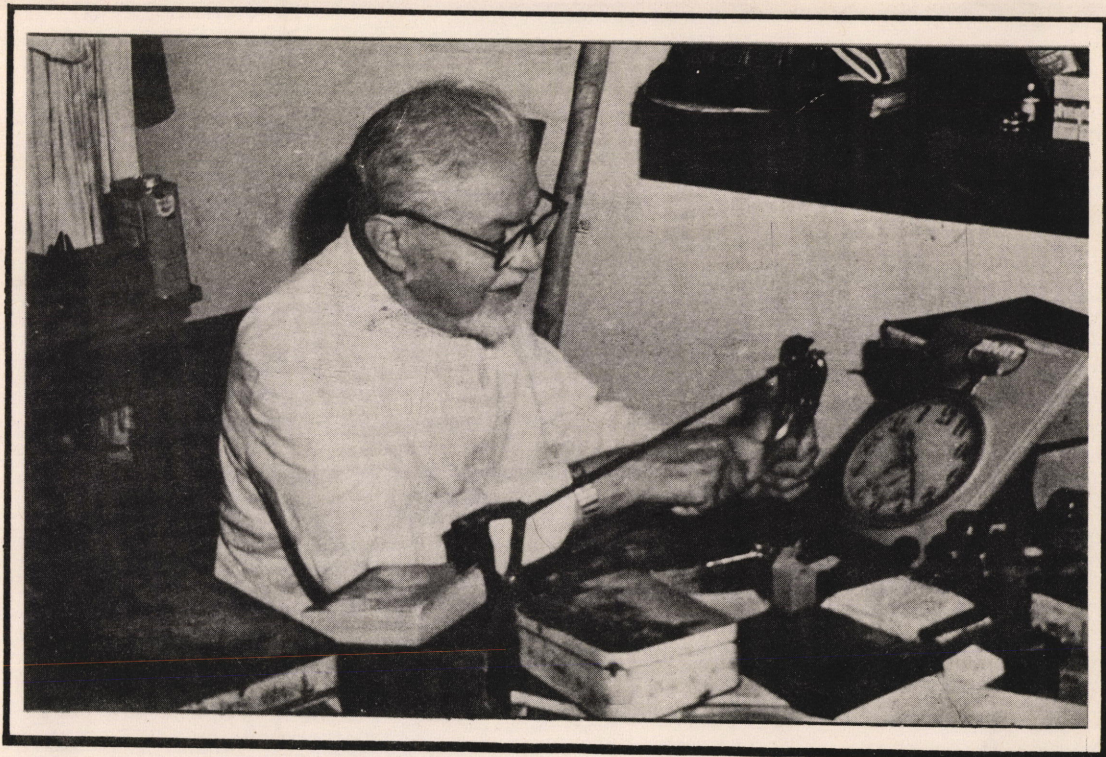


FR. JOHN BARUCCI SDB



Dear Friends,

On 26th April, 1985, at 3.25 A.M., our dear Fr. John Barucci went to receive the crown of righteousness which he had so justly merited. The members of the community who will miss him most are sure they have another patron in heaven. While thanking God for the gifts of this great salesian who has enriched our lives and made this world a better place to live in, I feel it is our duty and privilege to pay our homage to Fr. Barucci through this humble memoir of gratitude, highlighting the memorable moments of his life and testifying to some of the hall-marks of his deeply spiritual and profoundly human personality.

Itinerary of his life

It all began on 18th July 1905, when Alfonso, an estate manager and Ersilia, a school teacher, were blessed with their first child in Giovanni Barucci. He spent all of his early years in his native hamlet of Caserano in the province of Pontremoli (Italy) with his only brother and the seven hundred odd other inhabitants.

Quite unlike most of his future salesian confreres, he went to the Salesian Novitiate from the Pontremoli seminary, without the usual probation period in a salesian aspirantate. On 10th Oct. 1925 he became a novice at Castel de Britti (Bologna) and made his first profession on 8th Nov. 1926. The stipulated two-year tirocinium at strada Casentino, was followed by his final commitment to God on 29th Nov. 1929. After completing his theological studies at the Crocetta (Turin) his life's dream of becoming a priest was realised on 6th July 1930, in the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians.

The Selflessly-dedicated-fifty five year missionary life in India commenced a few months later. The 'sporadic assignments' (as he used to call them) allotted to him included the posts of secretary to the Archbishop of Madras-Mylapore, parish priest, assistant parish priest or acting Parish Priest at Perambur and Vepery (Madras), Ranipet, Vellore, Polur and Arni. He was a much appreciated teacher of canon law and moral theology for nearly twenty years, both at Yercaud and in Poonamallee (1952 - 1970).

