
He was a religious for 69 years and a priest for 57 years.
Fr. Francis Marmol died at Bandel, India, on May 20th, 1974, at the age of 88.



Bandel Church
Hooghly P.O. & Dt.
W. Bengal, India.
10-6-1975.

Dear Confreres,

The Angel of Death has deprived us of another valiant confrere and stalwart among Salesian missionaries when Fr. Francis (de Paula) Chamorro Marmol passed away from us on the 20th May, 1974. For the just death is a welcome release from the pains and miseries of this world. Fr. Nana, as we affectionately called him, passed away sweetly at 6-20 a.m., Monday 20th. Few of us confreres and boys were with him to see him off to eternity. More would have been present but we hardly suspected that he was so impatient to go to heaven.

A few days before his death, he began to lose appetite. But as it was mid-summer, we ascribed it to the heat as it had happened before. But when he ate little or nothing for more than a day, we were concerned and summoned the house doctor. We coaxed him to eat but he could not. He was evidently exhausted. The doctor prescribed some injection which we administered almost at once but his reaction to the injection was nil. His reflexes were very poor. The day dragged on and during the night we took no chances and kept vigil at his bedside. That morning he had received communion. We anointed him in the presence of all the confreres. There was no improvement. By 6 a.m. the next day we felt he was nearing the end of his journey here on earth. We started to recite the litany for the

dying and hardly had we reached the end of it when he gasped for breath and gave his soul to God. It was such a calm exit from this world of miseries and pains into a state of joy and unalloyed happiness. Fr. Doro at once celebrated mass for him in the room where he had heard mass so often ; while the community gathered in the chapel to offer mass for the repose of his heroic soul.

Fr. Marmol was born on 1st October, 1886 of Peter and Dolores at Jerez de la Frontera, Cadiz, Spain. He was baptised at the parish church of St. Michael. His mother died when he was very tiny and he jestingly used to say that they used to give him sherry instead of milk, sherry of which Jerez de la Frontera was famous. He entered the Salesian school of the Blessed Sacrament in September 1898. Young Francis was sent to the novitiate at Seville on September 15th, 1903. He received the clerical habit from the hands of V. Rev. Fr. Peter Ricaldone on 29th November, 1903. He pronounced his triennial vows on August 15th, 1905 and the perpetual on 21st September, 1911. He did his practical training at Andalucia, Seville, Spain. He was always known for his constant cheerfulness and fun. This characteristic he had right up to his last days. He learnt music and could play any instrument of the brass band. Of course, his favourite instrument was the clarinet. When he was no longer able either to play these instruments or teach others to do the same, how his fingers would snap out the rhythm and his feet keep the time when the Bandel boys played their band at concerts and academies where he made it a point to be present. This knowledge of music stood him in good stead in his practical life and even in the missions, as we shall see.

He read the Biographical Memoirs of Don Bosco very carefully and took down abundant notes which he put to good account as a priest in the missions. He was ordained a priest on 22nd December, 1917 at Cordoba. After his ordination he was successively at Cordoba, Rondo College and finally at Las Palmas Canarias till 1925 when he volunteered to go to the missions.

In 1925, V. Rev. Fr. P. Ricaldone sent a circular asking for volunteers for the missions. That was the golden jubilee of Salesian Missions. Fr. Francis Marmol volunteered. He was sent to Turin. When there, the Superiors wanted to send him to the missions at Equador. But as only trained agriculturists were allowed into that country, he was ordered to our agricultural school at Cumiana to train himself for that line of work, and obtain a diploma. But Divine Providence had other plans. After four or five months of that, he was recalled and assigned to the missions in Assam. He set sail for Bombay on 31st December, 1925 in the company of Fr. M. Uguet and Fr. A. Pianazzi.

Once in Shillong, Fr. Mathias assigned him to help Fr. Piasecki, a Pole, at Gauhati. He had no time to prepare himself for the enormous task that lay ahead of him. He did not know any English, much less Hindi or Assamese, to tackle the new task. But with his great spirit of faith and phenomenal optimism he launched into the new and strange task. Fr. Dal Broi, who had worked by his side for some time, reminisces : When I first met him, "he looked older for his years. But his spirit of joviality never left him. More than once we had the chance of seeing him play the 'tamburello' and singing a 'jota' with the zest and enthusiasm that would beat any modern youngster strumming his guitar. At Gauhati there was a middle school, a technical school, a convent of the OMND Christians and the whole of the Brahmaputra Valley extending from Dhubri to Dibrugarh and beyond. Now there are the dioceses of Tura, part of the archdiocese of Shillong, Dibrugarh, Tezpur and Imphal-Manipur ! Fr. Marmol was touring most of the time. Both roads and vehicles were very primitive then. Father did not cycle and so most of the

journey had to be done on foot or at best by bullock-cart." When trains were available he made use of them too. Once he was waiting patiently for a train and grew rather impatient when it was delayed. The station master was fascinated by this priest and asked him why he was so upset. "Why? I have so many of my children waiting for me at home." "How many children?" asked the station master, wishing to strike up a conversation. "A hundred and twenty," the priest shot back. "A hundred and twenty?!" exclaimed the incredulous officer. "And how many wives have you?"

