

WENT HOME TO THE FATHER



REV. BRO. FRANCIS CALEB SURIN
Salesian of Don Bosco
1926 - 2005

It was Saturday 26 November 2005. At 11.30 p.m. the gentle soul of our dear Brother Francis Caleb Surin went back to the Heavenly Father for his well deserved reward.

On Friday 25 November 2005 Bro. Francis felt a little unwell and experienced acute pain in the stomach. He was admitted in the Raj Hospital at Ranchi. Around four o'clock his BP began to fluctuate, felt uneasy and asked to put off the fan and T.V. The doctor was called and after examining him admitted him to the ICU as his heart beat was irregular. On 26 afternoon I went to visit him and found him looking rather fresh and serene. I actually went to ask his permission to go to Jharsuguda (Orissa) where I had accepted to give a talk to the Religious gathered in our house. He smiled and said "you can go, I will be alright." That gave me courage to board the train at 4.00 p.m. from Hatia Station. Little did I realize that this was my last meeting with him.

Cleric Godentius who had the fortune of assisting him in the last hours spoke of his experience. Bro. Francis used to ask about the cricket score and about all the work going on in the technical school and about the confreres. The doctor was so optimistic that he said Brother Francis can be discharged the following day. But around 7 O'clock he became unconscious still holding the Rosary which he always had in his hand. Fr. Davis and Fr. Valerius were informed of his seriousness and they came and administered the last Sacraments. At 10.00 pm he was put on to the ventilator. His BP began to fluctuate rapidly. One could feel that the end was near for Brother Francis. Looking serene and resigned he lay motionless for a few minutes until his Rosary fell off the hand. It was 11.30 pm. The soul of our dear Brother Francis returned to God.

I reached Jharsuguda that evening and on the next day before I gave the talk to the Religious I got the news of the death of Bro. Francis. I gave the talk and rushed back to Ranchi. His body was taken to Apollo Hospital to be kept in the mortuary.

A brief life sketch of Francis Surin

Patras Surin and Mariam Bhengra were simple farmers who lived in Thorpa near Ranchi in the present day State of Jharkhand. A son was born to them

on 24 Feb. 1926, he was named Caleb Francis, and was baptized on 21 March. In those days many of the people of Ranchi went to Assam to look for work. Patras took his family to Tezpur in Assam. There young Francis came in touch with the Salesians and Don Bosco. Gradually he felt the call of God to join the Salesian Society and having requested the superiors, he was sent to Sonada in 1955. He was good at sports, ability in mechanical work and showed his interest to serve the sick as an Infirmarian. In 1956 he made his application to enter the novitiate. In it he states:-

It is about 18 years that I am with the Salesian Fathers and Brothers. I have seen Salesian life led by my various Superiors. I desire to make it my own. Therefore I hereby ask you to consider this my application to the Salesian Novitiate as a lay Brother to secure the salvation of my soul in the Salesian Congregation. Fr. Patrick Sheehy and the house council in admitting him has written:-

He is pious, cheerful, and sociable. He is a bit slow in work, of good will, a good worker and very service minded.

Thus young Francis entered the novitiate in Upper Shillong on 4th April 1956 under the guidance of the Novice Master Fr. Joseph Bachiarello and made his 1st Profession 10th April 1957 in the presence of the Provincial Rev. Fr. Anthony Alessi. That was the beginning of a life of dedication and commitment to the life he had chosen.

Apostolate

Soon after the novitiate Brother Francis was sent to the Aspirantate at Bandel. He was an all rounder - a real *fac totum*. Calm and serene and he was always in the midst of boys. Generally healthy, here he contracted **malaria cum filaria** which was to remain with him till the end of his life. At all times he showed a strong sense of belonging to the community. In 1960, he renewed the vows in Sonada for another 3 years in the presence of the Provincial Fr. Orestes Paviotti. After the renewal of the vows the Superiors sent him to the Technical school of Liluah where he could learn more about the mechanical trade and teach the boys. He continued to become a good teacher in the technical, but filaria was causing him some concern and pain. In 1963 he applied to make the perpetual vows from Don Bosco Liluah, writing:-

During the period of my triennial vows I have done my best to observe the Constitutions and Regulations and I desire very much to make the Perpetual vows in the Salesian Society as a Coadjutor. He made his perpetual Profession on 23 May 1963 in the presence of the Provincial Fr. Paviotti.