The last fifteen years of his life were spent as 'patient or chaplain or both' at Wellington, Yelagiri hills, Bhadravati and finally as confessor at Kristu Jyoti College, Bangalore (1977 - 1985). The growing ardour of his missionary enthusiasm never for a moment flagged or fluttered despite the periodic changes of place, circumstance and office.

Fr. Barucci - the man:

Fr. Barucci was very much a man apart, one who does not easily fit into set patterns. His witticisms, spicy remarks especially about superiors, his well-known non-conformist attitude, and his forthrightness could give the casual observer or superficial acquaintance a very erroneous impression of the man. However those who knew him better would swear that below the apparent near eccentric peculiarities of his character (like constructing sundials wherever he went) lay deeply embedded genuine christian virtues.

The near unanimous testimony of those who knew him well, classifies him as 'simple', a man in whom there was no guile and totally alien to subterfuge. He was a man of ready wit, a twinkle in his eye and the characteristic smile. No one could remain long in his company with a long face. Everyone, especially children were fond of him, no less as the young parish priest at Vepery than as the grand old man at Kristu Jyoti College. As he went out for his daily walk, he might have forgotten to take his walking stick, but he would not forget to fill his pockets with sweets or medals for the children who would accost him. Judging by Cardinal Newman's definition, Fr. Barucci was a perfect

characteristic grin, "What can the doctor do?" In the afternoon, Dr. Chari, a good friend of the institution, came over to the novitiate house and after examining him said father's condition was serious. Later in the evening he developed fits of shivering and meekly agreed to be taken to the hospital.

The next morning, 25th Thursday, he collapsed while coming out of the toilet and then was shifted to the intensive care unit. Though he was so critical as to need oxygen he was the one to cheer his visitors. Later in the day he was anointed and received the Holy Viaticum as the doctor felt that Fr. Barucci's end was not far off. According to the doctor there was far too much insulin in his system and his kidneys had failed. Since his condition was critical, the Novice Master and others kept watch by his bedside. Around midnight he seemed to be struggling with himself but was soon very calm again. When asked if he wanted to say something, he replied 'Let's pray for each other'. When someone very generously offered to pray for his recovery, he retorted, "Let's pray that God's will may be done". At his request he was given the papal blessing and he made the sign of the Cross all by himself. At 3.25 a.m. on 26th April, our dear Fr. John Barucci passed to his eternal reward.

The formalities of carrying a dead body from one state to another had to be gone through before the body could be brought to Bangalore. Though expected earlier, the body reached Kristu Jyoti College only by midnight. The funeral mass at 7.00 a.m., on 27th Saturday, was celebrated by Fr. Thomas Panakezhram, the regional councillor. Nearly seventy priests concelebrated including the provincials of Bangalore and Madras. Besides the confreres making their annual retreat here, confreres from various houses in Madras, Kerala and Andhra, and many salesian sisters, the sisters of St. Anne, sisters of St. Charles Borromeo (Fr. Barucci was their chaplain at Bhadravati) as also a considerable number of lay people were present to pay their last respects to our Captain. The Regional spoke of Fr. Barucci as a man of faith who teaches us not only how to live but also how to die. He enlightens us that there is more to death than dying. Father Barucci's mortal remains were laid to rest by the side of the Kristu Jyoti Chapel. At the grave, Fr. Provincial bade goodbye to him in the name of Salesian India. Where Fr. Barucci had worked for fifty five fruitful years.

He had the best obituary there could ever be - the manifest sorrow and bereavement of the many who had come to pay him their last respects. When I entered his room a couple of days later, I was amazed that he had left his room in perfect order. Had he some premonition that he would not return alive? He had come so close to death and on so many occasions. Without a doubt he was more than ready.

way to Vellore from Ranipet, a distance of more than thirty kilometres. The Holy Rosary was his constant companion, especially on his walks.

The riches of his personality are revealed also in the two-volume diary he faithfully kept; 'The Bhadravati Chronicle' and 'The Random reflections of an unsuccessful missionary'. These books of his reminiscences contain revealing insights into his rich personality and include chapters like 'situations of conflict' in which as a priest he found himself, and 'vocation'.

