

Rev. Proceso Marcelo

THE FAITHFUL GARDENER

Jonnie Aristorenas Anzures

*One of the country's most respected radio evangelist, Reverend Proceso "Ka Esong" Marcelo started Hardin ng Panalangin (Prayer Garden) in 1958 when he was still a reporter assigned to the Malacañang Press Office. Ka Esong saw barrels of unread telegrams addressed to then President Ramon Magsaysay. This gave him the idea of a radio program where requests could be prayed for on-air. He believed that, unlike the telegrams, they would surely reach God. Today, **Hardin ng Panalangin** is the longest-running program over 702 DZAS (an AM station of the Far East Broadcasting Company – Philippines).*

It's been a long three hour drive back from an evangelistic film-showing crusade in a remote Batangas town. Even during a brown out, the senior evangelist continued to preach to the farmers, fishermen and housewives. And now, at almost twelve midnight, he was driving back to his office at the FEBC Compound in Valenzuela City.

Throughout the whole ride, his twenty four year old companion slept. Ironically, the senior citizen was behind the wheel through dark, rough roads and fast-moving trucks at the expressway. Everyone who was with him was very tired that night, but the evangelist was strong and alert despite his age. When they reached the office, his companion slept again at the men's dormitory – and woke up at 10:00 AM.

In contrast, this "driver", Reverend Proceso Marcelo, was already awake hours before his 5:30 AM prayer time program – *Hardin ng Panalangin*.

For for fellow DZAS employees and for other Christians who know Ka Esong, his life and ministry is legendary – inspiring both worthy emulation and

gratitude to the Lord for raising up a man who has dedicated most of his life to sow the seeds of God's Word.

Nipped in the “Bad”

Ka Esong's grandparents and parents were farmers, who raised him and his siblings in a religious background. Fear of God and honoring one's parents were virtues instilled in him at a very early age. Growing up in poverty, he also learned not to fear the pressures and trials of life – learning to persevere regardless of the situation he found himself in.

During World War II, Ka Esong enlisted with the Philippine guerillas. After the war, he became a soldier of the 2nd Squadron of the 7th Cavalry of the United States Army. He then became a military police and security guard after the US Army left the Philippines.

“My favorite attire was a white long-sleeved polo, khaki pants, a .45 caliber pistol at my side, and a jacket on my back – all of that in the sweltering heat of the Philippines!” He was so fascinated with his career in law enforcement that he aspired to become a member of the National Bureau of Investigation.

But just as he was getting used to the lawman image, he used his firearms in the wrong manner.”This all changed, however, when I first knew the Lord as my only Savior,” he said. “Instead of bringing me to the NBI, the Lord brought me to BBI (Bethel Bible Institute).”

Faith Taking Roots

In 1948, his brother forced Ka Esong to work with him at FEBC – Philippines. Every morning before they began work, he was required to attend a thirty-minute Bible study led by Reverend Max D. Atienza, a preacher and broadcaster of 702 DZAS.

“We studied the Gospel of John. Before we finished chapter three, I learned that what mattered was having a relationship with God – not merely having religion. I fully surrendered my life to God and declared as Jesus had

said, ‘Not my will, but Thine, be done.’” Later, following the guidelines set by the Bible, Ka Esong was baptized in the once pristine Tullahan River by Reverend Anacleto Lacanilao.

Ka Esong started out at FEBC – Philippines as a compound guard. Thereafter, he was assigned to construction and electronic projects like the assembly and repair of portable missionary radios or PMs. He eventually became a broadcaster in the early 1950s and had the privilege of sharing God’s Word with Reverend Atienza.

Never a Bed of Roses

Christian life wasn’t exactly a bed of roses for Ka Esong. Like most of us, he too had to work hard and sacrifice his conveniences and pride to pursue his calling. “When I was in seminary, I used to walk from FEBC to BBI because I didn’t have enough money for public transportation. Money was still tight years later, and I even had to borrow a three-piece suit for my wedding!”

These and many more humorous and humbling anecdotes served as reminders to Ka Esong that “God is indeed our Jehovah Jireh, the Great Provider”.

From humble beginnings, the Lord has been graciously blessing Ka Esong with more opportunities to enlarge his “garden” – places to plant God’s Word. “The most memorable trips in my ministry were with the Billy Graham Crusades in Switzerland, Amsterdam and Puerto Rico. I also had the privilege of preaching with Dr. Billy Graham in Hong Kong. I’ve also had the opportunity to minister to seven Canadian provinces and all fifty states of the USA.”

Sowing the Seeds of God’s Word

Ka Esong likes to plant vegetables, fruit trees, and ornamental flowers in his yard. But his gardening hobby has taught him more than just basic botanical pointers.

“One of the greatest lessons I learned from gardening is that it is not enough to plant a garden – one must also tend and cultivate that garden. Furthermore, if you do not plant, you will not harvest.”

For several decades, this faithful gardener has indeed sown, and now harvests not only God’s blessings but the testimonies of people whose lives have changed because of his life and message.