Brother Francis had his aging and sick mother at home. She needed the security of a house and some land which he had to get from his uncle. He worked hard and tried to get his uncle and the relatives give her what was hers. Soon after his perpetual profession he was transferred to Don Bosco School, at Park Circus. Here he worked hard to help the students and in this way he too gained more experience. In 1975 Obedience took him away to the National Capital – Delhi. A new technical school, still in its infancy, needed the dedicated work of a zealous Salesian like Francis. The machines had to be maintained, the boys had to be taught, and production must bring in sufficient money to sustain the work. Brother Francis worked very hard day and night. This strain made him weak and even his hearing was affected.

He wrote to the Provincial – Fr. N. Lo Groi:- **Please pray and bless me so that I can carry out my duty no matter how heavy the cross be... since March I had four attacks of filaria. The last attack was very bad and till now I am unable to walk. The pain on the legs and the swelling on the leg last 15 to 20 days... I must get strong before the boys come, otherwise it will not be possible to work.**

The difficult days of Okhla came to an end in 1981 with his transfer to Don Bosco Hatia in Ranchi, as Superintendant of the technical department. Here in 1982 he had the joy of celebrating the silver jubilee of his Religious Profession. In 1987 the Provincial Fr. Joseph.

Kezhakkekara asked him to move to Don Bosco Kokar, to help Fr. Guido Colussi to initiate the work there. It meant purchasing and enclosing the land amid opposition. Once Bro. Francis shared with me a trick he used. While the compound wall used to be broken at night and during the day some of the not- so- friendly people came with sticks and knives to frighten and fight with him. On the following day Bro. Francis brought a toy pistol big enough for the handle to be noticed and he stood with courage and said, “I am not an ordinary Adivasi as you think”. Someone noticed the

pistol and warning others - the group dispersed for their dear life! And they never harassed him again. The work for the technical school went ahead, with the building, and buying the machines. Brother Francis had to make several trips to Patna to get the affiliation and permission for the boys to appear for the exams. He wrote to the Provincial – *Now I am 65, and I feel that I am older than 70. We hardly get two to three hours of electricity. I have no money to buy tools and materials, and to pay the staff.* So, the struggle to educate the youngsters and run the technical school in his advancing years did cost him a lot of mental struggle.

In 1999 he was transferred to Kuarmunda in Orissa to supervise the workshop and to teach and assist the boys. His love for the boys helped him to muster all the strength he needed for it. But his failing health and occasional black outs and a poor heart made the superiors assign him back to Kokar in 2003. With great struggle, yet with a smile and loving heart, Brother Francis stayed with the boys and enjoyed the community life in all its aspects. He was a source of inspiration for all of us.

What they say..

Many floral and verbal tributes were made. To quote a few:-

Rev. Fr. Charles Lobo the Provincial speaking at the funeral summarized his life's journey and extolled his outstanding qualities as simple, committed and always happy and serene in spite of the sickness of - filaria

Fr. Francis Alencherry, Councillor General for the Missions, pays rich tribute to a simple, unassuming Salesian like Br. Francis in these words: "Accept my condolences on his passing away and my appreciation for the person he was. After a life spent in the service of the Lord, he has been called to His presence. May the Lord give him the fullness of life in His Glory. I knew Bro. Francis for his simplicity and his dedication to the work entrusted to him. He was a cheerful person in his own quiet way. I pray that he may intercede for the province to have many more good Brother vocations."

Archbishop Thomas Menamparambil who started his practical training with Bro. Francis in Bandel has this beautiful tribute: "I had lived and worked with him in my earlier years. I had profound respect for his sincere dedication to the Church, the Congregation and to the apostolate."