The last years:

Fr. Barucci defied death on several occasions and seemed to have the proverbial nine lives of a cat. Though he had many other options open to him, in deference to the wishes of his superiors he chose to spend the last decade of his life at Kristu Jyoti College as confessor. It was hard to detect any generation gap between him and the young students of theology, who very affectionately called him 'Captain'. He was available 24 hours a day, seven days a week not only to hear confessions but also to offer his services to anyone who needed it - to repair a watch, resuscitate a dead clock, fix up a motor or set right the stove or the iron. There is no person in the community, no area of the campus that has not been blessed with the 'midas touch' of Fr. Barucci. Making sun-dials was his passion and he put up one in the garden here a few years ago.

On a couple of occasions last year, there was clear evidence that his age was telling on him. As his hands were no more very steady, he had rather unwillingly reduced the number of hours he would normally spend in his workshop. One day, when he was not in the best of health, someone asked him, 'What do you want father?' His only answer was 'I want to be buried'.

Till we meet again:

When the students of theology dispersed for the summer recess on March 19th the captain was very much his normal self. All during Holy week, he was in high spirits, except for a small wound on his leg. On 14th of April, he left for Mount Don Bosco, Kotagiri where he wanted to make his annual retreat and take a few days of rest.

On Tuesday, 23rd, he ran a slight temperature and preferred to go to sleep without any supper. The next day he seemed better and in fact joined the concelebrated Mass. He wanted no food all day, except a little milk asked if he would like to visit a doctor, he replied with his

gentleman; he never offended others yet he loved truth and expressed it often bluntly. He never gave undue importance to what others said or thought of him; prestigious offices and covetable posts were never his ambition; he continuously shied away from glamour and glitter.

Fr. Barucci was by all standards an extremely intelligent man. Apart from his mastery of canon law and moral theology, his completely self-taught and scientifically precise knowledge of sundials was eminent. A couple of years ago, he had published a sixty-page booklet 'Sundials and the Reckoning of time'. The manuscripts of a more detailed and revised edition were found in his collections. At least on one occasion he was invited to address a couple of professors of the Bangalore University. His school-boy-like eagerness to learn even in old age was one of his most endearing qualities. He spared himself no pains to keep up to date with the latest developments in theology, though the self-styled radical progressives were not spared his jibes. His sense of christian optimism was near proverbial, especially in his incredibly cheerful acceptance of his life-long suffering; ever since his arrival in India, he had been in and out of hospitals. Yet he lived to the biblical age of 80, because he 'disobeyed the doctors', as he used to say, With regard to his health as in most other personal matters, he was a totally self-reliant person. He was convinced that the best place to find a helping hand is the end of one's own arm.

If ever someone grew old gracefully, it was Fr. Barucci. More than anyone else he had the 'gift' of old age. As one of the confreres writing to him on the occasion of the golden jubilee of his ordination to the priesthood put it, "you are not growing old, but you are growing gold", so majestically and joyfully, pure gold tried in the crucible of suffering and sickness.

Fr. Barucci - the zealous and pious apostle:

"you could always rely on him for any form of priestly ministry: celebrating the Eucharist, hearing confessions, preaching, or ministering to the sick." writes a salesian, But true to his calling as a son of Don Bosco and in faithful imitation of him, he was a most zealous apostle of the confessional. Even at the retreat just a couple of days before his death, he had spent much time reconciling people with God and man. In his hey-day he was frequently consulted by Bishops and religious superiors on canonical and moral matters, and appreciated by his students for his pastoral approach to the study of theology. Though a man of deep prayer, his piety was far from being conspicuous, one might say almost of casual outward appearance and devoid of all sentimentality. Many have confirmed that he would make the way of the cross everyday To be regular with his own confession, he would sometimes cycle all the

All of us will miss this great salesian more than we can say and in more ways than we can easily reckon. There is so much to admire and imitate in him. Those who had the privilege of having more than a casual acquaintance of him are definitely the richer for it. He brings home to us that sanctity does not depend on our educational qualifications, covetable posts filled or high offices held, or even on the acclaim the world may bestow, but on faith and love. The real heroes of human existence are camouflaged by unpretentiousness. Yet I believe the homage paid to Abraham Lincoln highly befits our Father Barucci too; 'He belongs to the ages'. The best homage we can pay him is to imitate in our own unique way the rich heritage he has left behind the transparent witness of a life dedicated to God and lived out joyfully in the spirit of St. John Bosco.

With all good wishes

Yours sincerely in Christ,
Fr. Stephen Kuncherakatt SDB
Rector,
Kristu Jyoti College,
Bangalore - 560 036. India

For the Necrology:

Fr. John Barucci, born on 18th July 1905 (Caserano - Italy) Professed on 8th Nov. 1926. Ordained at Turin on 6th July 1930. Died - Kotagiri (India) on 26th April 1985.