

SALESIANS OF ST. JOHN BOSCO  
PROVINCIAL OFFICE  
PARANAQUE – MANILA (PHILIPPINES)

August 31st 1976.



Dear Confrere:

The purpose of this letter is to recommend to your fervent prayers the soul of

**Rev. Fr. Leo BARATTONI**

who died at the Mother House in Turin at the age of 64; he was in the 37th year of his religious life and the 39th of priesthood. This brings to three the number of priestly confreres from this province who have passed on to eternity in the brief period of ten months. However we do not see this as a loss: rather we consider it as a gain as we feel sure that now they are our powerful protectors and intercessors in heaven.

Our beloved Fr. Leo Barattoni was a most important member of the community of Bacolor, Pampanga. Never did a word of lament of any indisposition pass his lips. Then one day he went to see the doctor as he had noticed some functional disturbance. Imagine our surprise when we were informed of the doctor's findings: an already-far advanced cancer of the bladder. His verdict: only a major operation at the hands of a specialist offered the slightest hope for keeping Fr. Leo alive. And since no such specialist was available here in the Philippines and considering further the nationality of Fr. Barattoni the doctor recommended was Dr. Ulderico Bracci of Rome.

As Provincial I took upon myself the unpleasant task of informing Fr. Leo of his almost hopeless condition as well as the only remedy that lay in a major operation in Rome.

Fr. Leo's response was one of disarming simplicity and accompanied by the sweetest of smiles:

"But this is nothing; I'm ready for whatever the Good Lord may send. As for going to Rome at this time? Too expensive. I would prefer to stay on here in the Philippines. But God's will be done."

And God's will was expressed through the confreres. On being consulted and on being assured that there was in reality some hope in the event of an operation performed by Dr. Bracci they were all in favour of giving it a try. So without further delay it was decided to send him to Rome: this necessitated almost the imposition of a formal obedience.


No sooner had he arrived at Rome than the Major Superiors through the Missions Office did all they possibly could to arrange as soon as possible the intervention by Dr. Bracci. During the post-operative convalescence Fr. Leo was often visited by both Superiors and Confreres who all showed the keenest interest in the healing process, and who did everything humanly possible to hasten that process in spite of the little hope given by Dr. Bracci, as he had found the cancer wide-spread.

Thinking that some of his native air might do him good Fr. Leo requested and obtained permission to betake himself to his hometown of Piovene. There once again the confreres showered every attention and care upon him; his own brothers and relatives were also involved and he attended the clinic at Schio for the necessary cobalt treatment; Fr. Leo showed his deep appreciation by rewarding them with his optimism and confidence. But he had one deep-felt desire: the return ticket to the Philippines.

Neither Fr. Leo's optimism nor the care and attention of medical personnel and relatives however were able to halt the forward march of the malignancy and soon it became even more evident that all hope for a cure had vanished. At this juncture Fr. Barattoni made yet another typically Salesian request: he wanted to be taken to Turin there in person to ask Our Lady for a miracle or failing that to die near Don Bosco. But upon arriving at Turin it was obvious to all that only a first class miracle could save Fr. Leo. He was immediately admitted to the Hospital of the Cottolengo where doctors and nurses squandered every attention and care on him. But all to no avail as within fifty (50) hours after his arrival he died peacefully surrounded by the admiring confreres of the Mother House.

The solemn funeral was held in the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians; in spite of the fact that it was vacation time when most of the confreres are elsewhere engaged in vacation apostolates still a goodly congregation attended the eucharistic liturgy concelebrated by no less than fifty (50) priests under the presidency of the Provincial Rev. Fr. Felice RIZZINI, participated also in by a large representation of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and many of the faithful who daily frequent our Basilica.





panied to the station by a large crowd of his parishioners as well as a goodly representation of his students both christian and non-christian. All were in tears: Fr. Leo was the only smiling face in the whole crowd; a smile that was only on the surface; inside his heart was breaking. And yet for one and all he was able to find a word of consolation, of comfort, of hope.

After two years spent as assistant parish priest in Florence, and more especially on November 1st 1968 we find him once again leaving for Asia this time for the Philippines; here a vast field of apostolate awaited his limitless zeal; an apostolate shared with so many other confreres like himself expelled from Burma and China.

