



MARCH 25, 2019 – ANNUNCIATION OF THE LORD PATRONAL FEAST OF THE MARIANIST FAMILY Celebrating the Marianist vocation



Dear Family,

Again this year we prepare ourselves to celebrate the feast of the mystery of our common vocation, our Marianist vocation, which takes inspiration from Mary's vocation, which we celebrate on this feast of the Annunciation.

Mary was called, invited by God, to collaborate in his saving mission.

Mary, who with her "yes," her fiat, inspires our response of trusting in God and wanting that God's will be done in us according to his word.



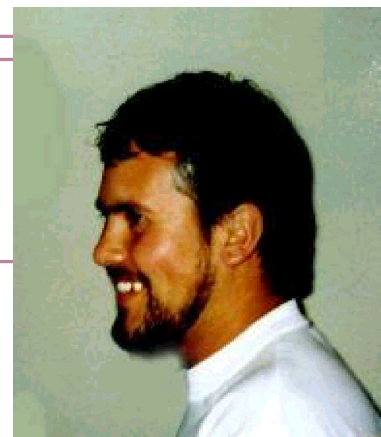
This year we propose to you as a vocational model our Brother Miguel Ángel Quiroga, "Míchel," who was killed by paramilitaries in Lloró (Chocó, Colombia) more than twenty years ago (September 18, 1998).

His example as a young religious, enthusiastically dedicated to his mission, who was killed for defending the poorest, is an invitation to all of us to live the implications of our vocation in depth ... and to live "life with *berraquera*¹," as Míchel himself said.

This year his cause for beatification will be introduced in Rome for "offering his life for love and defense of the humblest."

MIGUEL ÁNGEL QUIROGA GAONA SM – *Michel*

October 1, 1972 - September 18, 1998



¹ "Berraquera" is a Colombian-Spanish word with very different meanings depending on the context. In this case it could be translated as: Dynamism, Vitality, Vigor.



1. HIS LIFE AND VOCATION

Miguel Ángel was born in Colombia, on October 1, 1972, in the Department of Cundinamarca, Municipality of La Vega, Vereda "Mancilla" - Sabaneta. He was the son of Susana Gaona and Gustavo Armando Quiroga, cattle raisers and field workers.

In 1975 they moved to the city of Bogotá and settled in the Barrio Perpetuo Socorro in the Kennedy section of the city. Michel received his elementary education in the Perpetuo Socorro School, and earned his Bachillerato in the Kennedy Unidad Basica de las Americas in Bogotá.

An anecdote told by his parents: *"One day it occurred to Michel, as a child, to make an altar for the Virgin Mary, next to a very large tree, with firewood, sticks and boards. He said it was 'the house of his Heavenly Mother.' He picked the best flowers of the area and placed them with great care, in such a way that it was a very artistic work. There he knelt for long moments with his sister Dolly and Freddy and crossed his little hands to pray."*

He received the sacrament of confirmation in the parish of Our Lady of Charity, on June 17, 1989, his godfather being Fr. Ignacio Chapa, a Marianist religious.

A year later he entered the pre-novitiate of the Society of Mary in 1990. At the end of the novitiate, in late 1992, he was sent to the community of Lloró, in Chocó, but it seems that there was some resistance on his part. The superior had to invoke the vow of obedience. But in September 1993, when he asked for the renewal of his temporary vows, he wrote: *"I thank God for all this time of grace, during this year of pastoral experience among the Chocoano people ... the experience of this context of suffering and joy, oppression and hope, death and life ... has enriched my Marianist life."*

From 1993 to 1997 he was in Bogotá, studying. Thus he matured, living a happy religious life and always open to the needs of the poorest. His spirituality was deep and grounded in his one Lord and in his love for the Lord's favorite children, the poorest, whom he defended even to shedding his blood for them. In October of 1997 he wrote: *"I have the desire to give myself in depth to the One whose depth has no limit. For me that depth is the following of Jesus in Marianist life"*.

In 1998 he returned to Lloró after completing his higher studies at the National Pedagogical University as a Licentiate in Social Sciences in 1997.

In the Parish of the Immaculate Conception of Lloró, he worked as an evangelist and a tireless defender of the indigenous and Afro-Colombians, for their rights of collective land ownership, with Law 70, which years later was approved. Fredy Vélez, the young volunteer who lived in his community, and was present the day of his murder, pointed out in this regard: Michel *"had full knowledge of the historical context and the dangers of the war going on in this Chocoano territory, but he never stopped living and sharing the living word of the risen Jesus through formation and organization for the collective ownership of land by the black communities through Law 70."*

He also formed a group of women to make cards and handcrafted flowers, which were then sent to Spain as fair trade. In that group, not only did they work, but they also underwent an integral formation, in the Gospel and in life.