Every month he was touring for 20 to 26 days at a stretch. It was impossible not to be a victim to malarial infection. Often he came home to go to bed. Often he had very strong attacks. In his personal diary, he notes that he was already sick in 1927. On December 11th, 1927, he was taken by Mgr. Mathias to Calcutta General Hospital where he stayed from the 12th to 29th. His diary jottings show that he was very often sick of the same malady. This will explain why he was so shattered in health to the end of his days and which made him look so old and feeble and stooped.

Mgr. O. Marengo was a young cleric when Fr. Marmol was in Gauhati. He recalls: "I was a young cleric at the threshold of my Salesian life and Fr. Marmol was a mature Salesian in his forties with many years of Salesian experience. In a truly Salesian way he forgot the difference in age and experience and was to me and the other clerics just an elder brother, a companion and a friend. He was of a cheerful disposition which endeared him to all especially to the boarders whose souls he directed as confessor and whose bodies he cared for as a patient and skilled infirmarian. With equal skill and patience he managed to put up a brass band with boys most of whom could scarcely read and write."

Fr. Uguet recollects that Fr. Nana had neither the time nor the opportunity to pick up English nor any Indian language well. He just managed. Sometimes, his words didn't express what he wanted. When Fr. Ricaldone came as extraordinary visitor to Assam, he came also to Gauhati. Fr. Marmol wanted the boys to cheer him. So, he yelled out: "Phadhar Ricaldone ki jao!" The boarders were aghast. He shouted even louder, this time at least expecting an enthusiastic response. There was a sullen silence. One of the brothers who knew a little more Hindi, realizing the mistake, shouted: "Phadar Ricaldone ki jai!" This time the boys joined in an enthusiastic chorus: "Ki jai."

Soon, the parish of Gauhati was divided and the parish of Dibrugarh was carved out. Fr. Piasecki was appointed as its first ever parish priest. This 'Lion of Brahmaputra' as his confreres affectionately called him, had to start all over again on virgin soil. In 1928 Fr. Marmol was transferred to Dibrugarh to help the 'Lion'. Mgr. Marengo again recalling those days, writes: "I was sent to help him in 1933 when Fr. Piasecki went to Poland to collect funds for the church at Dibrugarh and I spent with Fr. Marmol the best part of one year . . . this is only a way of saying because we actually saw little of each other. Looking after some 14,000 Catholics scattered over a pretty vast area kept us very busy. The day either of us arrived from the tour, the other was preparing to leave."

Fr. Marmol was repeatedly sick yet as soon as he could stand, he was at his task again. Once the doctor ordered him to desist from touring as it was killing him. But he couldn't help. Again in 1935, he was back at the General Hospital in Calcutta. He complains in his diary on January 21st, 1936: "After having spent three months in the hospital, I go out without being alright."

A few days after he was thus discharged from the hospital, he went to Krishnagar. Here again he was constantly on the move going to Bongaon,

Jessore, Shimulia, Khulna. Often he would travel to Bandel for the monthly retreat and confessions. He even celebrated, in 1937, his Christmas mass in the royal palace at Murshidabad. In 1938 he was definitively transferred to C.O.P. For a time he substituted Fr. Woollaston at Bandel as prior.

In 1951, he was transferred to Liluah as confessor. He did this ministry with true apostolic zeal and unflagging energy. When the new house at Cossipore was opened, he was sent there again as confessor. His stay there was not long as the political ferment made it impossible for us to continue there. The saddest day dawned when the staff, including Fr. Nana, was subjected to a gherao which Fr. Nana recalled with great regret. His frail health could not stand that ordeal and he was brought here to Bandel. In a short time he was his old genial self again.

He had a big warm heart, always ready and willing to help and most grateful for the least favour done to him. I know this from personal experience. For the last few years, either he celebrated or mass was celebrated for him in his room as he could not negotiate the formidable flight of steps to the seminary chapel and back. When mass was over, he would smile and make a sincere gesture of thanks. So he was to all.

He was a Salesian to the core. He always loved the young and felt young even when he stooped with age and weariness. Youth is not a matter of chronological age but an attitude of mind and Fr. Nana's attitude was that of a young man. He was greatly attached to the community no matter in which community he was. Old and feeble as he was, he never wanted to miss any community celebration. Whenever and wherever there was some noise, he wanted to be there. He loved the fun and frolic of the boys. He would drag himself to the refectory of the confreres just to be with us. Once he slumped into his chair, he would look around beaming with joy. When boys were at play, he would sit by and assist and call, may be a young assistant, and point out the good ones and warn him about the naughty ones.

He complained of no one and no one complained of him at any time. He was all things to all men.

He was most obliging to his confreres and boys. He was always ready to do whatever his superiors asked of him. He would amuse us at table with his knife-swallowing trick. He did it with such grace and simplicity that we often asked for an encore and he seldom refused. When he was well, he obliged us with a Spanish song.

His sense of poverty was very edifying. He owned hardly anything to which a value could have been attached. When I examined what he had when he died, there was nothing that one could class as being of any value. He never even complained if he did not have something that he needed.

Dear confreres, I have kept you long over this biography. I do hope that this simple narration has enkindled in you, as it has done in me, some more love of our dear congregation that can produce such great men of such calibre. May his life be an added incentive for us to emulate his Salesian virtues and we can do him no better service. Though we have lost him, we have lost him to heaven. As we celebrate the centenary of the Salesian missions, let us promise Don Bosco that we will follow in the wake of such heroes he has inspired.

As we join our hands in prayer for the repose of his saintly soul, pray also for this seminary and for

your brother in Jesus Christ.
Fr. T. Polackal, S.D.B., Rector.