Fr. Thomas Mulayinkal, the Provincial of Dimapur, rightly sums up these aspects when he states, “Bro. Francis was one of the first Salesian Brothers (together with Bro. P.J. Joseph) that we the aspirants at Bandel in 1959 came to know. I have very happy memories of Br. Francis. He was indeed very simple, hardworking and prayerful. Those days he was also managing the kitchen. He did it with much love and care and we felt very close to him.”

Fr. P.C.James. Jhansi

Br. Francis Surin is like my father and mother He was a gentleman. He always guided me in my ministry. He had always a good word for me. He never said no to my requests. He found time to be with children of the hostel. He would say a story or joke with them. I never found him alone. He was surrounded by hostellers. Even the bigger ones he would make them understand their mistakes through patient advice. I never found him getting angry in all three years of my stay in Kuarmunda, Orissa. He had a pleasant way of dealing with everyone. I really experienced his big-heartedness when I took him to Shankara Netralaya, Chennai. He is so adjustable to any situation. He has seen hard times in his life and in others. I love him and admire him so much. He is a Salesian brother whom I admire and appreciate for his human qualities. Wonderful indeed!! Through his life and example many more young people may follow the life of Salesians with commitment and love.

Bro. Simon Lakra spoke in the name of the Lay Brothers and spoke of his experience with Bro. Francis as a friend, and good confrere ever ready to help anyone in need and interested in the students.

Mr. Joy – Staff of the ITC - Kokar

He spoke on behalf of the staff and students of ITC. Brother Francis took keen interest in the welfare of the students. We will remember him even though we cannot see him.

Dr. Kandulna, who knew him since 1980 and had worked with Fr. Guido and Bro. Francis, gratefully recalls all the hardships they had to endure to procure the land and start the technical school in Kokar

Fr. Melchior Tirkey was recruited by Bro. Francis and if he is a Salesian today, it is because of Bro. Francis.

Bro. C. J. Tom of Kokar community

Bro. Francis was a man of great experience, and his morning talks to the trainees were based on his practical experiences. He had keen observation of the students and the machines. He used to dress well during class hours to set an example to the students. He used to congratulate,

encourage and appreciate me on the programmes held and assured me with his full support. As a good Salesian he liked to be present with the students and he was an example of prayer.

Fr. Jose Naikam.

My experience of Brother Francis.

He was a pleasant and serene person. He had a pastoral heart and helped in the parish and assisted the Priests like a Catechist when I was Assistant Parish Priest at Kokar. He had a heart for the poor and the disadvantaged. He encouraged the confreres who took new initiatives to help or educate the poor children of the Parish and the neighbourhood. He was always present among the students. His practice of the preventive system was remarkable. His concern for the staff and their welfare was remarkable.

Cleric Godentius Kandulna had the privilege of being at his bedside in the last few hours and to bid him farewell to eternity. I like to share my sentiments of love and gratitude to Bro. Francis - I feel it a rare privilege and feel highly blessed to have been with him for ~~six~~ months. Brother Francis truly possessed many rare qualities of our father and founder Don Bosco - he was simple, humble and possessed a rare joy and optimism. He had a special love and concern for others and deep faith and hope in God. He shared his hardship and suffering to start and continue the works in Kokar- even to the point of being stoned. Incidentally Brother Francis shared how he spent his childhood spending the whole night with the villagers in the forest as they went hunting. He was able to draw people with his depth of love and concern. When I had some spare time he would ask me to read some passages from the Bible or some spiritual

book. Though we belonged to the same tribe with the same culture and language, he never spoke to me in our language. And I looked after him with as much concern and love because he was so appreciative of even the least thing done to him.

His final journey:

On 28th morning his mortal remains were brought from the mortuary of the Apollo hospital and laid in state in the Holy Angels' Church Kokar, for visitors. At 11.00 a.m. I celebrated Mass for the many children and Staff of Garigaon, the English medium and ITC schools of Kokar. After the Mass many religious, friends and well wishers paid their last respects. By 1.30 p.m. most of the people had gathered for the funeral service which was fixed for 2.00 p.m. There were Confreres from all the communities of Chotanagpur, a few from Delhi region and four from Kolkata Province. Besides the Salesians, the men and women Religious from Ranchi itself and Salesian Cooperators, Past Pupils and numerous faithful and well-wishers were present. Since the Parish Church would be too small for a large gathering, arrangements were made to have the funeral Mass in the open for which a stage was erected and a 'Shamiana' was put up in the playground in front of the Salesian residence. At 2.00 p.m. the concelebrated Mass began.

