

**YOUR MEMORIES ARE
ALL WE REALLY OWN.**



Fr. Eliseo Bianchi S.D.B.

**As in life and so in death, your
memory is engraved on our hearts,
and remains forever.**

**Confreres and Boys,
Don Bosco, Lonavla**

Dear Confreres,

God must have decided He had waited long enough for the pleasure of his company in Heaven. So, He came for him exactly two months before what would have been the 48th anniversary of his ordination. While it was hard for us to part with him, we can readily understand the Lord's desire to take Fr. Eliseo Bianchi to Himself.

Since the month of August 1991, Fr. Bianchi was confined to his room, and for the most part also in bed. His asthmatic condition and his weak heart made breathing difficult and painful for him. Strong-willed as he was, he refused any assistance, medical or otherwise, in the beginning, so as not to disturb the community. Gradually however he realised the folly of this decision and welcomed any help he got. The post XII students took it upon themselves to render whatever assistance was needed be it at day or by night.

As his condition worsened, he had to be hospitalised at Lonavla itself, as he did not want to go to Bombay or Pune. It was during the November retreat that Fr. Provincial managed to convince him to go to Holy Spirit Hospital, Bombay. Here he received good attention and was happy with the care of the hospital staff and the concern and solicitude of the Salesian confreres.

Unfortunately things took a turn for the worse, he had to be admitted to the Intensive Care Unit of the hospital and Fr. Bianchi passed away on the night of 1st December. The doctor attending on him declared the cause of the death as "Cardio Respiratory Arrest". His body was placed in the mortuary of the hospital. The following morning Fr. Provincial together with the Provincial Council members came to pay their respects to his mortal remains. With the help of Dr. Harriet Rebello, Assistant Dean, arrangements were made to take the body to the morgue of Sion Hospital.

The relatives of Fr. Bianchi who were constantly kept informed of his condition were at once notified of his death. They expressed their inability to attend the funeral. The funeral was fixed for 3rd December, at 4.00 p.m. Since many confreres were expected to take part in the Provincial Community Day celebrations that were to be held that evening, it would facilitate their participation at the funeral service. Obviously the celebrations had to be cancelled as a mark of respect.

I was privileged to be a member of the first Scout Troop that Fr. Bianchi started at Lonavla, the 59th Mawal. He made sure that every moment was a memorable experience for us. There were outings galore and every scout would look forward to the next meeting. The practical things he taught us and the camps he organised are still very vivid in my memory. The Scout Room, unique in its structure, bears testimony to the dynamism and creativity of this great soul.

What really had us gaping in amazement, eyes popping out would be to see the young gymnasts of Don Bosco, Lonavla perform in the gymnasium under the guidance of Fr. Bianchi. He set up the apparatus himself and whether it was the Roman Rings, the Parallel Bars or the Horizontal Bar, the boys performed to perfection, to the delight of those who watched. Once when I enquired about a limp that he had, he matter-of-factly said : "In my vanity, I tried to do a double sommersault, I missed and fell, fracturing my hip." An injury that was to haunt him till the end of his life.

Looking back at the days in Lonavla, with Fr. Bianchi, one of his students writes : Fr. Bianchi taught us Latin and Catechism. Call him a taskmaster or a scourge he made sure the Accusatives, Genitives, and Ablatives were firmly entrenched in our minds together with the truths of our faith. His methodical grounding and pounding was a reflection of his life: stoic, highly religious, and regimented with rigorous discipline. He was not known to smile much except to sneer at our unforgivable mistakes which we dared not repeat. The classroom for him, was a temple of learning as sacred as the chapel."

To call Fr. Eliseo Bianchi a talented person would be an understatement. Very few would deny that he was a genius of a Salesian. Whenever people associated with him, talk about him, the memories have always been about the ability of a single individual to achieve so much, so well, in so many spheres. His abilities continue to serve as a pointer to the vast horizons of human capability.

His last years were spent at the Propaganda Office of Don Bosco, Lonavla, always busy at his table, typing letters to benefactors, and whispering fervent prayers for them at the same time. He would already finish typing a hundred letters by the time we awoke. That was the target he set for himself. His untiring efforts did bear tangible fruits.

Fr. Eliseo Bianchi was indeed a many faceted personality. God had blessed him with many talents and I'm certain He didn't regret it. Boys would look on in admiration at the number of things he was able to accomplish. "Jack and master-of-all- trades" would be a fitting title.

He was one of the pioneers of this house and there was nothing he couldn't put his hand to. Fr. Cajetan Lobo maintaining the chronicles in those days makes this little note on 14th June, 1964: "Rev. Fr. Bianchi has been busy during these past days making some 30 iron beds at home. Himself the big mechanic, cutting the angle iron, drilling the holes etc. It must have been a big saving for the house. The church benches were also got ready. Fr. Bianchi and Mr. Anthony, the driver also fixed shelves for books. Fr. Bianchi has been a real model of a normal-work Salesian for our aspirants." Another entry on 14th July, 1964 reads: "Fr. Bianchi is very busy during the whole day, except his class periods, to make a wooden frame for a little shrine of Our Blessed Lady in the corridor, as tomorrow begins 'The Month of Mary', for us in this Province. By 11.00 p.m. it was ready."

