was one person who did not have it. For that reason they intended to retain him. Michel protested, and that was enough to get him killed.

This outcome of his life is, in reality, the expression of a dedication to the Lord lived

with radicalism from the beginning of his journey in religious life. His intense prayer life, his joy and his dedication to the mission were very clear. What moved Michel from within, the deep desire of his heart, appears with intensity in a prayer that he personally prayed every day after communion:

*Lord Jesus,
unite your life with my life, unite my life with your life,
unite our lives with the lives of others,
so that I may know how to share and be a brother,
and build in this world
the Kingdom of God, our Father,
in justice, life and liberation for the poor and oppressed,
On our Marianist journey,
in the footsteps of the Risen One. Amen.*



Meeting of Colombian Marianist religious. Michel is the one in the center, at the bottom.

Michel's presence enlightened the lives of his religious brothers as well as many others outside of the community. After his death, he continues to inspire the following of Jesus of the Colombian Marianist Family. In addition, his example continues to inspire many adolescents and young people from our works in the Region of Colombia through the so-called "Michel Groups".

The Society of Mary has asked the Bishop of Quibdó to open the diocesan phase of

the beatification process. In this case, the reason for opening the cause is, *by offering one's life in an act of heroic charity*, a new path to beatification established by Pope Francis in 2017.