Fr. Barattoni saw immediately that in addition to English he would need to have a working knowledge of the local dialect and so he set himself to learn Tagalog while at the same time filling the office of administrator of the Seminary-College of Canlubang. His already advanced age (55 years) did not seem to hamper him and so after a short while spent in the study of the language, Fr. Leo was found fully qualified for new responsibility. The Superiors entrusted to him the starting and the organising of the new parish of St. John Bosco in Tondo, the poorest zone of the slum district of Manila. Soon his calm but tireless activity began to produce exceptional results and was to be rewarded with a unique consolation, in the form of a very special encounter with His Holiness Pope Paul VI on the occasion of His visit to the Philippines. Pope Paul expressed the desire to visit the Parish of St. John Bosco and went there surrounded by all the other church dignitaries. Fr. Leo remained with his parishioners. But the Pope wanted to meet the parish priest and so Fr. Leo was invited to join him on the stage where Pope Paul took the stole from his own shoulders and placed it on the shoulders of Fr. Leo as if with that gesture to approve and incite to further zeal the work of Fr. Barattoni and the other Salesians in Tondo.

Shortly after this joyful event Fr. Barattoni was sent as confessor to the Juniorate in Bacolor, Pampanga.

And it was here that the hidden malady made its presence felt and it became necessary for Fr. Leo to enter the hospital and later on return to Italy where death awaited him in Turin.

From this all-too brief summary of the more important events in the life of Fr. Barattoni certain characteristics of his personality leap forth. His simplicity, goodness, humility, amiability, cheerfulness, nobility of heart, sensitivity to the needs of others, readiness to help no matter what the cost, above all his zeal in the field of the apostolate making use of all available means, searching out ever better and more suitable means more especially in the learning of new languages as well as the acquisition of other abilities such as that of musician and artist: all these and others less apparent were used to the best possible advantage. All this is indeed a precious lesson for

his attention to the Burmese language; at the same time he taught liturgy and history to some clerics and never neglected an opportunity of doing some good to the other prisoners.

1946 saw him once again back in Mandalay as Parish priest of St. Joseph's, a post he was to occupy for the next twenty years, until his expulsion from that country. As a parish priest he was most exemplary in his zeal and missionary ardour; he was tireless as confessor for both the community and the young; in his spare time he dedicated himself to teaching and writing booklets in Burmese. From his pen we have no less than 20 such booklets, among which titles such as the lives of Christ, Don Bosco, and Dominic Savio to mention a few. In addition to all this he was very popular as a retreat master for the different orders of religious both male and female then working in Burma. But this picture would be in complete were we to pass over in silence another aspect of his many activities: he still was able to find time to do some painting. How he enjoyed it! And he was pretty good at it. As a matter of fact some of the work done by him during the years in concentration camp could be classified as real genuine masterpieces. But during the active days of Mandalay he looked upon painting as a waste of precious time, time given to self-enjoyment, time that his zeal gave only and totally to the apostolate.

One of his fellow missionaries during those twenty years was Fr. Bartolino Giacomo. He was the daily witness of the total generosity of Fr. Leo to his pastoral work. It made no difference to Fr. Leo whether the temperature read 42 or 44 degrees; the scorching sun of Mandalay did not deter him; he would clamp his sun-helmet on his head, jump on his scooter and hasten away to visit some sick person or bring some other form of relief to some needy person. Every month without fail he journeyed the sixty Kms to be present as confessor to the monthly recollection at the seminary located at Anisakan. He was always available to anyone and everyone no matter what the hour, in the sacred ministry of the confessional. And it was there that he shared with his fortunate penitents those wise and holy counsels that were all heaven orientated.

Then came April 1st 1965. For Fr. Leo as well as for so many other Salesians and missionaries it was to be the saddest day of his whole life. All private schools, and that included our schools of Mandalay and Rangoon, were taken over by the national government and religious were forbidden to engage in any form of scholastic activity. But work in the parish was still possible.

