Saint Miguel Febres Cordero: Teacher, catechist and academician

Every 9th of February the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools celebrates the memory of Saint Brother Miguel Febres Cordero, born in Cuenca (Ecuador), on 7th of November 1854, and baptised with the name of Francisco Febres Cordero.

His family, well known for his political life in the country, initially opposed his desire to embrace the vocation of a religious Brother, and tried to direct him towards the priesthood. But Francis was not easily discouraged, neither in his vocational quest nor by the fact that he was born with deformed feet and frail health. From his earliest years he used to entrust his vicissitudes to Our Lady's intercession. Finally, on 24th of March 1868, he obtained permission from his mother to enter the Brothers' novitiate on the eve of the feast of the Annunciation. On taking the Lasallian habit, Francisco received the name of Brother Miguel and became the first Ecuadorian to be admitted to the Institute.

Brother Miguel's apostolate began in the Lasallian schools in Quito. From his youth he excelled in the teaching of Spanish Language and Literature and, faced with the lack of appropriate handbooks and textbooks, he decided to compose them himself. He had not yet reached the age of 20 when he published the first of his numerous works: a Spanish grammar that quickly became a landmark book. In fact, the Ecuadorian government adopted several of his publications for all schools in the country. Subsequently, his research and writings in the field of Literature and Linguistics, including Lyric Poetry and Philology, would open the doors of the National Academies of Language in Ecuador and Spain, where he enjoyed great prestige and admiration.

He also composed catechisms for children, catechesis being his main apostolic activity. In a special way, he always stood out for his passion for the preparation of children for First Communion. He devoted to this important ministry until 1907, when he travelled to Europe at the request of his superiors to work on the

translation into Spanish of numerous texts used by the French Brothers, who by that time had been expatriated and, given the circumstances, many opted to continue their educational mission in Latin American countries and in Spain.

His culture, simplicity and deep spirituality radiated wherever he went. After a few months in Paris, Brother Miguel was transferred to the Brothers' Generalate in Lembecq-lez-Hal (Belgium). He was then sent to the Lasallian International Centre in Premiá de Mar, in the province of Barcelona, where his teachings continued to imbue the youngest with his love for God and for the academy. "A community without books is like an empty barn," he used to say.

In July 1909, in the face of numerous acts of anticlerical violence in Premiá de Mar, he was transferred to Barcelona, together with other Brothers in formation and with the formands entrusted to him. During his refuge on the jetty in the port and later at the school of Nuestra Señora de la Bonanova, Brother Miguel was vigilant in protecting the young ones, and at the same time took responsibility for the custody of the consecrated hosts in the chapel of Premiá.

Once the storm of the revolution was over, he returned to Premiá de Mar, but at the end of January 1910 he contracted pneumonia and his health became even weaker. Brother Miguel died on 9th of February 1910 in the odour of wisdom and sanctity. On hearing the news in Ecuador, national mourning was proclaimed.

Pope Paul VI beatified him on 30th of October 1977, together with the Belgian Brother Mutien-Marie. Later, on 21st of October 1984, he was canonised by John Paul II. His witness as a teacher, catechist and academician continues to inspire all Lasallians.

Saint Brother Miguel Febres Cordero, pray for us!