



DON BOSCO

KRISHNAGAR

NADIA

W. BENGAL INDIA

6th June 1974

Rev. Brother SONA TARCISIUS

"All for You, Lord." These were the last intelligible words on the lips of Br. Tarcis Sona, whom the Lord has called to his eternal reward on 6th June 1974. He had written these words on the front page of his Spiritual Diary. This was the motto of his life.

Dear Confreres and Friends,

As in sorrow I announce the death of dear Brother Tarcis St. Paul's words — which seem to fit so well on his lips — come to console us by asserting the existence of greater realities : "For me to live is Christ and so to die is a gain."

Of late Bro. Tarcis had been complaining of general weakness, even before he went to Sonada for the May Retreat. Everyone felt a short holiday in the hills would do him good. So he joined the other confreres from Calcutta, who made the trip to Sonada by the D. B. Liluah Bus. There was no serious complaint about his health during the Retreat. But on the return journey he felt very bad and by the time he reached our house at Azimganj, he could no more stand the journey. So the confreres requested him to stay back at Azimganj. In spite of all the care of the confreres and of the Sisters of Azimganj there was no improvement and he was taken to Krishnagar. Soon after the arrival he collapsed. He was rushed to the Hospital of the Sisters of Mary Immaculate, where the sisters, doctors and nurses did their utmost to fight the disease. It was typhoid in its last stage. Brother was too weak to react to medicine, the disease was too far gone. The good sisters remained by his bedside day and night, they tried all means, but to no avail. Bro. Tarcis was scarcely conscious. Fr. Provincial, who was with us at the time, could hardly get a word from him in the afternoon of 5th June. In the evening Father Rector administered the Sacrament of the Sick ; the confreres and the few orphan boys, who had remained with us during the holidays stood around the bed praying. That night was bad, the morning was worse, Brother's temperature had risen to 108 F. In a last desperate effort to bring the temperature down, they wanted to pack him in ice. While Bro. James rushed for the ice and Fr. Rector was at the phone contacting all the institutions of the town and all our communities in Calcutta to solicit their prayers, Bro. Tarcis peacefully rested in the Lord, surrounded by his confreres, the sisters who had been caring for him, friends, and blessed by our Rt. Rev. Bishop M. Baroi, who was at his side in his last moment.

When the Cathedral bells announced the death of Bro. Tarcis there was a stir all through the Catholic Community of the town. His body was placed in the chapel of our school. From that moment up to the time he was brought to the Cathedral for the Mass, uninterruptedly people came to pray around him. Nobody could have imagined that this simple Salesian Brother could have gained so much esteem from so many people. But the moment of his glory was during the concelebration of the Mass in the Cathedral. Over forty priests concelebrated Mass with our Bishop, who delivered an appropriate homily in recollection of the virtues of Bro. Tarcis. The Cathedral was packed with people. All the Fathers from the Krishnagar Diocese were present. Our Salesian houses of Calcutta, Bandel, Azimganj sent several members and boys. All the Salesian Brothers of the nearby houses gathered around this worthy confrere. All religious communities, the Catholic schools and the people were present in great numbers. After the Holy Mass the body was taken to Bandel escorted by H. Exc. our Bishop, Father Provincial, the doctor and nurse, who had assisted him, and several confreres. The

Bandel Community was ready to receive him. At about 10-00 p.m. Brother Tarcis was buried in the Salesian Family grave beneath the sheltering mantle of Our Lady of the Happy Voyage.

Bro. Tarcis was born in Kairabari (Fatemabad T.E.), Assam, in 1922. His parents Seth and Susanna were good baptists hailed from Orissa to work in the tea-gardens. At nine he was orphan of both parents. Fr. V. Scuderi, the then rector and parish priest of Don Bosco School, Gauhati, brought him to the school in 1931, where he was baptised into the Catholic Church on 14-8-31. He was confirmed in the same year. He stayed in the school up to 1941. He made his studies there and was trained in Carpentry. In 1941 we find him in Don Bosco School, Shillong, as an aspirant. He begins his novitiate in Tirupattur (South India) on 12-2-42 with Fr. J. Carreno as novice-master. On 12-2-43 he consecrates himself to God by professing in the Salesian Congregation. In his Spiritual Diary we read on that date: "Lord Jesus, I am so happy to belong to You forever. Mary, help me to persevere in my vocation up to the end of my life." The thirty-one years he spent in the service of God and his neighbours were lived in the spirit of this prayer.

After some time passed in spiritual formation, we find Brother Tarcis in Don Bosco, Krishnagar, where on 6-2-45 he begins to work as teacher in the Carpentry section of the school with Bro. Ferraris. In this house he renews his triennial vows. By the beginning of 1947 he is in Don Bosco, Gauhati, as Brother-in-charge of the Carpentry section. He stays there up to the time he is chosen to go to Italy for 'further studies'. He reaches the Rebaudengo Institute on 1-10-55 where he spends three years. He had been very grateful to his superiors for the chance he had been given in Turin. After that we find him for a few months in Don Bosco, Park Circus, and two years in Sonada. From 1964 to his death he spent his best time as religious apostle in the house of Don Bosco, Krishnagar. This brief sketch about his religious career would say very little, if we should not speak of the religious spirit that animated our good Salesian Brother. In the following paragraphs I shall try to draw a relief portrait of Bro. Tarcis. The defect of this portrait will be that it will be too personal. Yet I think I have known Bro. Tarcis sufficiently well not to feel mistaken about what I am going to say. Besides I have received sufficient good reports from people who have known him and lived with him, from simple companions and friends as well as from Bishops and Superiors. All are unanimous in saying what I have tried to express below.

