

# Marianist Moment

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## *Venerable Faustino Pérez-Manglano*



Venerable Faustino Pérez-Manglano, whose feast day is March 3, is the youngest of the Marianists saints. He has been recognized for his sanctity because of his deep love for the Virgin Mary. He turned to Mary by praying the rosary regularly as a source of strength in seeking God's will in his life and to help him to persevere while experiencing the effects of Hodgkin's disease.

With the help of Fr. José María Salaverri, SM (1926-2018), the editors of this Marianist Moment will introduce Venerable Faustino to you in two parts, beginning with this biography. The

April edition will have reflections about his life.

If we were to think of life as soccer game, with heaven as the goal, then a 17-year-old Spanish boy, Faustino Pérez-Manglano, would be a World Cup forward. With his dream of a religious vocation, and the love of the Virgin Mary as his "assist", Faustino stormed the goal with a "banana kick" around pain and illness, and with breakaway speed headed home, to win the match.

Faustino Pérez-Manglano Magro was born Sunday August 4, 1946, in Valencia, Spain. He was the oldest of the four children of Faustino Pérez-Manglano Vidal, a gynecologist, and Maria de la Encarnación Magro Alonso. They chose a unique birth announcement: a calendar page for the day. It marked the joyous point in time of the birth of their first born; perhaps it also symbolized the transitory nature of life itself. Faustino was baptized that same August and confirmed at age 8. Only a few calendars marked the years of Faustino's life on earth. Much like the sport he grew to love so well, he used these brief years in a rapid ascent to holiness.

Faustino began school at age 4, a happy and curious child. The Loretto School was run by the Sisters of the Holy Family. One day, he took hold of one of the sister's crucifix and asked her who it was. She explained that it was Our Lord, and told how he was crucified. With all the

simplicity of his young age, Faustino began to try and remove the nails, asking sister, "But didn't you cry a lot when they nailed him?"

At six, Faustino enrolled at Our Lady of the Pillar School, run by the Marianists. From the beginning, he liked school. He got good grades and enjoyed the games and excursions. He loved nature, hiking, swimming and camping. During the school year, Faustino lived in Valencia, but he spent most summers, along with more than a dozen cousins, in Alicante at the home of his grandparents. He made his First Communion in Alicante on July 4, 1954, together with his sister Maria Encarna and three cousins.

On his grandparents' farm, there were an orchard and a number of unused buildings that formed a natural playground for the lively children. They played soccer, hunted treasure, camped and played make believe as happy children normally do. At first, the oldest cousin was the natural leader; when Augusto became too grown up for childish games, Faustino took his place. He seemed to corral the others, creating union, and his joyful smile and desire that everyone else feel happy brought a special peace. Throughout his school years, Faustino was known as a good boy. One of his teachers commented that he was enthusiastic, joyful, and pious. But God seemed to demand more.

In October of 1959, at age 13, Faustino made his first retreat at Casa de la Purísima de Alacúas. He talked over a little problem with his spiritual director, Marianist Father José María Salaverri. He explained that he had made a promise to the Virgin when he was in fifth grade to pray the rosary every day until 1961. Sometimes in the summers he had been distracted and failed to keep his promise but had kept track and was trying to catch up. Then he mentioned a number of rosaries owed. The priest was shocked at the fidelity of the young boy. Wisely, the confessor told him to consider his debt cancelled and without any promises or keeping track to try and pray the rosary as often as possible.

For the rest of his life, Faustino continued to pray the rosary often. One classmate remembers seeing Faustino walking ahead of him on the way to school one day. He hurried to catch up, and then realized that Faustino was praying the rosary. He says, "Without saying anything, and with simplicity and naturalness, (Faustino) gathered it into his hand and put it into his rosary case. All of this was done with a smile. He wasn't the least disturbed."

In the summer of 1960, Faustino began to write a diary which he faithfully wrote in every day for a year and later continued in a sporadic manner. The first entry was written on September 14, 1960, and shows the beginning of the symptoms of the Hodgkin's disease that would eventually claim his life. *I got up with the familiar pain. It left me. I finished Mario Gaitán, a beautiful book. I helped Fausto a little with watering. At quarter to nine I prayed the rosary.*

The first year of Faustino's diary seems to be little more than a timetable in which he recorded a few facts of the day. The second part is shorter and contains more personal reflection, usually of a spiritual nature. He was neither a literary artist nor a sentimentalist. He considered himself a poor writer, and he jokingly referred to his style in a letter to his cousin Augusto: "I tell you a lot, but in telegram form. I would like to do it some other way, but it just doesn't come out. Just a dull boy." In spite of his difficulty in expressing himself, his diary and some of his letters present a clear picture of how God was slowly seeping into every part of the fabric of his life.

