Society of Mary - Compañía de María - Société de Marie
Via Latina 22, 00179 Roma

May 2, 2023

Biography of Death Notice N. 10

The Province of Spain recommends to our fraternal prayers our dear Brother **Fermín GASTAMINZA IBARBURU,** priest, of the Marianist community of Siquem, Madrid, Spain, who died in the service of the Blessed Virgin Mary on April 29, 2023 in Madrid, at 91 years of age and with 73 years of religious profession.

Fermín was born into a large family on December 20, 1931 in the beautiful city of Donostia-San Sebastián (Basque Country). His parents, José María and Asunción, were deep believers and educated their sons and daughters in the Christian faith from their earliest childhood.

Fermín lived through the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), when he was a very young boy. He lived the rest of his childhood and adolescence during the post-war period (1940s).

All the male children of the family studied with the Marianists at the "Colegio Católico Santa María" in San Sebastián, a school that was established in 1887. Fermín was an exceptional student. His gifts as a good orator and writer were already evident. He was short in stature, but very skilled at playing soccer. He possessed an exceptional voice for singing.

After finishing his studies, a month before his 17th birthday, Fermín entered the Marianist novitiate in Elorrio (Bizkaia). He made his first profession on November 13, 1949. His formators saw him as a boy with a good heart, docile and communicative.

After professing his first vows, Fermín went to Carabanchel (Madrid) to spend the period of what was then called the *scholasticate*, studying at the university. He did his studies in several phases, as was customary at the time. He started with three courses of common subjects in Philosophy and Letters in Carabanchel, then two years teaching in Vitoria, and finally two more years of studies in Zaragoza, until he obtained his degree in History.

From Zaragoza, he went back to Vitoria, as a teacher of secondary education. Fermín made his perpetual profession in Vitoria. In the beginning years, he saw himself more as a lay religious. However, after some discernment, he asked to be admitted to perpetual vows with orientation to the priesthood. After consulting with his fellow brothers, his superiors approved his request.

After three years in Vitoria, Fermín went to the international seminary in Fribourg (Switzerland) to complete the necessary theological formation. The five years spent there were very important for Fermín. Fermín's last two years in Switzerland coincided with the convocation of the Second Vatican Council and the first conciliar documents. The seminarians experienced this Council very intensely in Fribourg and it meant a complete transformation in terms of vision, mentality, theological conception and pastoral disposition. In the homily of the funeral mass celebrated for Fermín, the homilist summarized this fact by saying that "*Fermín went to Fribourg with Christ the King and returned from Fribourg with Jesus the Good Shepherd*."

Ordained a priest in July 1963, he spent one more year studying to complete his licentiate in theology. From 1964, Fermín was sent to work in the mission of

schools as a teacher and chaplain. He lived 45 of the last 60 years of his life in the community of his hometown, San Sebastian. The remaining years were divided between Zaragoza (2 years), Logroño (5 years) and Siquem-Madrid (almost 6 years), in addition to two brief but intense stays in Colombia and one in Ivory Coast, after his retirement.

The 5 years in Logroño were very relevant for Fermín... as much as Fermín was also relevant for Logroño. In 1968, he was appointed - to his surprise and shock - superior and director of the Marianist postulate that opened in the capital of La Rioja. Some religious from that postulate still remember with gratitude "the breath of fresh air, renewal and stimulus" that Fermín introduced in Logroño in the difficult times of the years that immediately followed the end of Vatican II.

In 1973, he returned to San Sebastian, where he remained until 2017. He was superior of the community for a few years, professor of literature, philosophy and religion for many more, and chaplain of the school for many years, even after retiring from teaching in 2005. Fermín was a permanent, wise and benevolent presence at the school. A witness to the history of *his* school. He knew and greeted several generations of students and alumni, as well as their families. Always respected and loved by the administrative team and the teaching staff, he was sometimes perceived, with some discomfort, as a "defender of the poor and lost causes." He systematically put himself in the shoes of the difficult student and worked on their behalf.

Fermín's sensitivity to the suffering people was accentuated by the contact with the needy that he experienced during his time of missionary collaboration in Colombia, first in 1992 (Bogotá and Lloró) and then in 2003 (Girardot). The same happened to him during his stay in Ivory Coast in 2002, at the Notre Dame d'Afrique sanctuary (Abidjan). It is striking that in the memoirs that Fermín wrote in 2015, he left a detailed chronicle of each of these three brief missionary sojourns. These memories occupied more space than other periods of his life of much longer duration. This was proof that these missionary journeys had a strong and positive impact on his life.

As the years went by, now past 85, Fermín's physical and psychological health became much weaker, until he could no longer be adequately cared for in his community. In 2017, he went to the provincial infirmary of Siquem, in Madrid. Although his mental and communicative faculties were increasingly reduced, he

always maintained his good humor and affectionate disposition, which is why Fermín was very much loved throughout this time by his fellow brothers and the caretakers of the house. He fell asleep in the Lord on April 29, 2023, five and a half years after his arrival at the infirmary.

May he rest in peace in the Father's house, enjoying His boundless love.