

Lasallian Educator's Meditation on Saint (Brother) Miguel Febres Cordero February 9

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Francisco Febres Cordero Munoz was born in Cuenca, Ecuador, on November 7, 1854. His grandfather was a general in Ecuador's struggle for independence while his father was a linguist who taught in the local seminary college. His mother was an educated, devout woman who cared for "Panchito" since he was crippled and in poor health. Her care also included passing on her faith and devotion to her son. When he was almost five years old, he noticed a "beautiful lady" in the family garden who called to him. For the first time he walked until this vision ceased. Panchito was convinced the beautiful lady was Mary for whom he had a special devotion. As he grew older, his health improved and he gradually learned to walk. He was a happy child with a pleasant nature and cheerful disposition in spite of his health. His religious devotions included daily Mass, the rosary, and learning about the lives of the saints.

Saint John Baptist de La Salle noted that most parents are not well-equipped to bring up their children in the Christian faith and teach them their religion, unlike Francisco's mother. That is why, according to De La Salle, God founded the Christian Schools. Are you aware of some lack of religious training and practice in your students? You are God's minister who must announce to them, especially the "unchurched," the Good News. Even though you may not be assigned to teach religion, you must instill in your students an awareness of God's presence, a love and respect for prayer. Cultivate within them reverence and respect at Mass and prayer; see to it that they treat each other with the same reverence and respect. Your call to faith through word and example can be the power that overcomes the unhealthy, crippling effects of this secular age. Be the beautiful person who calls your students to walk in faith.

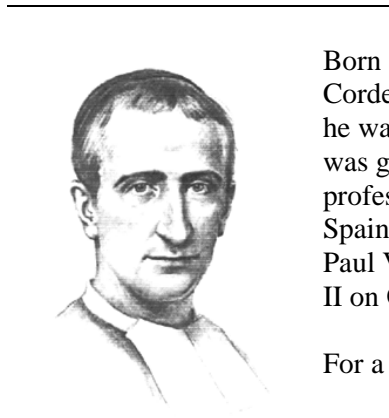
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Educated at home until he was nine, Francisco entered the newly opened Christian Brothers school in Cuenca in 1863. There he excelled at his studies and emerged as a student leader. When President of Ecuador, Gabriel Garcia Moreno, visited the school, Francisco was chosen to deliver the welcoming speech in Spanish and French. Francisco was attracted to the Brothers' life and prayed and even did spiritual reading with them. When he sought to join the Brothers, his parents and grandmother resisted. They used many tactics to dissuade him, but he remained resolute. Eventually he was allowed to make his novitiate with the Brothers at Cuenca since there was no formal novitiate in Ecuador. At his habit-taking in 1868, he was given the name Brother Miguel. He was fourteen years old! After his novitiate year, he was assigned to teach the third class in the Beaterio in Quito. When Senor Febres Cordero insisted that his son leave the Institute, the Brother Visitor stood firm in honoring the decision of Brother Miguel. These rebuffed demands resulted in a break in the father-son relationship. This situation was corrected six years later when the father sought Brother Miguel's intercession with President Moreno for a politically imprisoned friend. The President, remembering the man who had greeted him as a student, acquiesced to Brother Miguel's appeal. Communications between father and son grew cordial and frequent up to the former's death in 1882.

In their desire for what is best for their children, parents often fail to consider the desires and inclinations of their offspring. Some indulge and excuse their children much to the detriment of the young ones. Others have unrealistic expectations. Still others have little involvement in their children's development. God has employed you to procure every good advantage for your students. Frequently ask God for His grace to instruct your students so that they develop into educated, independent, mature Christians and productive, contributing members of society. Seek, whenever possible, to assist parents in doing the same.

Brother Miguel excelled as a teacher and looked “for every possible way of making the lessons and work agreeable and pleasant for the pupils.” After Brother Miguel had taught the same material for twenty years, a confrere asked him why he spent so much time with lesson plans. Brother replied, “Of course I know it—or I think I know it. But I also think that I can find a better way of presenting it every year. I’m sure that if I teach this material for another 20 years, I will still find even newer and better ways of explaining it.” His lessons were noted for their preparation, organization, clarity and ability to connect with the students even if it meant the use of their idiom. He insisted on their mastery of the material before advancing them. After he had been teaching for only four years, he published a Spanish grammar that was soon adopted as a text for all schools in Ecuador. Later he published seven other educational works. He wrote poetry, some of which is still included in Ecuadorian literature anthologies. He was appointed a public examiner and inspector for the schools of Quito. Even though he did not have the opportunity for university studies, he educated himself and soon was noticed by the intelligentsia of Ecuador. He was elected to the National Academy of Ecuador, was a corresponding member of the Academy of Spain and that of Venezuela. He was awarded the *Palmes academiques* of the French Academy. The superiors of the Institute moved him to Paris, Belgium and Spain (where he died) and assigned him the task of translating French texts into Spanish. Amidst all his honors and accomplishments, Brother Miguel took more delight and pride in preparing students to receive their first Communion.

Do you take great care in preparing your lessons so that they will be clear, agreeable and pleasant for your students? As you teach the same material from year to year, do you look for ways to present it in an interesting, animated manner? Have you seen to your continued education to assist in your instruction? Are you a member of professional organizations that promote and support superior teaching? Can you say along with Brother Miguel, “I must engage in all the works that I undertake with a spirit of love, of gratitude for the divine goodness which has been gracious enough to employ me for his glory and the salvation of souls”? Brother Miguel is an Ecuadorian hero with stamps issued and public monuments erected in his honor. Even though your likeness may never appear on a stamp or monument, your dedication, preparation, patience and masterful lessons will make you a hero in the lives of your students.



Born in Cuenca, Ecuador on November 7, 1854, Francisco Febres Cordero Munoz, first attended the Brothers’ school in that city when he was nine. On March 25, 1868, he received the religious habit and was given the name Brother Miguel. He pronounced his perpetual profession on December 8, 1882. He taught in Ecuador, Belgium and Spain where he died on February 9, 1910. He was beatified by Pope Paul VI on October 30, 1977 and canonized a saint by Pope John Paul II on October 21, 1984. His feast day is February 9.

For a brief, highly readable biography of Saint Miguel, read

Salm, Brother Luke. *Brother Miguel Febres Cordero, FSC*. Romeoville: Christian Brothers Publications, 1984.