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Pope Francis recognized the martyrdom of six religious priests and brothers and seven laypeople who were killed in the 20th century "in hatred of the faith," clearing the way for their beatification.

The pope approved the decrees during an audience Jan. 23 with Cardinal Angelo Becciu, prefect of the Congregation for Saints' Causes.

Among the soon-to-be blesseds are three Spanish priests of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and seven laymen who were killed in Guatemala between 1980 and 1991.

Sacred Heart Missionary Fathers Jose Maria Gran Cirera, Juan Alonso Fernandez and Faustino Villanueva were all serving in different parts of the Guatemalan department of Quiche, where almost 90% of the population is indigenous Maya.

The guerrilla movement was very strong in Quiche, making it a scene of severe repression and horrific violence during Guatemala's 36-year civil war. Priests and religious were often targeted by government forces as they were often accused of supporting or carrying out subversive activities. More than 200,000 people, mostly

indigenous Maya, were killed or disappeared during the conflict, which ran from 1960 to 1996.

The pope also recognized the martyrdom of three Capuchin priests, including Fr. Jose Domenech Bonet, from Spain who were killed in 1936 during their country's brutal civil war.

During the meeting with Cardinal Becciu, the pope also approved decrees recognizing the heroic virtues of an Italian bishop, a Brazilian nun, a French Capuchin priest and three founders of religious institutes, including Fr. Jose Plancarte Labastida of Mexico, who founded the congregation of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate of Guadalupe.

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