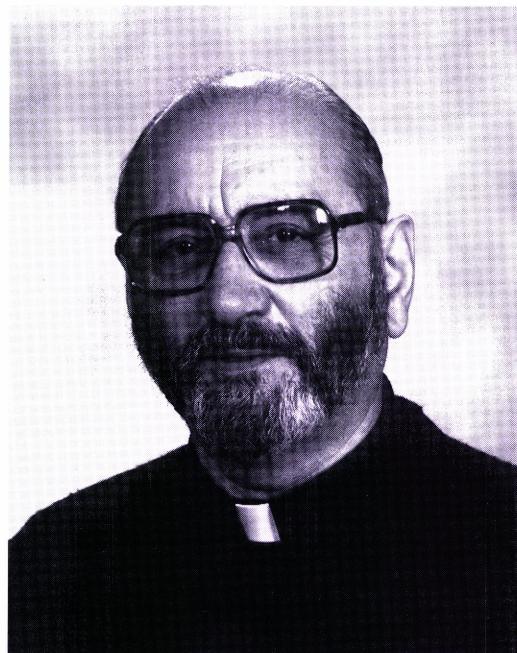




36 B216  
m 1995

# Fr. Felix J. Martocchi, S.D.B.



Father Felix J. Martocchi died in Summit Medical Center in Oakland, California, on October 22, 1995 at the age of 78, 60 of these years as a Salesian of Don Bosco and 49 years as a priest. Father had been living at Mercy Care Center in Oakland for the past two years.

Funeral services for Father Felix were held in the chapel of the Salesian Community in Richmond, California, on Thursday, October 26. The viewing and recitation of the

Rosary at 10:30 a.m., and Mass of Christian Burial at 11:00 were followed by interment in our Cemetery, near the Salesian Residence.

Fr. William Schafer, provincial, was the principal concelebrant, assisted by a good number of Salesians and lay friends of Fr. Felix who came from near and far to pay their respects to a dear friend. In his homily Fr. Schafer read a letter addressed to Fr. Felix by Lilia Nava in the name of all the friends at Mary Help of Christians School in Laredo. It

## *The Early Years*

At the special course of continuing formation which he attended in Rome in 1977 he presented himself to the rest of the class in this fashion: "I was born at Prosto (province of Sondrio), in the diocese of Como, on June 25, 1917, the third of nine children (7 boys and two girls). At 5 years of age I was an altar boy in my parish church and since then I went to Mass (6:30) every day, sunshine, rain, or snow, thanks to mother. Going to el-



Fr. Felix (front row, 5th from the right) with the faculty and Staff of Mary Help of Christians School in Laredo.

read:

"Dearest Father Felix,

I am writing you one final letter to express the love and appreciation that the faculty, staff and entire student body at Mary Help of Christians School have for you. I've spoken to the children about your going away to rest eternally with our creator, and they would like you to know that your presence will forever be felt at school and in our hearts.

The children remember you as a dear friend, a cheerful companion on the playground, a kind priest, and as their father at Mary Help. They also want you to know that they recall each time you opened a car door for them as they arrived on campus, each time you bent down and lovingly tied their shoes, each time you gently pushed them on the swing, and they especially remember each time you reminded them, with a smile on your face, to be a friend in Christ. As faculty and staff, we also know that your memory will live in our hearts. We will never forget how you always took time to ask us about and pray for what we cherish most, our families. For this we thank you and promise to keep you in our prayers. Good-bye for now, Father Felix. Love."

lementary school, and having to pass in front of the church ' I would enter it not for a visit but to "celebrate" Mass."

"After completing the grammar school, my pastor wanted me to enter the seminary, but because of lack of money, he himself taught me for a year. At the end of that year, I entered the diocesan Seminary. In the first year, I was so homesick for the mountains that I tried everything to be dismissed, but the Lord wished otherwise. It was in the Seminary that my vocation to the Salesian life bloomed, thanks to my spiritual director, who was the delegate of the Salesian Cooperators of our region. He would circulate the Salesian Bulletin and the Youth Mission Magazine among the seminarians. And so it happened that I asked the seminary rector to allow me to enter the Salesian Missionary House of Ivrea (Turin). He told me to ask my Bishop, since two years before, three of the seminarians had already entered Ivrea. I paid a visit to Bishop Macchi, a great Salesian Cooperator." (Every year he used to accompany pilgrims to Valdocco; he died while writing the introduction of an edition of the Catholic Readings.)

