Father of Mexican Independence - Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla

A priest by the name of Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla is known today as the “Father of Mexico” and the “Father of Mexican Independence.”

How is it that a priest of the Catholic Church has such a distinction? What did he do to deserve that honor?

The Library of Congress—in its article “Distant Neighbors: The U.S. and the Mexican Revolution”—tells us more about this famous man:

> *Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla is generally regarded as the “Father of Mexican Independence.” He was born in a rural area of Guanajuato where his father managed a hacienda.*
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> *He was an excellent student in both theology and philosophy at the then Colegio de San Nicolás Obispo in present-day Morelia. In 1778 he took clerical orders and in 1791 was named rector of his alma mater.*
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> *However, shortly thereafter, he was removed from that position and sent into semi-exile to be a curate in the town of Colima. No one knows for sure why he endured this fate, but perhaps his willingness to espouse positions not sanctioned by the Church, might have been a factor.* [He was reported to the Inquisition, for example, because he seemed to support the French Revolution.]
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> *Finally he made his way back and in 1803 he became the priest for Dolores, a well-to-do town in the silver-rich Bajío area to the north of Mexico City. Dolores was close to the much larger and wealthier town of Guanajuato, which Hidalgo knew well.*
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> *In Dolores, he started a pottery complex and a brick making plant, grew trees for silkworms, set up a tannery, and cultivated bees, olives, and grapes. He spent whatever additional time he had learning Indian languages, and reading.*
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> *Historians cannot pinpoint exactly when Hidalgo accepted the idea that Mexico must become independent from Spain, but they do know he was part of what has become known as the “Querétaro conspiracy” along with his brother Mariano, Ignacio Allende, Juan Aldama and several others.*
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> *According to legend, at midnight on September 16, Hidalgo waved a banner bearing the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe and proclaimed, “Viva la Independencia; Mueran los Gachupines.” ("Long live Independence. Death to the Spaniards.").*
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> *After taking silver-rich Guanajuato, his army, reckoned to be some 60,000 strong, marched to Valladolid, Morelia. Next Hidalgo’s forces went to Toluca in preparation for an assault on the capital itself.*
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> *On the way, they met the royalists headed by Torcuato Trujillo at the Battle of Monte de las Cruces. The rebels seemingly won that battle, but they took severe casualties, and many deserted.*
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> *By November 2, Hidalgo gave up on conquering Mexico City and suffered several defeats at Aculco (7 November), Guanajuato (25 November), and Puente de Calderón (17 January).*
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> *Hidalgo, Ignacio Allende, and others were captured on March 21, 1811 in Coahuila. Hidalgo was sent to Chihuahua where he was stripped of his clerical profession, and executed.*

Despite his personal fate, Father Hidalgo had sparked the quest for independence in his country. A decade after his death, Mexico and Spain were negotiating an agreement—known as the "Plan of Iguala"—which eventually resulted in Mexico's status as an independent Republic.

Credits:

Portrait of Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla, by an unknown artist, included in "México a través de los siglos," Tomo III: "La guerra de independencia" (1808 - 1821) - which, translated into English, means: "Mexico Through the Centuries, Volume III: War of Independence" (1808-1821) - published, in 1880, by Vicente Riva Palacio and Julio Zarate.

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