



Fr. Frank Ribotta, S.D.B. 37B209



May 2, 1918 - February 24, 1998

Father Frank Ribotta, a Salesian priest and educator, who walked many miles throughout the hallowed walls and fields of many institutions, departed for his heavenly home on Tuesday, February 24, 1998 in San Pedro, California. Having labored for almost 30 years at St. John Bosco High School in Bellflower, California, Father Frank, who was suffering from the debilitating effects of Parkinson's disease and needing additional care, in September, 1997 moved to Jeanne Jugan Residence in San Pedro, California under the loving care of the Little Sisters of the Poor.

On February 23rd, the day preceding the 31st anniversary of his mother's passing, Frank seemed to have a premonition of his own death. He asked to be anointed even though there were no signs that death was so close. On the following day, February 24th, he began to fail and died suddenly that evening; the same day that his beloved mother had passed away 31 years before.

On Friday, February 27th, the faculty, staff and students of St. John Bosco High School held a memorial service in the school chapel to honor Father Frank's many years of dedication to the school community. A video presentation of his life and activities was the centerpiece of the service.

Then on Sunday, March 1st, again in the school chapel, there was a public viewing of his body followed by the Rosary and Funeral Mass which was attended by many of his Salesian Brothers and Sisters, together with some faculty, friends and former students. The Provincial, Father Nicholas Reina, was the main celebrant and Father Lucian Lomello, his companion in the early days of St. John Bosco High

School, was the homilist.

THE STORY OF HIS LIFE AND ACTIVITY

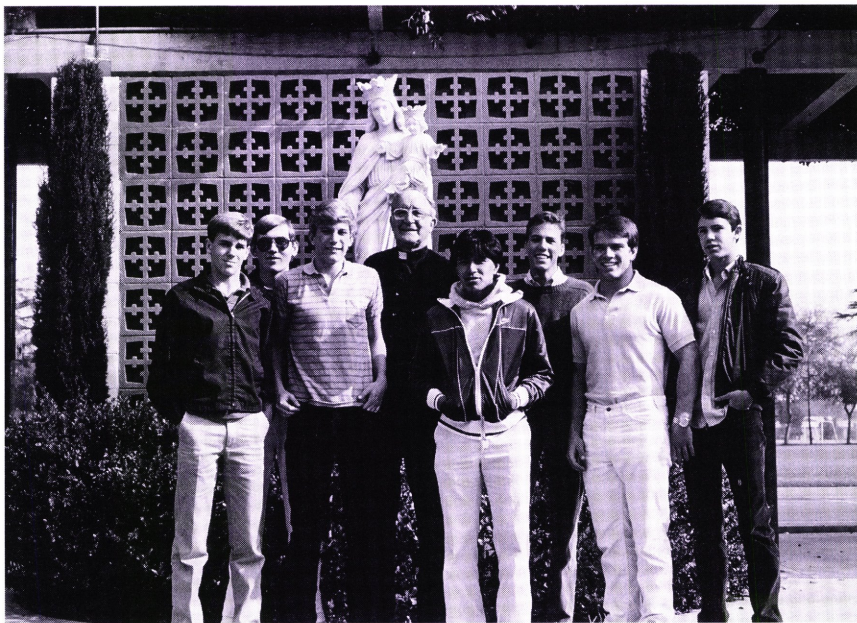
Father Frank was born in the city of St. Francis, San Francisco, on May 2, 1918. He and his younger brother Michael, also a Salesian Priest, attended the Salesian parochial schools of Corpus Christi and Sts. Peter and Paul in their native San Francisco. Both boys transferred to the Salesian Seminary in Richmond for their high school studies. After graduation in 1936 Frank was admitted to the novitiate in Newton, New Jersey, where he later received his B.A. degree from Don Bosco College. In 1940 he returned to California and was assigned to the newly opened Salesian boarding school in Bellflower. Here he was to begin pioneering work under the able direction of his former director of Richmond days, Father Ernest Giovannini. Among his first charges were future Salesians: Fathers Tom Prendiville, Ralph Murphy, Roger Luna, James McLinden, and Bro. John McLinden. In 1943 Frank returned to Newton for his theological studies and was ordained there on the Feast of Sts. Peter and Paul in 1947.

