Blessed James Miller – “Martyr for love of the education of the poor”

In the city of Huehuetenango, in Guatemala, on the front wall of the Indian Center La Salle -which would later receive the name of ‘Centro Indígena Santiago Miller’- a commemorative plaque records that “at 4:10 pm, on February 13, 1982, Brother James Miller was murdered in that place while serving the indigenous youth and fulfilling the Lord’s command”. He was 37 years old.

James Miller (his given name) was born into a family of farmers in Ellis, near Stevens Point, Wisconsin (USA). He was born on September 21, 1944 and met the Brothers of the Christian Schools at Pacelli High School, where he entered after his first years of study in a public school in Ellis.

Later, in September 1959, he entered the Congregation of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. In August 1962, he received the habit of the Brothers and on August 31, 1963, he professed his first vows.

After ministering for three years at Cretin High School in Saint Paul, Minnesota, where he taught Religion, English and Spanish, alternating with school maintenance and coaching a student soccer team, Brother James felt the call to mission in Central America.

Thus, in August 1969, after his perpetual profession as a religious, he was sent by his superiors to Colegio San José, in Bluefields, Nicaragua. Five years later, in 1974, he took over the management of another Nicaraguan ministry led by the Brothers of the Christian Schools in Puerto Cabezas, which under his leadership would grow from 300 to 800 students, while accepting the assignment of conducting and supervising the construction of ten new rural schools.

However, the tense situation during the Sandinista revolution led him to leave the country in 1979, at the request of his superiors. He then returned to the United States, to Cretin’s school, and in 1980, in New Mexico, he participated in a session of spiritual renewal.

Nevertheless, his missionary vocation did not weaken and in 1981 Brother James

returned to Central America. This time he was assigned to work at Colegio La Salle and Centro Indigena La Salle, both in Huehuetenango (Guatemala). There he gave himself unreservedly to the education of Mayan youth from rural areas who were being trained in agriculture.

At that time, he was aware of the difficult political situation in Guatemala and the threats of the so-called 'death squads'. In January 1982, a month before his martyrdom, he stated this in a letter in which he confessed that "I am personally weary of violence, but I continue to feel a strong commitment to the suffering poor of Central America. The Church is being persecuted because of its option for the poor. Aware of numerous dangers and difficulties, we continue working with faith and hope, and trusting in God's Providence".

On the afternoon of February 13, 1982, he was murdered by three hooded men. He was shot several times in the back, which immediately caused his death. The assassins were never identified. His vocation of service and dedication to the educational mission of the poor and oppressed sustained him until the end: "I have been a Brother of the Christian Schools for nearly 20 years now, and commitment to my vocation grows steadily stronger in my work in Central America. I pray to God for the grace and strength to serve Him faithfully among the poor and oppressed in Guatemala", he had declared.

Brother James Miller was beatified on December 7, 2019 in the City of Huehuetenango. The Eucharist of his beatification was presided over by Card. José Luis Lacunza, on behalf of Pope Francis. Every February 13 the Church celebrates his liturgical memory.

We ask Blessed Brother James to intercede for all Lasallian educators so that we may be faithful to our mission of educating and evangelizing among the poorest and most vulnerable, embracing our commitment to a more just and fraternal world, even to the ultimate consequences.

Blessed Brother James Miller, pray for us!