



REV. BRO. RAPHAEL BARA SDB

My dear Confreres,

In the morning hours of 6th February 1992, Rev. Bro. Raphael Bara, sdb., breathed his last in the Mission Hospital, Jorhat. It was 8.15 a.m. when he began his eternal day in the realms of Almighty God. He was 77 years old and 51 glorious years a Salesian.

HIS LAST MOMENTS

His last night in the hospital had been a restless one as several of the previous ones were. Confined to the bed restricted by needles and pipes his last days were one continuous agony. On the last morning visible signs of improvement were noticed. When the nurses came for the morning chores he was smiling. Those who kept watch by his bedside during the night, left confident that he would recuperate. But at 8.00 a.m. when the doctor checked his heart and pulse he found that Brother was in the throes of death. Those concerned were informed immediately. It took just few more minutes and his saintly and salesian life reached its fulfilment.

HIS LIFE

Brother Raphael Bara, was born in Anaberi, a village of the District of Gumla in Bihar, on the 14th of December 1914. He was the third of 10 children of Saheba and Julia who were very devout catholics baptised by the great missionary, Fr. Livens. He himself was baptised in February next year. His parents took care of his education early in life. Due to many unfortunate circumstances his studies were done at different schools of Katkahi, Tongo, Gumla, and finally at St. John's, Ranchi he completed his IXth Standard. In 1936 his parents arranged for his marriage. He never wanted to marry. To his luck a certain Francis Barla, from Rowta, Tezpur, Assam, happened to come to Anaberi, and young Raphael decided to leave the marriage proposals aside and proceed to Assam. His father agreed to this mostly because he promised to buy and bring a gun for him. Raphael's father was a very good hunter. That is how the Lord called him to become a salesian. Incidentally, his supposed-to-be-bride went and became a nun.

The first salesian he met was Fr. Michael Devalle, sdb. of Tangla mission. Fr. Devalle appointed him as incharge of the Boarding. The young Raphael full of life began to love those boys and in no time he became their life and their leader. He put all his talents of sports and music and dramatics at their service. He had his initiation into salesian life even before he became one. When Fr. Devalle suggested to him to become a salesian, he was overjoyed and agreed.

In 1939, he applied for the Novitiate. In his application, he wrote in very clear terms that the purpose of his becoming a salesian was not only to work for youth but also to bring Non-Christians to the true religion. He completed his novitiate at Sonada under Fr. Orestes Marengo, sdb. (later Bishop of Dibrugarh) in 1941. He made his profession in the presence of Rev. Fr. Mariano Uguet, sdb. the then Provincial. He had always wanted to be a priest. But at the advice of his novice master, he chose to remain a salesian Brother.

As a professed salesian, Brother Raphael was sent to Don Bosco Tezpur. Our dear Bishop Robert Kerketta, sdb. of Tezpur has vivid memories of him. He was a boy then studying in Cl. III. He relates that during the second world war almost all the Italian and German missionaries were interned. The mission of Tezpur was no exception. On 8th December 1942 all the boarding children of Tezpur Don Bosco tearfully bade farewell to Fr. Francis Lindner who was a German. The mission was left in the hands of Fr. Joseph Dalbroi, sdb. and Fr. E. Gutierrez, sdb. who came to help from the theologate in Shillong. It was at that time Br. Raphael reached there full of life and enthusiasm. He was all in all in the school and in the boarding as the two priests were busy with the mission works. All scholastic and extra-curricular activities were guided by him. He was the soul of discipline and liturgical life. He was firm and demanding but all the boarders were extremely happy under his care.

His pastoral zeal knew no bounds. He was regular in attending the monthly meetings. The Christians who came to the Parish for one reason or another found in Bro. Raphael an understanding elder Brother. He never let a chance of giving an instruction pass

by. In the yearly marriage classes he was ever present to teach and instruct. Even when advanced in age and sick he would be the happiest when asked to instruct the young in Religion. He was an ardent promoter of vocations. He was on the look out for good boys and used to follow them up in their piety and obedience and finally invite them to answer their call of God. Bishop Robert Kerketta is one such vocation.