He told me that he was most happy when seminarians asked him to become a religious, but



*Silvia Martocchi, Fr. Felix's Mother*

especially Salesian missionaries, because it was the Lord that called them.

"I entered the aspirantate at Ivrea on September 8, 1934; I applied for the missions and was accepted; the United States was to be my field of apostolate. I entered

the Novitiate in Newton, NJ, on September 7, 1935 with four other companions from Italy. My first profession was on September 8, 1936 followed by three years of philosophy at Don Bosco College, in Newton, where Fr. Alvin Fedrigotti was the director. The three years of tirocinium found me working in California, first in Richmond (1939-1941), where Fr. Ernest Giovannini was my director; then in Bellflower and Watsonville (1941-1942). Back to Newton I went for my four years of theology (1942-1946) under the pleasant direction of Fr. Ambrose Rossi.

My priestly ordination took place on June 29, 1946 in Newton at the hands of His Excellency Bishop Laravoire Morrow of Krishnagar, India."

Thus ended Fr. Felix's autobiography up to the time of his Priesthood.

#### *His Priestly Ministry*

"Cast your care upon the Lord, and He will support you; never will he permit the just man to be disturbed" (Ps. 54: 23).

Most of Father Felix's life as a priest was spent as a teacher and Catechist (Chaplain) in our junior seminaries, first in Rich-

mond, Ca. (1946-1948, 1950-51, 1955-1957) and subsequently in Watsonville, CA (1948-1955, 1958-1981). "I left my heart in Watsonville," he would often repeat with nostalgia since he spent 30 years there, in various capacities: teacher, director of religious activities, financial administrator. He spent the better part of 1948 as associate pastor at St. Patrick's Church in Los Angeles. He taught for two years (1957-58) at the Don Bosco Technical Institute in Rosemead. In September 1981 he joined the staff of our St. Mary's Salesian School in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. He loved to work among resident students. Here he remained until obedience called him to Laredo, Texas, (1986) where he resided in our Parish of St. Luis Rey, rendering faithful service for six years to the Salesian Sisters at their Mary Help of Christians School until he fell sick and was transferred to Mercy Care Center in Oakland (1993).

In 1986 Father Martocchi's fourtieth anniversary of his ordination to the priesthood was celebrated most solemnly at St. Mary's School in Edmonton. Archbishop J. N. MacNeil of Edmonton sent him his congratulations stating that "you have been the willing channel of the Lord's love, mercy, care, guidance and support. The honor is a great one."

Fr. Felix was to celebrate his fiftieth anniversary next June 29. Instead, he will celebrate it with other Salesians in the heavenly garden to-

*Fr. Felix and his classmates at the Salesian Missionary House of Ivrea*





Felix with his relatives after his first Mass at his home parish

gether with his companions Alphonse DiCairano, Aloysius Bianchi and John Faita.

### ***Saved By a Miracle***

*"Only in God is my soul at rest, from Him comes my salvation" (Ps. 61: 2).*

On September 29, 1956 in Richmond, while assisting in the playground with the aspirants, he accidentally fell and suffered a skull fracture, which in turn caused a brain concussion with the rupture of brain blood vessels. "A week later" Fr. Felix narrates in his diary, "I underwent surgery to remove the coagulated blood. The doctors had given me up. Instead, on October 12th I was released from the hospital. And on November 3rd I was back in the classroom as a full time teacher and stayed on for 25 years."

To be sure, there remained effects from that fatal fall throughout his remaining years. Insomnia was frequent; his eyesight was impaired in one eye and so was his hearing. He complained often of strong headaches which he tried to ease with medication. He was an example in the way he was able to bear this cross with resignation throughout his remaining years.

### ***His Final Passage***

At Mercy Center confreres attended him regularly. Br. Martinez, as the advocate for the elderly, visited him frequently. In this last year he continually complained of shortness of breath, sleepless nights and lack of appetite.

On Sunday, October 22, Fr. Mario Mich, the director of the Provincial House in San Francisco, paid him a visit and found him in a much calmer mood. He recited with him the Blessing of Mary Help of Christians and, after saying a few encouraging words, left him. One hour later, Father Felix expired saying to his nurse that he was ready to go to heaven. It was 12:30 in the afternoon.