But not for long. Just a year later, and precisely in March, the final blow, the ultimate sorrow: expulsion. Of the ten European confreres then working in Burma eight were expelled and among them our own dear Fr. Leo. Towards the end of July the evening of final separation darkened the horizon. Fr. Barattoni was accom-



At the expressed desire of the relatives of Fr. Leo who wanted the mortal remains to be buried in his hometown the funeral cortege then proceeded to Piovene; here once again the solemn funeral rites were repeated presided over by the Provincial of Verona Very Rev. Fr. Anthony MARTINELLI and participated in by many confreres of that Province and more especially of the Schio community.

We Salesians, working here in the Philippines, have also prayed much and offered many suffrages for the soul of Fr. Leo; right now however we would like to express our deepest gratitude not just to the Major Superiors and the Missions Office but also to the two Provincials and all the confreres of the Central and Veronese Provinces for the wonderful charity they have shown in so many different ways to our dear departed Fr. Leo; in this they have given yet another magnificent witness to that splendid spirit of family and solidarity that still exists within our Mother the Congregation.

Fr. Leo first saw the light of day in Piovene (Vicenza), Italy, on December 21st 1911. For his ecclesiastical studies he entered the seminary of Padua; but even here he already felt called to the foreign missions. His mother however insisted that he should wait until after his ordination before finally deciding. This sacred ordination came in 1937 still in Padua at the hands of the Bishop of Padua. This same bishop did all he possibly could to keep Fr. Leo in his diocese assigning him as chaplain first in Padua itself and subsequently in Cittadelle; but still Fr. Leo could not stifle the desire of giving his energies to the foreign missions.

The first signs of its becoming a reality were seen when Fr. Leo enrolled in the ranks of St. John Bosco. During the school year 1937-38 we find him among the "aspirants" as well as teaching at Bagnolo Piemonte; the following year he made his novitiate at Villa Moglia, and there on Sept. 12th 1939 he made his first religious profession. Now the way was clear. On October 18th of that same year 1939 he set out for India destination Sonada where he was to spend some time in learning English. In 1940 the then Provincial Fr. Scuderi assigned him to the house of Mandalay as catechist; at the same time he was assistant parish priest in the attached parish of St. Joseph's: later on he would be parish priest here for 20 years.

His first preoccupation on reaching Mandalay was to get a working knowledge of Burmese, no easy task due to the many characters, the different tones and the strange grammatical construction. All the while he was battling with Burmese he was also filling his other office as catechist with exemplary zeal.

But all too soon World War II engulfed Burma bringing in its wake five years in concentration camp for Fr. Barattoni and thirteen other confreres. But they were years well spent; those confreres were able to enjoy true community living and Fr. Leo dedicated all

all of us. And yet by far the most precious was his resignation to the will of God when informed of the nature of the sickness that pardons no one. The calmness and imperturbability with which he welcomed death which at that moment was already certain and so near at hand were truly most edifying; and not just at that precise moment but even after timely reflection, giving all who visited him proof of his openness to the divine will. It is in moments such as these that we can best see the maturity of a person, a maturity that is the best fruit of the habitual living of the FIAT of total abandonment in the hands of God.

Never will we forget this wonderful example that Fr. Barattoni has given us: his absolute detachment from everything that is earthly. The one and only goal for his whole life and every activity was God and the salvation of souls.

This gives us every reason to hope that Fr. Leo will already be enjoying even now in heaven above the reward of his very rare virtues, of his zeal in the apostolate, of his many sacrifices, not least among which must be numbered the malady that brought him to an untimely tomb.

When we prayed on the occasion of the death of Fr. Leo it was not just to offer suffrages for his soul but also to thank the Good Lord for the gift He had given the Congregation both in Burma and the Philippines in the person of our dearly beloved Fr. Barattoni.

We are saddened as is but natural at his premature departure for eternity, but we are also gladdened at the thought of his powerful intercession in heaven; and we feel that he will make good use of that intercession on behalf of our vocations both in Burma and here in the Philippines.

Dear Confreres, I know that I can depend on your precious and continued assistance in this as in other difficulties, and

I profess myself to be  
Yours sincerely in Don Bosco,

Fr. Jose Carbonell,  
Provincial Superior.