

"Let the holiness of God shine forth" (cf. Mt 5, 16)

item 313

Argentine martyrs



In the early morning of Sunday July 4, 1976, worshipers arriving for Mass in the church of San Patricio found the doors shut. The church, administered by the Pallottines, was in the middle-class suburb of Belgrano, in the north of Buenos Aires. A young man, the organist Rolando Savino, offered to climb in through a window of the house adjacent to the brown brick church. To his horror he found, on the first floor community

room, the bodies of five men laying in a pool of blood on the floor. On a door near the bodies was scrawled the words: *"Por los camarades dinamitados en Seguridad Federal. Venceremos. Viva la Patria."* (For the comrades blown up at Federal Security. We will prevail. Long live the Fatherland.)

Close by, on the carpet, appeared the words: *"Estos zurdos murieron por ser adoctrinadores de mentes vírgenes y son MSTM."* [these left-wingers were killed for being indoctrinators of innocent minds (literally 'virgin') and MSTM (an anagram referring to the Movement of Priests for the Third World – to which none of them belonged)].

Parishioners were aghast as the doors were opened and the horror revealed. The three priests of the parish – Alfredo Leaden 57 [Provincial Delegate], Alfredo Kelly 43, Pedro Dufau 67 – had been gunned down. Beside them lay the bodies of two seminarians, Salvador Barbeito 29, who was principal of a local school, and Emilio Barletti 23.



Their massacre shocked the parish and the city. The military condemned the murders, claiming that it was obviously the work of left-wing guerrillas. Twenty police officers had been killed in a bomb explosion two days earlier. It may have been that the execution of the innocent clerics and students was a reprisal killing. In subsequent investigations it emerged that the military junta had authorized the killing. The papal nuncio, Archbishop Pio Laghi, who had arrived in Buenos Aires on April 27, 1974 was convinced that the military intended to subdue and intimidate Church authorities with such acts of violence.

This became the bloodiest single act of violence against the Roman Catholic Church during Argentina's brutal dictatorship. Now Catholic officials in Argentina are working to have them declared saints. And the man who promoted their cause as archbishop will have the last word, as Pope Francis.

"This parish has been blessed by the presence of those who chose to live not for themselves, but to die so that others may live," then-Archbishop Jorge Bergoglio said in 2001 during a service marking the 25th anniversary of the killings of the five Pallottines.

What became to be known as the San Patricio Massacre is a searing example of the strains within the Argentine Church where Bergoglio spent his entire career. In all, 18 priests, 11 seminarians and about 50 Catholic lay workers would be killed or made to disappear as death squads sought to eliminate left-leaning activists during Argentina's "dirty war."



In this photo taken on March 23, 2013, a group of volunteers at San Patricio church, review documents to add to the canonization case for three priests and two seminarians who were killed inside the church in a 1976 massacre. Credit: AP

Bergoglio himself was accused of not doing enough to protect two of his priests as a young Jesuit leader during the 1976-1983 dictatorship. But he also saved others inside Church properties before ushering them into exile using false identities, at a time when top Church officials were publicly aligning themselves with the junta leaders.

"The killings were a milestone ... The message that everyone got from the Church's higher levels was: 'Be afraid because if anyone from any community criticizes this government, all might be targeted.'" said Francisco Chirichella, a layman who is gathering documentation to justify their martyrdom, a key step toward sainthood.

Alfredo Leaden 57, was Provincial Delegate in Argentina of the Irish Province, known as a 'gentleman' and a man of God. **Pedro Dufau**

67, built and directed the San Vicente Pallotti school, adjacent to the church, for children of housekeepers in the Belgrano neighborhood. The most outspoken was probably **Alfredo 'Alfie' Kelly** 43, who led the parish and had admonished members of his congregation for buying property stolen from political prisoners, calling the thieves "cockroaches." Police believed the two seminarians were involved in the Third World priests' movement, and "hence, they were considered fair game in a wave of vigilante-type executions police have carried out in retaliation" for the bombing.

Four of them were Argentinian, Barbeito was a Spanish citizen.

"Kelly told me and other colleagues, at a dinner on that July 3 at the parish, that he feared for his life because there was a letter floating around calling him a communist," said Fr Rodolfo Capalozza SAC, who

was then a 20-year-old seminary student, and escaped death because he happened to stay at his parents' home that night.