The first seven years of his priesthood were spent in various roles of service: Prefect of Studies at St. John Bosco in Bellflower (1947-48); Catechist of the Salesian Seminary in Richmond (1948-1950); Financial Administrator at St. Francis School in Watsonville (1950-51) and then Director of Salesian Seminary in Richmond (1951-1954). It was in the San Francisco Bay Area that Frank had his friends, family, and roots. But it was obedience, to which he had vowed himself, that transferred him to Southern California where he ministered the last 47 years of

his life. He never complained, nor wavered in his commitment as an obedient religious. After stints at St. Francis School, Watsonville (1957-58), Don Bosco Tech, Rosemead (1958-67) he was to find his niche in the school he quickly learned to love: St. John Bosco School in Bellflower. There as teacher, counselor, athletic director, and varsity coach in several sports, he worked for the next 27 years. In

1967, he served one year as a translator for the English speaking world at the Salesian headquarters in Rome. Returning to California he was placed in charge of the newly established pre-novitiate program at De Sales Hall also in Bellflower (1968-71).

"It was a happy day for Frank", writes his brother Michael, "and a gratifying one for me, when the Salesian community of Bellflower feted him with a gala anniversary dinner marking his 50 years of priesthood. It was really a memorable and festive affair and one which Frank, although beginning to fail, had enough physical stamina and clarity of mind to enjoy to the fullest." This Golden Jubilee celebration on October 26, 1997 which was attended by members of Frank's family, many Salesians, and members of the school faculty, was truly a recognition and appreciation of Frank's spirit of sacrifice, his sense of duty, and his exemplary life as a Salesian priest and religious.



1983-84: The senior class Latin Club of St. John Bosco High School with the moderator, Fr. Frank.

A SALESIAN PRIEST, EDUCATOR, and A BOSCO BRAVE

In the eulogy given at his burial service in Richmond, Father Michael, Father Frank's younger brother, said: "Like his saintly patron, Francis of Sales, Frank was a gentle man. That gentleness, once you got to know him well, covered a genuine humility. In all the years we grew up together as: schoolboys, seminarians, and fellow Salesians, I never recall his ever raising his voice in anger, present company, of course, excepted. (In our family, it was the little brother who did most of the yelling and shouting—that's what little brothers do). No doubt, Frank had his share of inner frustrations, but he rarely let them surface and allow them to injure friend or foe. Cardinal Newman's definition of a gentleman as 'one who never inflicts pain,' describes Frank's persona so admirably.

He was a quiet man too. Loneliness, it is said, is the impoverishment of self, but solitude is the enrichment of self. Frank loved his solitude, his 'quiet time' as he used to call it. He treasured those rare periods of solitude, which were so hard to come by in his early years when feverish activity used to consume so many of us. He especially savored those days which he spent, far from the madding crowd, in our hide-away cabin in the Mojave desert. It became his home away from home. He often told me that he never felt closer to God than during his solitary walks at night under the star-sprinkled skies in the high desert. It was then that he enriched himself, body and spirit

It was the solitude of the mountains that held a special lure for him. During the summers of the 1970s and early 80s, he used to lose himself in the High Sierras for days on end: living off the land, sleeping under the trees, and worshipping the God of nature. Henry David Thoreau would have found in Frank a congenial companion. He would wax eloquent- during one of his rare moments of excitement- when he shared those experiences with me. But being the city slicker that I am, I would just nod dutifully and smile my approval. I wish now that I had listened more closely.

His love for the mountains once nearly cost him his life. Let me share with you this little-known episode. One day, hiking in the Dolomite Alps in northern Italy with his priest friend, that indomitable mountain man, Father Donato Valentini, known to some of you, the two were sud-

denly caught up in a vicious rain and wind storm. No shelter anywhere in sight. Donato, the experienced and skilled Alpine climber that he was, had the presence of mind to lash Frank to a boulder to keep him from being swept off the precipice where the two were pinned down. After the storm abated Frank, beginning to be overcome by hypothermia, was rushed to the nearest shelter by Donato where he was covered with blankets and plied with endless cups of hot tea. They revived him. He had not only survived that ordeal, but shortly after, managed to hike almost to the summit of a nearby Alpine peak, again (and fortunately) accompanied by the intrepid Donato Valentini. It was one of Frank's proudest moments."



1955-56 Fr. Frank Ribotta, coach, with the B-Basketball Team. In these early years of St. John Bosco High School's athletic competition, Fr. Frank coached the B & C basketball teams, and Varsity & JV baseball teams.

