

SALESIAN HIGH SCHOOL
323-2 CHUNG HUNG DONG
KWANGJU, CHUNNAM 500
KOREA



KOREA, October 1, 1984,

Dear Confreres,

It is with regret that I communicate to you the death of our confrere

FR. ARCHIMEDE MARTELLI

at 67 years of age, 51 of mission life, in KwangJu, Chunnam Korea on August 6, 1984.

Fr. Martelli was born in Mantova Italy on the 23rd of November 1916 and spent most of his life in the Orient working in Japan, China and founding our Salesian work in Korea.

Born into a pious farming family of six children he attended primary school in Mantova until the fourth grade. He finished primary school at the Salesian boarding school in Verona and at fourteen years of age entered the aspirantate in Ivrea. Immediately after his novitiate in Turin in 1932-33 he was sent to Japan where he attended the diocesan seminary in Tokyo. During his practical training he worked alongside Fr. Antonio Cavoli running a small printing press to send a newsletter called 'The Echo from Afar' to benefactors in Italy. The proceeds were to go to the orphans and old folks being taken care of by the Sisters of Charity of Miyazaki, newly founded by Fr. Cavoli under the guidance of Monsignor Cimatti. With the bombing of Pearl Harbor and the start of the war it became even more difficult to look after all the orphans, elderly folks and works of charity, being

fostered by Fr. Cavoli and the Sisters of Charity. So when in 1942 as a newly ordained priest he was asked if he would like to go to Tokyo University to study Japanese culture and history he declined and asked to go to help Fr. Cavoli. There he worked until 1944 when he received a letter from Monsignor Cimatti stating, 'Pack your bags and come immediately to Tokyo.' Monsignor Cimatti asked him to go to Dai Ren, a seaport town in Manchuria. So as usual, always obedient, without a word of hesitation he went by boat to Korea and by rail to Manchuria passing through Pusan, Seoul and Pyung Yang. Little did he dream that ten years later he would spend the rest of his life in the country he was now traveling through. At Dai Ren he was warmly met by Don Liviabella who almost immediately told him you must learn Chinese and English as fast as possible! At that time Dai Ren was a thriving sea port of 400,000 Chinese, 200,000 Japanese and 70,000 white Russians, mostly aristocrats who had fled the revolution. Here he learned English from a Russian Countess and Chinese from a Father P'i (Whom Father Martelli thinks later became a bishop). Then at night to practice both he taught the students of the parish English while practicing his Chinese. He spent three years in Dai Ren before and after the war. The Russian troops had occupied Dai Ren and were terrorizing the populace. At this time occurred the famous episode of Fr. Martelli standing between a group of sisters and three Russian officers pointing pistols at him. He saw the marauders entering through an unlocked door of the convent and bolted between them and the sisters. This tactic gave the sisters a chance to hide and nothing came of the incident.

In 1948 he was back in Japan where he was vice principal and the next year principal of middle schools in Nakatsu and Tokyo. In 1954 he received the obedience to go to Korea. This transpired at the invitation of Archbishop Harold Henry who wanted a school and minor seminary and was willing to entrust it to the Salesians. This became our first work in Korea. The Archbishop bought the land and Fr. Martelli undertook the building of the school with very little means at his disposal. This has now worked itself into 13,000 past pupils among whom are 43 priests. In his later years he considered these priests his greatest accomplishment and always talked of them with pride. In 1980 he retired from his position of principal and kept himself active by extending the work he had always done even as principal and rector; that is, he would go to visit the most forgotten villages, especially those of lepers and other orphanages to see what assistance he could be to them. Be it material or spiritual, if at all possible he would grant the request, even up to a month before his death, although ridden with cancer and complications from it, even while complaining of constant severe headaches, he would seek out these leper friends, say Mass, hear confessions, write for gifts for them. While lying prostrate on his bed in the hospital, passing in and out of consciousness, his greatest concern was for the two weeks of retreat for the 200 leper children that he had organized with the novices. And so he died amidst all the prayers of the confreres, the lepers and the orphans, surrounded by those who loved him and whom he loved.

His funeral was presided over by The Most Rev. Victorinus K. Youn, Archbishop of Kwangju. The Mass of Resurrection was concelebrated by all the clergy of the diocese, and numerous priests from all over the country. Past pupils and people from various parts of Korea chartered buses and came to the funeral in groups. There were so many people that not all could fit into the school auditorium for the funeral. (It was chosen over the church because of the anticipated crowds). After the ceremony a two meter picture was fastened to a car which led the funeral procession. After one turn of the school yard Fr. Martelli was taken for a last ride through all the main streets of Kwangju City of which he was an honorary citizen. Finally he came to rest in the priests' cemetery in the land he had adopted and which had adopted him.

His greatest words were probably 'I have never once in my life regretted the path I have taken.' He was always cheerful in the midst of tribulations and constant preoccupations. 'I have never seen Fr. Martelli angry,' was the constant com-

ment at the funeral. He was a man of the people. He knew how to cry with them and laugh with them. He never said no, treated others kindly and made them feel at ease. To the question, 'Why don't you call the teachers in and reprimand them?' he simply responded, 'I don't want to hurt their feelings.' Even when principal he didn't look for prestige but was always the first to fix, sweep, clean lavatories and do odd jobs. Never showing displeasure or disappointment he went along fearlessly and courageously with hope in the Risen Savior.

The first Salesian seed has fallen to the ground here in Korea. May it continue to bear fruit through the many that follow in the footsteps of Fr. Martelli.

In Saint John Bosco

Fr. Henry Bonetti, SDB

Rector

DATA FOR THE NECROLOGY:

Fr. Martelli, Archimede— Born in Mantova(Italy) on Nov. 23, 1916
Died in Kwangju(Korea) on August 6, 1984
at 67 years of age, 51 of profession and 42
of priesthood.