An avid fan of the Valencia soccer team, Faustino's diary records his love of the sport and the outcome of many of the team's games. And the missions -- another of his loves -- are often mentioned in his diary. In the entry for October 19, 1960, he mentions his praying of the rosary, the soccer score, and an auction held at school for the missions. "I got a pack of Chesterfields for 115 pesetas which I gave back so they could auction it off again because I promised the Virgin I wouldn't smoke a single cigarette until summer. We have 1,558 pesetas for the missions now."

Faustino became ill in November of 1960, and in January of the following year he wrote, "I am still ill and I don't know when I will be able to go to school.... even though it costs me a lot to pray, I pray the rosary every day, except a few days that I missed."

Faustino's illness kept him in bed for most of the year. There was a great deal of pain, along with strong medicine, injections and radiotherapy. In spite of this, he continued to study at home so as not to lose the year.

In October of 1960 Faustino had become an aspirant to the Marian sodality. He wrote, "It is a difficult plan, but I know I can do it." During retreat, he expressed his resolve: "I am going to try an asceticism of 'yes' to everything good." During the annual retreat that year Faustino's entry for October 22 reads, "We talked about many things, but one made an impression on me. What vocation am I going to choose? Doctor? Chemist? Or will I perhaps be a priest? That is what has impressed me. Has the Lord chosen me? He will tell me. How good it is here in Alcuás! For the day and a little that is left of the retreat I'm going to remain completely silent. Maybe God will speak to me."

Apparently, in some way, God did speak to the soul of this young boy. The following day he wrote, "Father and I will keep the secret of my vocation until we see if I really have it. I'm about to burst with the immense happiness I have. How marvelous Christ is!"

Over the next two and a half years, Faustino mentions his vocation from time to time in his diary. Each time he seems more certain, more happy, with this direction for his life. For

Faustino this desire for a religious vocation became an instrument that helped him pass rapidly toward sanctity. Feeling the call to God's service, it spurred his generosity and helped him to detach himself more and more from the things of earth and to discover the redemptive value of suffering freely accepted in union with Christ. Although humanly speaking, Faustino didn't fulfill the call to a religious vocation, in his innermost being he lived it to the full. In January of 1962, a diary entry notes, "Sanctity is very difficult. But I will try, and who knows if I might achieve it?"

From November of 1960 to May of 1961, Faustino carried the cross that the Lord had given him -- the pain and debilitation of a fatal form of Hodgkin's disease. During these months he records his pain and low spirits in his diary, but he accepted these without complaint and attempted to make certain that others did not suffer because of him. During this time, too, his infantile affection for the Virgin Mary began to change into a mature understanding of her role. "Every day I love Mary more. She is my Mother. Thanks to her, each day I love my own mother more." Where previously his diary had been sparse in sentiments, he now begins to express himself in a fuller way. "Jesus, let me love Mary, not only because she is pure, beautiful, good, compassionate, my Mother, but because she is your mother and you love her infinitely. ....

If I want to imitate Christ, my Master, I must do it by infinitely loving what He infinitely loves, His Mother and mine."

Faustino's health seemed to improve. With his family, he made trips to Zaragoza to visit the Lady of the Pillar, and to Lourdes. After months of suffering, he felt very well although his physical appearance was not attractive. The chemotherapy had caused him to bloat and to lose his hair.

When his mother asked if it didn't bother him for people to see him like that, he responded "Why? There's nothing bad about it. If your hair falls out, what are you going to do? It will grow back." Then he added, laughing, "What went away will come back again." At Lourdes, Faustino tells us, "It's moving to be with all the sick and to see their resignation and faith.... Afterwards, I helped as a "brancardier" (stretcher bearer) helping at the pools and at the Grotto." And, again, "I think the greatest miracle of Lourdes is the conversions that take place there. It's phenomenal to see how very sick people don't ask for their own health, but for that of those at their side.... The next time I go to Lourdes I will go as a stretcher-bearer."

As always, Faustino thought more of others than of himself. The summer of 1961, Faustino was told to "take it easy." With friends, he took walks through the country, fished, and practiced target shooting with a rifle. Swimming was forbidden, but he accepted both the good and the bad tranquilly. His grandmother remembered that since he wasn't very strong, with

each meal they gave him a glass of milk with Cola-cao. That Christmas when the cousins were discussing their likes and dislikes regarding beverages, Faustino, without thinking, said, "What I can't stand is Cola-cao. It makes me nauseous." Startled, his grandmother asked why he hadn't mentioned that the previous summer. Faustino replied, "Grandmother, you did it with so much pleasure that I didn't want to deprive you of the enjoyment." Time and again, Faustino subjugated his own wishes and preferences in favor of others.

That winter, Faustino begged to be allowed to go camping with his friends. His parents refused to allow it, saying that he could go in the spring if his health was still improving. He wrote in his diary, "I had a great disappointment... Thanks be to God it has left me and I will offer it up for the missions.... I will make the sacrifice and will suffer willingly for the missions."