It was presided over by the Auxiliary Bishop Rt. Rev. Vincent Barwa as the main celebrant. After the Mass the Bishop blessed the coffin and it was taken in procession to the cemetery in front of the Church where Fr. Guido Colussi was laid to rest in 1997. It was 5.00 p.m.

Everyone of the Salesian Community tried to give a fitting farewell to dear Bro. Francis. The coffin was made in the technical school by the carpenters under the supervision of Fr. Noble. Fr. Davis and Fr. Valerius meticulously planned every item of the ceremony. The cousin Sister of Bro. Francis - an SMI nun was present. The Salesian Family members - the FMA, SMI, MSMHC, Cooperators and Past Pupils with other Religious and Priests close by took part with a good many of our Parishioners.



**Bro. Francis with Rev. Fr. Joaquim D'Souza
Regional for South Asia**



Bro. Francis with the Staff



Bro. Francis with the football Team



The legacy

Like a candle that is burnt out, the life of Bro. Francis too came to an end. Today the mortal remains of our dear Brother Francis lie beside that of Fr. Guido Colussi in front of the Grotto under the gaze of Our Lady of Lourdes. Perhaps this was God's plan since they shared the apostolic ministry so closely.

My personal contact with Bro. Francis is a long one but I came to know him better when I was the Delegate of New Delhi Delegation, and as Rector of Don Bosco Kokar. He was a fine person, quiet by nature, friendly and approachable. He could communicate with every type of people without being haughty even if he had a different opinion. He was very respectful when speaking of superiors and showed great sensitivity to the needs of others. He had many problems and concerns and would share them with me with respect for authority.

Fr. Charles Lobo wrote about Bro. Francis that he had “certain *gentleness of character* and humility coupled with shrewdness and prudence. He would not tell someone a thing if he knew he is not ready to take it well. But he would communicate it nicely to a superior. Brother is not known to have had enemies or rivals, because he was not aggressive nor competitive. He had lived with people of a vast variety of origin and background, both Indian and foreign, and his relational quality matured in that context”.

As a Salesian Bro. Francis showed commitment to his duty of teaching and training the students, and following up the staff. He showed great interest in the activities of the Parish, the school and boarding and the co-curricular activities. He loved to be with young people – at work and at recreation. His presence was markedly Salesian in every respect even though he was old, feeble and suffering. He had a sharp sense of observation to notice what is missing and gently point it out. His love for the congregation made him seek out vocations and many of our early Salesians of Chotanagpur owe their vocation to him

As a Religious, his **poverty and simplicity of life** was noticed by everyone. He did not have many things nor did he ask for anything special nor spend money for his personal outfit. He was a **man of piety** -

shown specially in his love for the Eucharist and participation in the Mass and spirit of prayer. I could vouch for his deep faith in God's providence which

was shown by his serenity and calm in the face of problems and setbacks. **He loved Mother Mary.** The Rosary was his constant companion. He died saying the Rosary and on a Saturday. Surely Mary must have come to take him Home on her special day.

We **thank God** and our Bl. Mother for the beautiful person of Bro. Francis His memory lives on. The legacy remains - a life of simplicity and joyful commitment to the Lord in the service of the young May his life be an inspiration to many young people to give their lives to God as a Salesian Brother.

With St. Paul he can say- I have fought the good fight, I have run the race. May the Good Lord give him the reward of the good and faithful servant - life in the company of the Blessed.

Fr. Mathai Vellappallil

Rector

For the Necrology

Born - 24 Feb. 1926

1st Profession 10 Apr. 1957

Perpetual Profession 23 May 1963

Died - 26 Nov. 2005