"We talked a lot about the situation in the country and they all had different opinions; they weren't killed because of their ideology or politics but because they preached the gospel of life in a time when life was being threatened," added Capalozza [he has since moved from there and the Pallottines returned the parish to the archdiocese in the last few months].

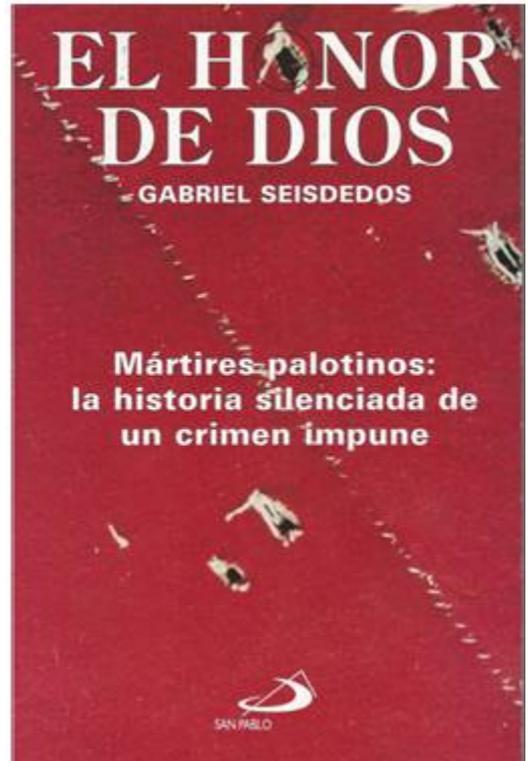
In 2001 the Pallottines asked the Argentine Church to formally consider them to be martyrs. "As time went by the cause changed, and today we are asking for sainthood," said Pablo Bocca, the current parish priest at the church.

Bergoglio, who had been close to Kelly and heard his confessions, formally approved the opening of the investigation in 2005.

"I am a witness, because I was with Alfie in his spiritual guidance, in his confession, until his death. He only thought of God. And I name him because I am a witness to his heart, and when I mention him I mention all of them," Bergoglio said in his memorial homily.

Normally, proof of two miracles is required for sainthood. But martyrdom — dying for one's faith — counts as the first miracle. A Vatican tribunal must eventually rule, and the pope makes the final decision.

"I have a lot of hope in this process," Bocca said, "because now the Pope is someone who knows the cause, who lived in this country and who shared the commitment of the Church."



compiled from the following sources:

<http://www.theblaze.com>
Francis – Bishop of Rome

09.04.13
01.04.13

Billy Hallowell
Michael Collins

POSTSCRIPT - civil proceedings:

On 20.02.14 Luciana Bertoia, of the [Buenos Aires Herald](#), wrote:

A probe into the massacre of five members of the Pallottine religious community during the last dictatorship is currently making progress in court. More than 37 years after the killings, Judge Sergio Torres is hearing statements by some of the colleagues and relatives of the priests and seminarians who were assassinated by a death squad in St Patrick's church in the city neighbourhood of Belgrano ...

Pope Francis also expressed his intention to canonize the so-called "five martyrs of St Patrick's," to show that the Catholic Church has not forgotten them. It might be difficult to say the same of the justice system, which has so far done little in their name.

The Pallottine [civil] case has been stuck for years. In 1995, journalist Eduardo Kimel — who investigated the case during the years of impunity enjoyed by perpetrators of dictatorship-era crimes — was given a one-year suspended prison sentence for slander and was also fined for accusing Judge Guillermo Rivarola of not investigating. Kimel's case reached the Inter-American Human Rights Court and during the Kirchnerite administration the crimes of defamation and slander were abolished.

sac asia oceania e-bulletin

you commented...

on #163 great news from Papua New Guinea.

JD 15.03.15

It was wonderful to read of the experiences of those working in Papua New Guinea..the model of Church outlined, recognising the role of all working together, is certainly one Vincent would love.

Also thank you for the image of Mary and Child printed in the article. This picture was painted by artist **Sr Maria Van Galen FMM**. Maria devoted her life to so many people on the fringe of society: people of PNG, the indigenous people of Australia, sex workers in Amsterdam. Maria, when very ill, returned home to Melbourne and died in January 2014. Seeing the picture brought back many memories of a truly courageous missionary – thank you.

CS 16.03.15