In 1950, the Provincial Fr. A. Pianazzi, sdb. transferred him to Don Bosco Dibrugarh. There, he found in Bishop Orestes Marengo, his erstwhile novice master a real father and friend. So much so when he was asked to go to Don Bosco Guwahati on transfer in 1953 the parting was difficult. Fr. Antony Alessi, the then Provincial appointed him as teacher and boarding master in Don Bosco Guwahati.

At Don Bosco Guwahati his qualities as a Hindi teacher and artful hockey player made him very popular. He took degree in the Hindi language and passed with IInd Rank in the Guwahati University. He continued to be the most loved boarding master. He spent 13 long but happy years at Guwahati. In 1966 he was transferred to Savio Juniorate, Mawlai. He was a helper to Fr. Joseph Marchesi, the prefect of the house. Besides this he was a teacher of Hindi and Assamese to the aspirants. Many aspirants of those days are priests now. They can testify to the fact that Bro. Raphael made his students love these languages. No one can overestimate the importance of the same in the missions. His stay in the aspirantate was only for four years.

In 1970 Bro. Raphael was called upon by the Provincial to go to the mission of Golaghat which was undergoing some serious crisis. He accepted his obedience courageously since he understood the problem. He found himself in the company of the veteran mission of Golaghat Fr. Felix Bolini, sdb. He would often recall those first days and praise the courage and spirit of Fr. Bolini, Fr. Chacko Kakkanatt, sdb. and Fr. Terrence D'Souza. He served the mission as Headmaster of Don Bosco School and boarding master. He had to face very difficult situations. He had many people who had organized themselves against him. But his conviction, spirit of discipline and faith in prayer brought about

lasting changes. Soon the school and the boarding were full of life and regularity. Bro. Raphael met and talked things over with all those who had problems with the mission. He was dealing with his own people many of whom had come from his own native place in Bihar. It was largely due to him that nomalcy returned to Golaghat missions. Bro. Raphael lived and sacrificed himself in this mission for 22 fruitful years.

HIS ILLNESS

As he was advancing in years many health problems began to crop up. He had been suffering from skin eczema on both his legs. He never complained about it. The only time he would mention his sickness was when it interfered with his duties towards his boys. In March 1990, while on a visit to Tezpur, he was suddenly taken ill. In the hospital the doctors declared that he was suffering from diabetes. After necessary treatment he returned to Golaghat. But he was no more the same spirited man. The constant medications, restrictions, rest and dieting all made him feel that he could not be as useful to the mission as before. He found consolation in prayer. He would spent long hours in prayer in the church. But he made it a point to attend all the community practices.

His health began to fail. Several times he had to be taken to hospital in critical conditions. Fortunately for us all Bro. Raphael came back always happy but never completely healed. In November 1990, Fr. Theophil Ganlari, sdb., his Rector took him to his native place to see all his relatives. Before he left, he told the community that he was going to visit them for the last time. We never took it so seriously!

The year 1991 was a very happy one for Bro. Raphael. It was the golden Jubilee year of his profession as well as the foundation of the Golaghat mission. He was lucky to celebrate the same at Bandel with some of his companions in January 1991. The Catholic community of Golaghat felicitated him in the month of August. As a Province all the confreres rejoiced with him in October the same year.

As the year came to a close, his health gave way. Most of his time he had to spend closed up in his room. He was becoming forgetful. The community at Golaghat took great care of him. It was clear that he too was becoming pessimistic about his recovery. On 22nd January 1992, he took very seriously ill. He had gone for a stroll around the farm after his 'Siesta'. On his return at 3.30 p.m. he collapsed in front of his room. Fr. E.C. Michael, sdb. who happened to be near supported him and helped him to his bed. By 4.45 p.m. he joined the community for tea with no sign of illness. But he was urged to take medicines and rest. At 7.30 p.m. when supper was taken to his room he was found fallen on the floor of his bathroom, struggling to rise. Doctor was called in at once. He advised immediate hospitalization. In the same night Fr. Anto Tharakan, sdb. took him to mission hospital Jorhat where he was admitted. There he remained until he gave himself to God on 6th February 1992.

