

Servants of God: Josefa and Coleta † 1



Josefa Born: May 14, 1892 in El Sabinito, Mexico,

Coleta Born: March 26, 1897 in Tierras Blancas, Guanajuato, Mexico

Died (Martyred): Degollado, Mexico, December 24, 1917

Overview: Maria de San José (shortened to Josefa) Parra Flores was a young member of the *Association of the Children of Mary Immaculate* in the city of Degollado, Mexico. On December 24, 1917, to defend her purity from the attack of some guerrillas, she and her friend Coleta Meléndez Torres (or Menendez De La Torre) threw themselves into a burning building: they burned to death. They were twenty-five and twenty-one years old, respectively. The authorization to initiate their cause for beatification and canonization, under the direction of the Diocese of San Juan de los Lagos in Mexico, is dated October 12, 1995.



Their Martyrdom. Maria de San José (shortened to Josefa) Parra Flores was a young member of the *Association of the Children of Mary Immaculate* in the city of Degollado, Mexico.

Having moved with her parents to the state of Jalisco, Josefa joined the *Children of Mary Immaculate* in Degollado at the age of fourteen. She was known for her religiosity and love for Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. When she went to her father's ranch, she always carried with her a book of meditations on the Passion of Christ and invariably stopped for a few minutes to read a passage. Such was her love and compassion for the suffering Christ that she often burst into tears. When a new immigrant was hired to work on her father's property, she befriended his daughter, Coleta, five years younger than Josefa. She instructed

her young friend in the truths of the faith and prepared her for First Communion. Both often walked to Degollado to attend Mass; along the way, they recited the Rosary. When Coleta was old enough, she too enrolled in the *Children of Mary*. The two friends conscientiously practiced the virtues inherent in their Association membership: charity, obedience, humility, and purity. Furthermore, they never missed the annual pilgrimage organized for the members to the shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

Sadly, the bloody events of the Mexican Revolution, which began in 1910 to mobilize the masses of poor peasants against the large landowners, also tragically involved these two young women. In December 1917 the revolution, unfortunately, reached Degollado. On December 24 a group of guerrilla fighters under the command of José Inés Chávez García, known as "The Attila of the Bajío" (the Bajío is a lowland in central Mexico), entered the town and laid waste to it. The guerrillas chased the two young women down a central street hoping to capture and sexually assault them. Although all the buildings near them were engulfed in flames, Josefa and Coleta saw no alternative. As some eyewitnesses reported, just as they were about to be captured, Josefa managed to free herself and Coleta. The two

Servants of God: Josefa and Coleta † 2

threw themselves into the blazing space that had housed a butcher shop. The attackers stopped, amazed at what they had witnessed. Moved by mercy, they tried to pull the women out of the building, but the wind fanned the flames. Not a cry escaped the lips of these two young women, although their faces betrayed their pain. They soon burned to death. Coleta was twenty-one, while Josefa was twenty-five. A few days later, after the fire debris was cleared, their bones, now calcined, were discovered. Those who had found their bodies noted that the medals they wore around their necks, as badges of the Children of Mary, had not melted, but remained intact.

The authorization to initiate their cause for beatification and canonization, under the direction of the Diocese of San Juan de los Lagos in Mexico, is dated October 12, 1995. Their complete names: Maria de San José (or Josefa) Parra Flores and Coleta Meléndez Torres (or Menendez De La Torre).

To determine whether their sacrifice could be declared martyrdom in defense of bodily chastity, the diocese of San Juan de los Lagos, within whose territory the place of their death currently lies, launched an informative inquiry on May 29, 1956, followed by a decree on their writings on May 29, 1959. The authorization from the Holy See arrived on October 12, 1995. In 1981, a plaque of tiles was placed at the site of their sacrifice. Although not yet officially declared, they are known as "the martyrs of Degollado" or, more familiarly, "Las Quemaditas" (translated as "The Burnt Young Women"). They were not members of a religious order, but were lay youth members of the *Children of Mary Immaculate*.

Original Author: Emilia Flocchini – modified and expanded on 2015-02-19. English translation edited by deacon Dana McCarthy (2025).

Link to above writeup (Google translation from Italian to English): [Josefa Parra](#)

Link to DePaul University on Mexican Martyrs (1917): [Latin American Martyrs](#)

Link to Saints and Saints-to-be (1917): [Josefa and Coleta](#) – scroll down to December 24

Link to Spanish language video: [Josefa and Coleta](#)

Note from Deacon Dana: I focused largely on Josefa because of her relationship with our late and wonderful parishioner, Carmen L. Aquino, who died on February 23, 2023. I wish I could recall the exact relationship between Carmen and Josefa, but I'm pretty sure Josefa was either Carmen's aunt or great aunt. Carmen was born in 1931, so I suppose it could be either, but more likely the latter. Be sure to include Josefa's friend and companion, Coleta, in your prayers as well since these two young women suffered holy martyrdom together.

Prayer for Beatification given to me by Carmen:

Immaculate Mary, Mother of the Church and Model in the Family of God, intercede for us in our efforts to remain pure and chaste in a world that craves immediate pleasures and gratifications. Since Josefa Parra and Coleta Meléndez braved a fiery death rather than surrender to lustful men, we pray that the process for their beatification, introduced by the Church in recognition of that supreme sacrifice may be happily fulfilled. We ask this through Christ Our Lord. Amen.