### ***Memories and Testimonies***

The Psalmist proclaims: *"Blessed be the Lord. the God of Israel. who alone does wondrous deeds"* (Ps. 71:18). Father Felix was a willing instrument in his priestly life and cooperated generously with the grace of God. Our Lord Jesus said to his disciples : *"You are the salt of the earth.... You are the light of the world. Your light must shine before all so that they may see goodness in your acts and give praise to your Father in heaven."* (Matt. 5:13-16).

I believe that at this point I should present witnesses to the "gospel salt" that gave taste and to the "gospel light" that shone forth in the life of Fr. Felix Martocchi. They are many. Let me just quote a few.

Father Felix spent most of his summers at camp, whether it was at Camp St. Francis, Camp Salesian or Camp St. Mary. It was in these various camps that he especially demonstrated his deep Oratorian Salesian spirit. A favorite camp of his was Camp Salesian in Middletown, CA.

Father Larry Byrne, who was associated with him at this camp from the 1984 season on, writes

his impressions of Fr. Felix's camp apostolate.

"Father was unobtrusive but very effective. He was an example to all of us in his attendance at practices of piety- morning and evening prayers, visits to the Blessed Sacrament and of course his daily Mass.

"To the campers he was daily confessor during their Mass. I can still picture him with a constant flow of boys on the office porch. Then again, his Good-Nights were always eagerly listened to by the campers and staff. We could never calculate the immense spiritual effect Felix had on the boys: he was an ever present counselor and comforter for the boys who were in need.

Camp activity-wise, Felix never hid himself. He was always "visible". His specialty was the Arts and Crafts. But he did not limit himself to the craft room; he wandered around through the other activities while carving some wood, knitting multicolored lanyards and other such like items. The net result of this was that the campers not actually engaged in activities gathered around Fr. Felix. So, repeating a phrase used above, Fr. Felix was the unobtrusive but very effective Salesian assistant and sower of the Salesian Spirit.

"I have lost a loyal friend on earth but gained a powerful advocate in Don Bosco's Garden in Heaven."

From Mary Help of Christians School in Laredo, Texas, where Fr. Felix was chaplain for the last seven years of his active life, comes this testimony: "Fr. Felix was a very fervent Salesian," writes Sr. Antoinette Pollini, "who loved his mission and all those involved, the families, the people and the children. Hence, they were indebted to him, loved him and kept in touch with him even though distance separated them. He was the right hand for the Sisters and the school children ... always ready to celebrate the daily Mass and to administer the Sacraments."

Last September, Sr. Anita visited Fr. Felix for the first time at Mercy Center. She sent in this comment: "I had the impression that Fr. Felix was a V.I.P. ... the wall in his room over his desk was bedecked with photos of children, families, friends and benefactors. The boxes at the side of his desk were packed with mail (answered and

to be answered). How these people loved him! His ardent love of his missionary life in bringing the words of Don Bosco, his love for Mary Help of Christians and the Preventive System to so many people and the Texan families he encountered in his mission; from the letters he received, it was evident he was not only greatly loved and respected, but people also prayed for his recovery."

I can certainly confirm this testimony by the fact that he had stored up in boxes hundreds of photos of events sent to him by the kids that he loved. He would shed tears looking at them. As long as his strength allowed he always answered his mail.

Sister Sylvia Castillo states: "Fr. Felix was a father to the youth. He was caring, gentle, and prudent. We and they loved him. They kept up their relationship through writing... the pictures

*Fr. Felix helps a little girl in need*





*Fr. Felix with the Cub Scouts, Mary Help of Christians School, Laredo, Texas*

and letters spoke for them. He was dear to their hearts even though he was miles away."

A precious remembrance that was sent to me is that of Barbara Hughes, of Salinas, California, at whose marriage Fr. Felix officiated, visiting her home on various occasions. He was very special to her two daughters as well.

"I worked with Father Felix the last year St. Francis School was open in Watsonville. While our joint tenure as teachers was very short, we remained in touch throughout his years in Edmonton, Laredo, and finally at Mercy Center. During this time many things impressed me about this quiet, prayerful man of God.

Father Felix had a keen interest in the Salesian students as well as all the people associated with him. I can't imagine how many photo albums he had collected through the years. Somewhere there must be a very detailed photo timeline of his life. His interest in people was more than just pictures or surface details. He made it a point to really get to know his students. While he never cut them any slack for uncrossed "t's" in spelling tests or transposed numbers in math, he had a genuine compassion for them. Truly dedicated to his mission of educating future Salesians as well as leaders and citizens of God's world on earth, he never hesitated to sacrifice himself in an effort to inspire their excellence. Perseverance and striving for one's individual best was what Father Felix wanted to instill in those he touched.