FUNERAL

The Rua Home community, Jorhat prepared his body for burial and organized a solemn Mass for the repose of his soul. Then, his body was taken to Golaghat mission where he had spent his last years. All those who knew him both Christian and non-Christian came to pay their last respects and to pray for the repose of his soul. On 7th February, his mortal remains were taken to Salesian college, Dimapur where many confreres, friends, acquaintances from far and near joined to mourn his death. Since the SPCI meeting was held in Dimapur in those days, all the salesian provincials together with the Regional superior concelebrated the funeral mass. Bishop Thomas Menamparambil of Dibrugarh presided over the Requiem Mass, during which Fr. Thomas Panakezham, sdb. the Regional preached focussing on Bro. Raphael's simple and holy life as a salesian Brother. At the grave, Very Rev. Fr. Scaria Nedumala, sdb. Provincial of Dimapur in his oration gave a touching farewell to the dear departed in the name of the Province. Bishop Mathai of Diphu of happy memory who was present on the occasion extolled Bro. Raphael's deeply convinced religious life. Finally he was laid to await the resurrection.

HIS MESSAGE TO US

It is not easy to summerise the greatness of this simple salesian Brother. It is in place to reflect upon his life a little as he is no more with us. All those who knew him will agree that Brother Raphael was a person for all. He was at home in the company of both young and old, and even the very young. He was a convinced Religious who loved Jesus deeply. One job that he prided in was preaching about Jesus. Whenever he instructed, took catechism classes, or prepared children for the sacraments there was a joy on his face that was very contagious. He would never miss a chance to speak to the people about Jesus and Mary. He prepared his instructions. He made use of his talents of Music and dramatics for furthering the Jesus-knowledge. There are still several popular songs composed by him in vogue.

His love for the Blessed mother was very evident. After the daily mass he took a few minutes off in front of the Mother's statue. The holy rosary was his constant companion especially towards the end of his mortal life. Month of May devotions was always organized by him. He enjoyed giving sermonettes. He would ask those whom he invited to join priestly life to pray to our Lady daily.

Bro. Raphael's love for the boys cannot be easily measured. He could spent hours on end in their company edifying them with his stories and songs. Even when his ailments constrained him he made it a point to be around when the boys worked or played. He kept them active with his inventiveness, competitions, dramatics and all that his talents inspired.

He loved his vocation as a Salesian Brother. He never spoke of any regrets. This is more evidenced in the way he spoke about Don Bosco and the congregation. The respect and veneration he showed towards those in ecclesiastical authority was something remarkable. The most tangible way in which he showed that he appreciated his vocation was when he attracted and invited his students to become priests or brothers. Wherever he worked he made it a point to call and challenge youngsters to accept God's invitation. Bishop Robert can testify to this. He met Brother Raphael in the boarding. He writes, 'It was actually Brother

Raphael who sowed the seed of vocation in my heart'. There are many priests and brothers in the North East who discerned God's call through his simple open method of challenge and invitation.

Brother Raphael was a man of prayer. He would spent long hours in the church in personal prayer and other common devotions. He always was present for the community prayers. Even when he found it hard to read the common prayers he insisted on just being together with the confreres. He was very regular with his manifestation and spiritual directoin. Fr. Theophil who was his Rector during his last years was his student erstwhile, says how meticulous and sincere he was. He never missed his weekly confessions. Very often his confessors were the ones whom he had taught and trained.

CONCLUSION

I have pin-pointed these few outstanding marks of his life so that we can together say the Brother Raphael truly was 'The Lord's Good and faithful servant'. All of us who knew him will feel his absence. We all sympathised with him in his sufferings, comforted him when he was stricken, and assisted him in his helplessness. We have reason to mourn his death. Let us not be like those without hope. Let us look up whence Bro. Raphael smiles at us and tells us about himself, 'For me to live is Christ and to die is gain.'

Yours affectionately in Don Bosco

Fr. PAULINUS CHEMA PALAYIL, sdb.

Rector and Parish Priest
Catholic Church – Golaghat.

Necrology :

Born on : 14. 12. 1914, at Anaberi, Bihar, India

Profession : 06. 01. 1941

Death : 06. 01. 1992