It was during this time and under his baton that music at Lonavla flourished. His proverbial, "Go play ping-pong", to potential musical aspirants, without a ear for music, is still remembered. Many budding musical talents blossomed during this period. It is a matter of deep regret that he deliberately took himself off the musical scene and did not transmit that inimitable passion to later generations. We enjoyed his music classes. We were transported to a different plane when he played the organ, and enthusiastically waited to hear the band which he conducted with a martial hand. The theatre too played an important role in his life. He would spend hours training boys in this art and bring to the fore their latent talents.

One of his students reminiscing the good old days had this to say: "Fr. Bianchi was a story-teller par excellence ! Even today I can visualize him very vividly as he told us stories in the Nazir Bungalow, Lonavla, during the long rainy days when it was impossible to go out to play. Even the superiors, including the Rector, would sit down with us to listen to the stories to which Fr. Bianchi almost gave life with his gestures and expressions and modulation of his voice and the choice of words."

The body of Fr. Bianchi was brought to the Provincial House at midday and laid in state in the audio-visual air conditioned room. Just before the Mass, the body was reverently carried to the Shrine of Don Bosco's Madonna. About 60 priests concelebrated the Mass with Fr. Provincial. The Shrine was packed to capacity with Salesians, Salesian Sisters, members of the Salesian Family, boys from Lonavla and Matunga and a few also from other institutions. In his homily Fr. Provincial highlighted his work, his spirit of dedication and zeal for souls.

After the Mass the body was taken to the Sewri Cemetery where it was laid to rest in the Salesian enclave.

Eliseo Bianchi was born on 22nd August 1914, in Lumezzane, Italy, to Luigi Bianchi and Maria Bonomi. He joined the Salesian school at Ivrea on 18th December 1926. So strong was his desire to dedicate his life to God in the service of youth that he left his beloved Italy for the shores of India in 1930 when he was just 16 years old. India was to be his home for the rest of his life except for a brief span when he returned to Italy.

He entered the novitiate at Shillong in 1930 and made his first profession on 8th December 1931. Then followed a period of philosophical studies at Shillong itself after which he was sent as Assistant and Teacher to Don Bosco, Krishnagar, and then for a year to Don Bosco, Shillong. In 1937, at Bandal, he made his final and total commitment to God, which was followed by the study of Theology. In 1939 there was a break in his Theological studies and he was sent as Assistant and Teacher to Don Bosco, Gauhati. Meanwhile the Second World War broke out and Eliseo Bianchi was interned at Dehra Dun. It was here that he continued his Theological studies and was ordained priest on 30th January 1944.

His first assignment as priest was at Don Bosco, Vellore. His stay at Vellore, however, was very brief, he was transferred to Don Bosco, Matunga as Assistant and Teacher in 1945. He was to remain here for the next sixteen years of his life. After a year as Catechist in Yercaud he came to Lonavla in 1962. He then returned to Italy for a short spell at home. When he came back to India he served as catechist in our houses at Kurla, Borivli, Baroda and Matunga before returning to Lonavla in 1988, where he remained till the end.

Anyone who has known Fr. Bianchi will remember his exactness and orderliness in everything he did. His room had few amenities and was clean and orderly. Though he was strict and austere with himself he was kind and generous with others. Very sensitive to the needs of the poor and the suffering. Every Thursday he would take the jeep, go to the centre of the town and there distribute bread and a few rupees to the poor, this apart from his generosity when anyone approached him for help.

What impressed me most was his deep sense of the supernatural, his prayer and trust in God. There wasn't a day when he missed his Mass and the recitation of the Breviary. Even when things got difficult he was faithful to his practices of piety. In moments of intense suffering, he would sit upon a chair with some help, look at the crucifix and weep. During the last few days when he was unable to move he would be fingering the beads of the Rosary saying as many decades as possible. His devotion to Our Blessed Mother and fidelity to Don Bosco was admirable.

How loving God was to him ! He often expressed his praise and gratitude to Him for all that the Lord had done for him. Fr. Bianchi loved Him deeply and gave Him all that he had to give. He loved his religious family and those to whom he was sent with the message and love of the Good Shepherd.

We, too, are grateful to God, for the gift of Fr. Eliseo Bianchi to the Province of St. Francis Xavier, Bombay and to the Salesian Community of Lonavla in particular, and pray that he may now receive the reward of his labours.

Yours affectionately in Don Bosco,
Fr. Ronald Menezes SDB
Rector

FOR THE NECROLOGY :

Name	: FR. ELISEO BIANCHI SDB
Born	: 22nd August, 1914
First Profession	: 8th December, 1931
Ordained Priest	: 30th January, 1944
Died	: 1st December, 1991
Age	: 77 years 4 months.