

SF



Fr. Joseph R. Simeoni, SDB

Born in
Bussolengo, Italy, 1881

A Salesian for 69 years

Ordained a priest
September 5, 1905

Died in San Francisco
December 10, 1967

March 24, 1968

Dear Confreres,

On December 10, Father Joseph R. Simeoni, S.D.B., was summoned by the Master after a long period of illness.

Father Simeoni came to the United States in 1902. A precious letter was found among his papers. In the envelope there was a visiting card of Father Michael Rua, the successor of St. John Bosco and it contained a message of two Latin words, "Veni celeriter", (Come at once). That was Father Simeoni's letter of obedience which gave as his destination the United States of America, where the Salesians had begun their work five years before.

Father Simeoni was born in Bussolengo, (Verona), Italy, October 7, 1881. He became a professed member of the Salesian Society April 18, 1898. He arrived in San Francisco September 5, 1902, and after completing his studies for the priesthood he was ordained in Albany, N.Y., Sept. 23, 1905. He was reassigned to S.S. Peter & Paul's, San Francisco, in 1909, when he began preaching

Missions for the Italian immigrants. This was to be his life work.

There was great need of spiritual assistance for the Italian immigrants who had come to our shores to seek a better way of life. Because of language difficulties, different customs and traditions, these poor people remained isolated, and often neglected and in danger of losing their faith. Father Simeoni brought to them great understanding, the consolation of their religion and a reminder of their great Christian traditions. Letters from two Apostolic Delegates, Bishops and Archbishops bring out in clear light the tireless zeal of Father Simeoni. Lists of all the parishes visited by him in the course of 60 years speak eloquently of the work of our Missionary who traveled far and wide throughout the United States and especially along the Pacific Coast.

Looking through his files I found an interesting postcard. It is a photo of the SS. Santa Rosa, wrecked near Point Arguello, Calif. July 7, 1911. The ship appears split in two by the fury of wind and waves. The card is addressed to Fr. Coppo, then residing at 29 Mott St., New York City. The message as follows: "On this ship, SS. Santa Rosa, Fr. Simeoni was a passenger on July 7, 1911. Like Jonah he was on his way to preach to Nineveh. He was quite shaken. He heard the confessions of thirty persons on board and gave absolution to those tossed about by the waves." Signed. Father Piperni.

Once, when Father was asked about the importance of the Missions he preached he remembered in particular his preaching in Chicago, at our Lady of the Assumption, when for fifteen consecutive days he preached four sermons a day to large crowds of people. The Mission was preached in 1919, after the first world war.

There were times when his listeners were few in number, especially when he preached in isolated towns in the mountains. At other times, when he was not pleased with the attendance, he did not spare his congregation. Some still recall his opening words, My dear pews "and he made sure that all parishioners

would come to the Mission. At another time he began his sermon with the words " My dear widows, ..."and when the good women remonstrated, he explained: "If it is true that you have husbands why don't they accompany you to Church?", and after a few days he had all the sheep in the fold.

In 1940 the Italian Government conferred on Father Simeoni the knighthood of the Crown of Italy in recognition of his work for the Italians.

We do not have statistics of the sermons preached, confessions heard, conversions obtained. We leave the task of compiling the figures to Fr. Simeoni's Guardian Angel, who will be his powerful advocate before the throne of God Almighty. However, let us be charitable with our prayers.

Sincerely yours

Rev. Gabriel J. Zavattaro, S.D.B.

Provincial Vicar