At St. John Bosco in Bellflower Father Frank was chaplain and coach to most every team of football, baseball, and of course basketball. It was the common opin-

ion at the school that his presence was felt on every team as Bosco sports became known and respected throughout Southern California. His constant work with young athletes to instill a competitive spirit coupled with a prayerful ideal profiled his time as Bosco's athletic founder and leader. In the early days of St. John Bosco School no athlete was not in some way touched by Frank's guiding hand. That same quality which he established four decades ago, still permeates the gym and playing fields of the school.

It was Father Frank's early guidance that has made the Bosco Brave not only a mascot but an ideal to live up to. Father Frank is and will surely always be Bosco's "first Brave." In looking only at Frank's sporting prowess, one would miss the complete man.

As a teacher, he dedicated himself to the sharing of ideas and dreams. Frank's classrooms have always been a quiet buzz of questions and answers. Whether the subject matter be Church History or Latin, Frank's students were challenged daily. His careful marking of papers with sound marginalia and advice have directed thousands of young men to sounder thinking and clearer responses. His lecturing always kept his charges on task and wide awake. He profiled what the scholar and athlete should be: an active and thoughtful man of character. Father Frank's students still recall his presence, his lectures, and his wit. For many it was Frank's voice that clearly proclaimed the "good news" of Jesus Christ.

As a priest his sharing of the Eucharist remains his finest gift to the young that he served.

Fr. Richard Presenti, his director in

the final years of Father Frank's life on earth, summarized fittingly the whole of the career of this memorable person: "I think it is very clear that Father Frank Ribotta was a dedicated and talented man, who gave himself completely to his work as a Salesian. For his 60 years of Salesian life and his 50 years of priesthood, Father Frank was always the consummate priest and the committed educator. From his lived life, you knew that Father Frank never once regretted becoming a Salesian and following in the footsteps of St. John Bosco. Since his retirement in 1993 he continued to tutor, to hear confessions and painstakingly note the happenings here at school in his own hand in the house chronicles. He was

September 6, 1987: Very Rev. Egidio Viganò with Fr. Frank in the patio of St. John Bosco High School, Bellflower.



a student of history and was one who always wanted to know what was going on. He will always be remembered as a charter member of the Bellflower "playground chapter". He and his friend Father Bob Ferguson could be seen regularly walking around the property with their heads together discussing the life and times in the San Francisco Province. This same trait also extended to the events that took place here on the St. John Bosco campus. He always knew who to approach to find that item of information which he wanted or needed to know. He truly loved this school. In all, he spent more than 30 years of his life on this campus. He was here the day school opened in 1940. Later he became the school's first athletic director, its vice principal for a year and its head counselor for many years. It was his home. Being around kids and their activities was his life. He would always inquire about the scores and attended as many sporting events as his sickness would allow. He loved to read. He read everything that came into the community. His interest in the Church and the world in which it ministered never wavered. All these things gave meaning to the life of this man.

It is our faith that must keep reminding us that Father Frank's pilgrimage is over. He has served and left his mark on this world through his ministry as an athlete, Salesian, priest, teacher and friend. His bout with Parkinson's these last years had to be difficult for this very athletic man, but he seemed to accept God's will with the serenity that comes only from a man of deep and enduring faith. The suffering, the anxiety, the life-long thirst for knowledge are now over."

Father Richard concluded at the Memorial service, "In the person of Father



Frank Ribotta we celebrate a life lived in simplicity and faithfulness to the things in which he believed. He understood that serving the needs of others is what brought the most happiness to his life. "

A Mass of Christian Burial for Father Frank was celebrated in the chapel of Salesian High School, Richmond, California on March 2, 1998. The main celebrant was again Father Nicholas Reina, provincial, and the homilist was his brother Michael. Present were members of the Salesian Family, friends and former students of Father Frank paying their final respects. The interment in the Salesian Cemetery just behind the community chapel, followed the Mass in the presence

of students and faculty. Now the earthly remains of Father Frank lie along side those old familiar faces whose camaraderie he shared for many years, now linked together in joyful companionship in heaven.

May we ask for a prayer to the Lord of the Harvest that he send to our province men of the stamp of Father Frank Ribotta to fill the void left by his demise.

Father Mario Mich, SDB
Province Achivist
for the Salesian Community
at St. John Bosco High School
Bellflower, California
April 4, 1998

Father Frank Ribotta

Born: San Francisco, CA
May 2, 1918

Professed: Newton, NJ
September 8, 1937

Ordained: Newton, NJ
June, 29 1947

Died: Jeanne Jugan Residence, San Pedro, CA
February 24, 1998



Salesians of St. John Bosco

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