2. HIS DEATH "FOR LOVE AND DEFENSE OF THE HUMBLEST"

On September 18, 1998, about 9:00 a.m., Fr. José María Gutiérrez, on one boat, and Michel on another boat, along with several catechists and peasants from Lloró, were on the way to El Llano to celebrate the patron saint's festivities. But 8 minutes after leaving the town of Lloró, they were intercepted in the Atrato River by paramilitaries (Auto Defensas Campesinas) dressed as soldiers and armed. They asked everyone for their documentation; the religious, and some others, handed them over, but they did not want to let some of the peasants continue on because they did not have documents.

Fredy Vélez, the Marianist volunteer who was in one of the boats, narrates the facts: *"Faced with this fact, the paramilitaries began insulting and threatening the people by telling them: 'You bastards, why don't you carry papers, those who don't carry the papers are going to dry up the river, we'll make you swallow the water' (a threat to drown them). Miguel Ángel, in a serene, spontaneous, free and voluntary way, when he heard the insults and this threat, told them: 'Don't bother these folks, they're not accustomed to carrying documents and also you don't have the right to ask for papers because you are a group outside the law.' One of the paramilitaries told him to repeat what he had said; Miguel, already with his document returned and having boarded the boat, repeated with a soft and calm voice: 'Don't bother these folks because you have no right to ask for identity documents.' The paramilitary immediately told him: 'You stay.' I, who was next to Miguel, said: 'If he stays then we are all going to have to stay.' I got off the boat and I stood between the paramilitary and Miguel. Father José María, who was in the other boat, told them: 'Don't mess with the boy, he is from the evangelizing team, we just left the town and the police saw us leave. Besides, what he is saying is true, because according to the media, you are as illegal as the guerrillas.' The paramilitary immediately replied: 'Don't compare us with those bastards.' At that moment, there came out of the paramilitary group (who were approximately 18 to 20 uniformed men) a tall, stout man with black skin, who walked up a bit, stood in front of Miguel and without a word loaded his gun, aimed and shot him in the chest. Miguel fell dead immediately into the boat, bleeding from his mouth. Seeing this situation, Father José María Gutiérrez said: 'To the town, let's return to the town.' Immediately the paramilitary who had asked us for documents shouted: 'No, not to the town, go upriver or we'll kill you all.' The motormen, frightened, in the midst of shouting and crying from the people, turned on the engines and took us upstream."*



And Fredy continued: "For me, the murder of Miguel Ángel Quiroga Gaona was an act of immense love, of conscious surrender in favor of the dignity of the people and communities with whom he worked, especially when he interceded for the people of the community, when they were being verbally insulted and threatened by that paramilitary group. He was aware of the context of death and war to which the population was subjected in these territories, and the modus operandi of this extra-legal group, but he did not remain silent before the insults and threats to which they were being subjected."

(Cross in the place where Michel Quiroga died)



3. TESTIMONIES ABOUT MÍCHEL

"He was serious, but at the same time happy. He knew how to smile ... There was tenderness in his heart, that tenderness that they have who have given their hearts and their lives, definitively, to God. Michel was demanding of himself. During his years of study at the university, he often got up at 3:00 a.m. That was the only way he could make time for three concerns that he never gave up on: performing with excellence in his studies, committing to service missions and, of course, taking care of his personal prayer life. He was very human. He liked to celebrate the significant dates of those who lived with him. He knew how to create an atmosphere of fraternity."

(Testimony of Fr. Manuel Gonzalo, SM, Michel's formator)

Michel had the courage to "offer his life to defend us. He had the courage to reproach those men for having such a terrible attitude (...) In the face of such injustice he, who had a noble soul, he, who had a soul of solidarity, was willing to die to defend us. (...)

Very dedicated to service, he was a most helpful person. He was a person who made you feel like you belonged to his own family, who made you feel important, despite the humiliation and poverty that surrounds people in our situation."

(From the testimony of Franklin Antonio Rentería, witness of his death)

"He was always attentive and at the service of people, he was with the humblest. (...)

He had no preferences for anyone. For him, everyone was the same, he had no preferences. He appreciated people very much. He liked his Chocó.

His death was because he did not like injustices. And that's why they killed him. What he had to say, he said. Because the truth burns a lot.

He was like that with us. If it was okay, he said so, if not he said that also. He did not keep anything back. When one does what Michel did, that means offering up one's life, and that is just what he did. And because that was so, he risked his own life. And he inculcated that in others. He gave the best of himself."