As a technician Bro. Tarcis has shown his skill as the head of the Carpentry and Cabinet-making Section, in which capacity, he was sincerely loved and revered by his instructors, workers and pupils. Outsiders liked to come to his workshop because he would never refuse anybody's work.

He had always more orders than he could finish. His slogan was either to do things well or not to do them at all — that is the reason for which he had the best people in the town to have cabinet and carpentry work done by him. Religious communities and mission stations were those, who benefited more from his work. To the merit of Bro. Tarcis we can add that he had a special talent for teaching drill and sports to big groups of boys ; his patience and interest was unique. He could prepare beautiful short entertainments with the boys in preparation for feasts in the traditional Salesian way.

But even above his technical skill we had to appreciate in him the religious, the Salesian — apostle and educator. He lived his religious consecration to the best of this understanding and strength, ever happy of it, with no complaint and regret, always sure that he had chosen the right path — the straight way to God and his neighbour. This he showed through a life of piety nourished by participation in the liturgy and devout reception of the Sacraments. How much he loved the chapel, the altar, the liturgical services ! How deep his moments in colloquy after Holy Communion, during the visits to the Blessed Sacrament ! How fruitful the weekly confessions done in front of the boys and his confreres ! The moments of personal prayer in meditation and spiritual readings were drawn through the hours of the day. You would clearly understand his union with God even at work by the recollected way he went about doing things and meeting people. His behaviour was an inspiration.

The exemplary practice of the vows is what made him a model religious. Chaste without compromises, strict with himself and prudent with others ; he practised work and temperance, vigilance and restraint. He was tenderly affectionate in his devotion to Our Lady, Help of Christians. He was a loving disciple of St. Aloysius, whom he would propose to his sodality boys as a model of youth. He disdained all unbecoming words or deeds that would dim the beauty of purity. Poverty was lived by him in all its demands. Everything was good enough for him : food, dress, things he needed for himself. He shared his way of thinking with the poor — his own workers, the boys he cared for, the people who would ask of him consideration in his bills. His hard-working life without any respite made him think that work is the poor man's privilege. Obedience for him had still the sacredness of old times. Although he found it useful and often necessary to give out his mind and sometimes insist on points that he thought were more in accordance with God's will, he would give in to the opinion of the community and that he did with a beautiful broad smile. The opinion of the superiors was taken as sacred by him. He would never venture on new paths and experiments without asking the suggestions of the superior. When things

were clear to him as God's will, neither criticism nor jeerings would discourage him.

He loved Don Bosco, whose Biographical Memoirs he would unfailingly read. He loved the congregation, ever interested in its history and happenings. This love he showed in a practical way by the faithful practice of the Constitutions and Rules. It would not be too much to say that his observance was scrupulous. He was exact in community life, which he lived best in the moments of brotherly encounters in the chapel, during common meals, recreation and work with others. Brotherly love became natural to him, as the fruit of faith and forbearance. Surely he never had enemies, because even enemies would turn to be his friends. He could not bear any dissension in the family — his timely joke would often disperse tense moments of misunderstanding. His love would not surely stop at his religious community, but would extend to the greater family of the youth in his care, to the bigger community of the local church, and to the whole Church and its leaders, who were sacred persons to him.

But this would be the least I would say of him, if I were not to disclose his apostolic ideals and endeavours. On all accounts he was an apostle and an educator, especially among the boys, who had come in contact with him — we could number hundreds of them, who still nourish the deepest love and esteem for his work. He liked to talk to boys both in public sermonets and in short talks, in private conversation and in casual meetings. His topics were: frequent reception of the Sacraments, love of virtue, avoidance of sin, charity and brotherly love, prayer, love of Our Lady and the Saints, and very often vocation — especially religious and priestly vocation. He chose the teaching of his trade and other subjects, especially catechism as the best means to come to the help of his pupils. He liked the work of infirmarian in order to be able to serve the sick. He prudently would take sides with boys in cases of misunderstanding, difficulties, material and spiritual inconveniences. He worked through organized sodality-groups for the spiritual renewal of individual boys and the school as a whole. A faithful disciple of Don Bosco's Preventive System he would be everywhere at the right time to help the boys to find their way before any difficulty could arise or any disorder could be registered. This continual attention towards the boys gained for him their esteem and love.

After reading this brief spiritual sketch of Bro. Tarcis, it will be easy to gauge the great loss experienced by all those who have been living with him even for a few months. What everybody misses most, is his wonderful example as a Salesian Brother — the Brother who has lived his lay Salesian vocation with the definite understanding that Don Bosco's mission and Charism was his own mission and Charism. His memory will keep alive

in all, who knew and loved him, the meaning of their religious consecration and mission.

If I am allowed to express a wish before I conclude this obituary letter, I would ask God that in this year of preparation for the World Congress of the Salesian Brothers, He may inspire generous youth to give their names to the Salesian Brotherhood in greater numbers and arouse in the present Brothers a great desire to live their glorious vocation, in the way Brother Tarcis Sona lived it, so fully, so brightly.

Dear Confreres and friends, while asking you to remember in your prayers good Brother Tarcis, I especially request you to pray also for this House, which has been and is still undergoing several difficulties, and for me too.

Yours affectionately in Christ Jesus,
Fr. L. Colussi. Rector.

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Note: As we think fit and spiritually advantageous to write a short biography of Bro. Tarcisius Sona, we request those, who can say something about him to please write to us. Thank you.