On retreat in January, 1962, he reflected on his vocation and began to learn detachment. "I think my vocation is out of love for Christ, with infinite desire to serve him in the best way possible. That desire includes, if it might be necessary, dying for Him." By nature a saver, Faustino did not like to spend his money on frivolous things. During this retreat, he surprised his spiritual director by saying he felt he was too attached to money. He took his savings and sent them, in the form of books, to the missions in Japan.

Faustino began to think about the problems of the world. He wrote, "For a great many Christians, God is a problem. They don't want God to bother or disturb them." The topic was discussed in greater depth in Sodality meetings, and Faustino began to take a great interest in sociology classes. "We have life too easy. We are in danger. We have only comforts and not one difficulty worth mentioning. Everything as we want it. We have to be simple..." Not content with theories, Faustino concentrated on the concrete, and did small things that were within his grasp. He and his friend Ernesto took an interest in a young working boy of fourteen. They helped him with clothes, food, and medicine as well as visiting with him as a friend.

During the spring of 1962, Faustino's parents at last allowed him to go camping again. Wisely, they chose to let him enjoy a full life in the short time God had left to him. In spite of his physical limitations, he enjoyed it immensely. In June he made his first promises in the sodality. In the summer came a final glorious camping trip with school companions to France and Switzerland. In one of his notes, we read "I tried to be as serviceable as possible." Indeed, his companions underline the fact that this was a part of his nature and that he was always ready to do a favor.

His pre-university year was his final year of school. By the fall, his sickness had obviously returned in full force. The medicine was not helping and his mother had to help the

determined student to dress and get him off to school. He could only remain a half day, and in the afternoons he studied in bed.

By January of 1963, he was swollen, in pain, and albumin was forming. He made his final school act - the annual retreat - toward the end of the month. In his retreat notes there is a moving reflection on death: "We must accept death as of now. A death with the Virgin is marvelous. Christ, grant that every day I may be more devoted to Mary. I want to be always intimately united to her. She will help me to die, and I will have the death of a true saint. Let death come when God wants and where God wants. It will come at the time, the place and in the way that is best for me, sent by Our Father, God. Welcome to our sister, death."

Several times during this retreat he wrote, "Most Holy Virgin, teach me to see the value of suffering. Teach me, Lord, the value of suffering."

On February 4, the priest decided to speak frankly with Faustino, and told him the seriousness of his illness. Faustino commented wryly, "I thought the doctors were at their wits end."

"And are you ready to die if God wishes it?" his confessor asked.

"What do you think, Father: I'm prepared, right?"

Fighting to hold back tears, Faustino confessed, "It's only that I feel sorry for papa and mama. How sad they are going to be!"

On February 9, he received the Sacrament of the Sick. In his final diary entry, he expresses his happiness to have received Extreme Unction, "It's marvelous to have received it knowing completely what was received." He renewed his sodality promises and wrote "Help me to continue offering these little inconveniences for the needs of the world."

A normal boy, Faustino enjoyed the visits of his classmates and their chatter about the daily occurrences at school. He read a lot, prayed, and received daily communion. His spiritual director, Father Salaverri, visited and asked him if he kept in mind the goals he had made on retreat.

"Yes Father, to become a saint."

"Good, but are you trying to do so?"

Smiling broadly, Faustino answered, "Here I am. I think this is a good method, right?"

Sunday, March 3, Father Salaverri visited and in spite of Faustino's failure to complain it was obvious that he was suffering. His hands were shaking and when the priest asked him if he was nervous, Faustino replied, "No Father, it's the body. I haven't been able to sleep for so long. But inside, I'm at peace."

The priest gave him several requests for Heaven, the first being to console his parents, and Faustino promised to carry them out. Then he gave the boy wonderful news. He promised to return the following day to receive Faustino's vows as a Marianist. Special permission had just been received based on his wish and the extreme seriousness of his condition. Instead, Faustino became a Marianist only by desire.

The painful hours dragged by and the edema began to fill his lungs. At eleven he asked for a drink and noticing his mother there he told her to go to bed and rest. A few minutes later he called her back to help him and as she held him he gave a sudden jolt and lay lifeless in his mother's arms.

Faustino Pérez-Manglano was a normal and happy boy who radiated joy and serenity. His reputation for sanctity led to the idea of the introduction of his cause for beatification. In 1986 his remains were transferred from the cemetery of Valencia to the chapel of Our Lady of the Pillar school.

On this occasion, the Superior General of the Marianists said, "His silent presence will be an incentive for everyone: teachers, parents, and students. He will remind us that in this life we must not be content with little, but that it is possible to – and we should do so – strive for a high human and Christian ideal to better the world."