(From the testimony of Carmen Oneida Mosquera, from the women's group *Las luchadoras*, of Lloró)

Michel "remained in Lloró a short time. The little we shared, the teaching or what he gave us, was very important. In a very short time, he gave a lot. (...)

On the day of his death, it was lunch time when I found out, when the news came to us. The town was sad, nature itself felt it so. The afternoon darkened. There was a fierce storm that night. There was intense cold, because Michel brought joy, and he was gone. There was a sadness for several days. I do not know how to explain it. Lloró, cried its heart out.²"

(From the testimony of Aida Luz Mosquera, collaborator in the parish and member of the Marianist fraternity)

"Michel was a very happy person. He transmitted that happiness. I never encountered Michel angry. He was always smiling. (...) He also told us not to let ourselves be mistreated by men. And that we should know how to claim our rights. He gave us many values. He was a friend who gave his life for all of us here in Lloró, for love, for defending us. (...) That death of Michel hurt a lot. We did not expect it. The death of Michel was out of love, for defending the weakest of our people. (...)

The death of Michel hurt us a lot. We have him in our hearts, because if he had not stepped out to defend the guys, he would be alive. We will always remember how Michel was, with that joy, that he knew how to transmit. Every time I remember his death I feel very sad and I cry. I will always remember you, Michel, with that "berraquera" you taught us. You will live in my heart until the day of my death."

(From the testimony of Cruz Marina Cossío, from the women's group *Las luchadoras*)

² The original says: Lloró lloró entero. Lloró (the name of the place) means "Cried". Literally it should read: The whole Cried cried.



4. PETITIONS AND THANKSGIVING OF THE FAMILY

PETITIONS (It is recommended to adapt them to each context)

- For all the religious of the Society of Mary, so that the Lord may give us the gift of living our vocation with the passion, joy and capacity for service with which Michel lived it. That we may know how to give ourselves generously to the mission and to the service of the poorest. (SM)
- Good Father, we the MLC present the fruits of our meeting in Korea. Help us to be faithful to the calls received in that moment of grace: to commit ourselves every day with more strength and enthusiasm to our mission and to the service of the weakest ones where we live. May we learn from Michel to live our surrender with joy. (MLC)
- For the religious sisters, Daughters of Mary Immaculate, so that, renewed in our vocation by the great gift of the beatification of Adèle, we might be ready to live fully the demands of our vocation and, like Mary, be available to do the will of the Father. (FMI)
- For the Alliance Mariale: we place ourselves in the hands of Mary to take care of our Institute that wants to be at her disposal so that her Son may be known, loved and served in all the environments we frequent. May the Lord grant us vocations and the grace to grow in fidelity to the gift received, in order to serve him in the midst of our world. (AM)

THANKSGIVING

- We thank you, Lord, for our Founders and for all those who - like Michel - with their fidelity to the Marianist vocation, have made it possible for our charism to have come down to us living and fruitful. Thank you, Lord.
- We thank you, Father, for the testimonies of those who give themselves with fidelity to following you, evangelizing in their family, work or neighborhood, accompanying those who suffer, building more supportive structures and denouncing injustices. Thank you, Lord.
- We thank you, Lord, for all the people who, like Adèle, have given and still now offer their lives humbly in the ordinary and daily tasks to be a sign of your mercy and maternal tenderness among people. Thank you, Lord.
- We thank you, Father, for our Family, united today with joy on this feast of the Annunciation. We thank you for the gift of Mary in our lives, and for being able to be collaborators in her mission of making present to the world her Son, our Savior.

Spontaneous prayers may be added.



Lord Jesus:
join your life to my life,
join my life to your life,
join our lives
with the lives of others,
so that I may know how to share
and to be a brother/sister
and move forward in building in this world
the Reign of God, our Father,
in justice, life and liberation
for the poor and oppressed,
in our Marianist way,
following the steps of the Risen Lord.

Amen

*(Prayed by Michel every day after
communion)*

A PROPOSED OUTLINE FOR A CELEBRATION:

Celebration of the Word (without Eucharist):	Within the framework of the Eucharist:
• Opening hymn • (General introduction to the meeting) • Word of God: Jn 12:24-26 • Presentation on the life and death of Michel. • Time for prayer, interspersed with some of the testimonies. • Petitions and thanksgiving • Our Father • Concluding prayer	• Readings from the Feast of the Annunciation • Presentation on the life and death of Michel, to begin the celebration or at the moment of the homily • The petitions and thanksgivings proposed may be used. • Some of the testimonies about Michel may be read either in the homily or after Communion.