

LETTER OF ERIC.
OUR BROTHER MARIANO PUGA

16 March 2020

"I shall see the Lord no more in the land of the living. No longer shall I behold my fellow men among those who dwell in the world. My dwelling, like a shepherd's tent, is struck down and borne away from me; you have folded up my life, like a weaver who severs the last thread..." (Isaiah 38: 11-12).

"There is such a thing as a good death. We are responsible for the way we die. We have to choose between clinging to life in such a way that death becomes nothing but a failure, or letting go of life in freedom so that we can be given to others as a source of hope." (Henri Nouwen, Life of the Beloved).

Beloved Brothers,

feeling deeply both gratitude for the gift and sadness for the loss, I announce to you the passing of our big brother, dear friend and a living icon in the fraternity, MARIANO PUGA CONCHA from Santiago, Chile. He passed away last 14 March 2020 at 88 years old. He died of lymphatic cancer.

Allow me to honor the soul brotherhood we had with Mariano with the following lines. My first encounter with Mariano was in Cairo General Assembly in 2000. Prior to his election as general responsible, his presence in the assembly was like a virus contaminating us with joy and laughter with his delightful singing accompanied by an accordion. Little did I know that these songs were from the slums of Santiago, very jovial and empowering and never depressing. He



was like a troubadour singing with his lungs and heart the dreams and aspirations of his people in Santiago. His wild spirit and joy-filled music captivated me. My second encounter was in the US in 2002. He was visiting US fraternity while I was in a sabbatical. The late Howard Caulkins, another dear friend proposed that if I would come with him to the country assembly in Minnesota then, he would drive me to Mepkin Abbey where I would spend my sabbath year as monastic guest. We did drive together and there, I met Mariano again. Very easily, we reconnected, soul to soul, in a deeply personal and intimate way. I

was sharing with him my crisis with the Church, with my personal demons and with God and I never felt so listened to. He simply embraced me tightly like an elder brother comforting a younger brother, with tears in his eyes, feeling my pain. Then, he smiled at me with these soothing words, "It will be okay." We parted ways with a promise to hold each other in prayer – I to the Abbey and him to Tammanraset. My more recent encounter with him was last year in Cebu during the General Assembly. At 88, travelling across the globe took a heavy toll on him. He was hospitalized twice, and in both times, I was with



him. The sage in him was calling me to come out from the tomb of my pretense and share personal testimonies. We easily reconnected, brother to brother, valuing each of our stories, at the emergency room (where he stayed for 5 hours) then, inside his room (which he vehemently resisted for he wanted to stay at the ward with the poor people), until very late in the evening. Then, with a smile on his face, he whispered to me, "the assembly has just finished, I could now go home." I went home that night, so humbled yet so enriched by

this soul-full exchange, our review of life which for Mariano is at the heart of any assembly of brothers.

Allow me to share also some lines which Fernando Tapia wrote to me about Mariano. "Mariano was a passionate seeker of God and a lover of Jesus of Nazareth. The encounter with Him through the poor of a dump changed his life forever. He left everything and entered the seminary. Here he met Charles de Foucauld and followed his spirituality until the end of his life. He was a spiritual father and formator at the seminary of Santiago.

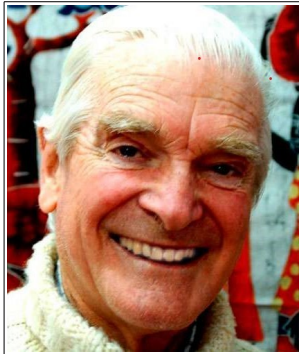
Then he became a worker priest for more than 30 years of his life sharing in the lives of the poor. He always lived among them. He was their pastor, defender during the time of military dictatorship of Pinochet, suffered being imprisoned 7 times. He promoted a church committed to the poor. He preached many retreats in Chile and outside of Chile. He was a man of prayer, of joy, close to everyone, a friend of believers and non-believers, a missionary to the peripheries of the Chilean society, following in the footsteps of Bro Charles. The gospel was his guide which he wanted to cry with his own life."

Mariano, brother, friend, thank you very much. Thank you for your wild witness of a wild God in Jesus of

Nazareth. I share the gratitude and the grief of the poor people of Santiago whom you have touched by your witness. May Jesus, the Good Shepherd welcome you to your new abode for eternity which he prepared for those who are faithful.

Brothers, I pray with Mariano that in our meetings and assemblies, we continue to risk sharing our poverty and vulnerability to one another. It is our poverty that unites, qualifies and liberates us as brothers-in-fraternity. The same is our springboard for mission with the poor, as we said in Cebu. May it also be our humble yet firm resolve to share in the missionary life of Jesus of Nazareth with the poor in the footsteps of Bro Charles.

With my fraternal embrace,



Eric LOZADA