Father Felix took pride in keeping in touch with students for years beyond their classroom

experience with him. He had the capacity to recall events with vivid detail. Answering all letters, Father Felix would take great joy in hearing from former students and associates. He would count his friends as one would very precious jewels.

Always mindful of his call to lead others to God, he wanted to witness on every possible occasion. I recall Father saying that he wore his cassock or Roman collar whenever he traveled in case he encountered someone who was in need of a priest; they would recognize him. He truly lived his commitment to God and to Don Bosco.

Simplicity was another one of his virtues. While articulate in several languages and very well read, Father Felix was approachable and humble. He regarded others with respect and dignity. Whenever families gathered, Father could often be found holding and talking with the babies and little ones, just like Jesus, wanting to be near the children. I think he was hoping to plant the seeds that would one day reap productive students.

I am sure that even in death as he rests with our Creator, Father Felix continues to keep track of the little ones and his friends. "

One final note from one of his companions and fellow priest, Fr. August Bosio, SDB. "For some time," Father Bosio writes, "I had been suspecting that Felix Martocchi, my companion, will not be celebrating the 50th with our class. Remember? How can you go back 50 years ... and remember enough to write? -- He was even-tempered and humble, efficient and effacing. He never set the world on fire, but he nurtured a quiet flame of fervor and perseverance to the end. May he rest in peace. We'll miss him on June 29, 1996."

### *Conclusion*

Allow me to conclude with a prayer from one of Fr. Felix's students in his long teaching career. It shows the affection that his pupils had for him.

"Father, please pray for me for the gift of balance. I want to be a saint — God has given me so many graces and I want to be more faithful to the call of grace than I have ever been. Please pray for

me. You have been such a blessing to me- especially during my teen years — I was even more difficult then than I am now. Please ask God to give me the grace to love Him with all my heart, soul, and strength. For a long time I've been praying for this but I am more selfish and self -centered than ever. Thank you for your prayers and your example of uniting your suffering with Christ's. Please pray that it will not be lost on your old friend from Watsonville. God bless you! Love and prayers."

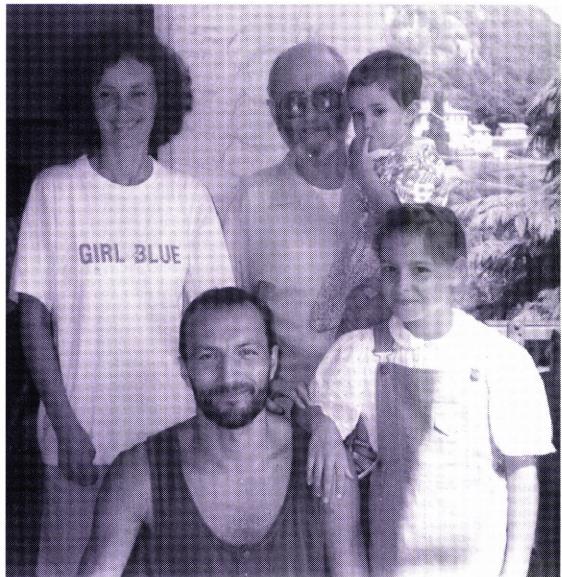
We, Salesians, would like to thank the Sisters of Mercy Care Center and the nurses for taking such good care of our confrere Fr. Felix Martocchi. May the Lord compensate their kind services with an eternal reward in Heaven.

My dear confreres, perhaps I have been too long, but the gift of the goodness that Fr. Felix Martocchi brought to the province, went often unnoticed, and needed to be brought to light for our benefit and for the benefit of the many with whom he came in contact.

May the Lord grant to our wonderful confrere an eternal reward in the Salesian Garden together with so many other exemplary Salesians.

Please, pray also for me and for this Provincial community.

Rev. Fr. Mario Mich, SDB  
Director



*Fr. Felix (back center) on a visit to his brother in Italy*

## **Father Felix Martocchi, SDB**

Born: Prosto Di Piuro, Sondrio, Italy  
June 25, 1917

Professed: Newton, New Jersey  
September 8, 1936

Ordained: Newton, New Jersey  
June 29, 1946

Died: Mercy Care Center, Oakland California  
October 22, 1995



*Salesians of St. John Bosco*

SAN FRANCISCO PROVINCE  
1100 Franklin Street  
San Francisco, California, 94109