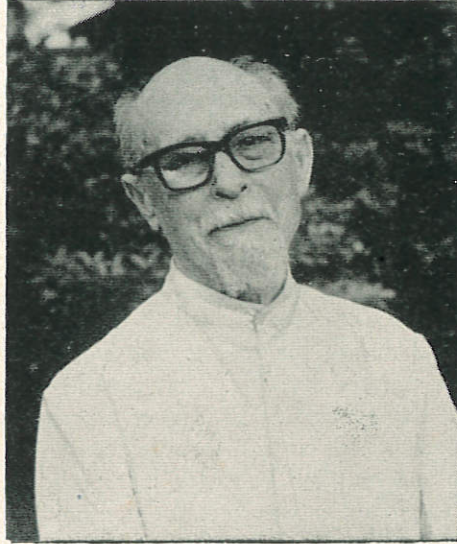


OBITUARY LETTER
of
FR. MARIANO UGUET SDB.



*"I shall not die, but
I shall live, and
recount the deeds
of the Lord".
(Ps. 118, 17)*

Born : 10.04.1898 Barcelona
Died : 18.02.1989 Calcutta

Dear Confreres,

As I present to you the obituary letter of Fr. Mariano Uguet just a year after his death, I recall here the glimpses of this beloved person to whom the words of the psalmist can be most aptly applied: "I shall not die, but I shall live, and recount the deeds of the Lord" (Ps. 118, 17). Fr. Uguet wanted to live on to recount the deeds of the Lord and indeed he was only two months short of 91 when he died. Even now he certainly lives on with the Lord and recounts the deeds of his long career.

His Last Days

From 1985 to 1989 Fr. Uguet was not in good health and was looked after in the provincial house. Besides the normal difficulties of old age, he suffered from complaints of the prostate gland and had to undergo an operation. Although the operation helped him for sometime, he found the going very tough towards the last few months. The presence of the nurse and occasional visits from the doctor and the attention and care given by the confreres provided him with strength, solace and comfort.

During the last two days of his life, events began to build up rapidly towards what was going to be a final farewell. On 16th February Fr. Uguet had come for Mass in the morning. As he did not come down for tea in the evening, the confreres went up to his room and enquired about his health and they found him too weak to get up. His ready smile was missing too. That day he had to be persuaded and assisted to eat something. On 17th morning he could not say Mass and Holy Communion was taken to him and that was to be his last Communion. Seeing his condition the confreres decided to administer the sacrament of the sick and during the rite he was alert and prayed and responded to the prayers devoutly. That evening the doctor arrived and diagnosed the ailment of Fr. Uguet as caused by infection in the urinary tract. Medicines that were prescribed could do little at this stage and on 18th February his condition deteriorated further. Holy Communion was brought to him but he was not able to receive it. All realized that the end was not far away and the confreres remained around him and began to recite the prayers for the dying. Before the prayers were over Fr. Uguet breathed his last peacefully with no trace of agony or pain on his face.

As the news of his death spread, confreres and friends began to arrive at the provincial house to pay their last respects to this great Salesian. At 6.30 p.m. the Mass concelebrated by twenty priests had a big number of participants including people also from the parish of Tengra.

The funeral rites began at Bandel with a concelebrated Mass presided over by Fr. Provincial and joined in by thirty-six priests and participated in by a large number of religious, seminarians and friends who filled the shrine. During the funeral

Mass Fr. Sebastian Alancheril, the provincial, expressed the sentiments of the confreres when referring to the loss of this veteran Salesian as irreplaceable, not only because Fr. Uguet was the oldest Salesian missionary linking India with the early times of Salesian history, but also because of the pioneering work he had contributed as Provincial and in other offices as well. He was truly the "Patriarch" who had seen several generations of Salesians. After the Mass his body was laid to rest at 4.30 p.m. in the cemetery set apart for deceased Salesians of the province.

A Short Life-sketch of Fr. Uguet

Born on 10.04.1898, in Barcelona, he had a good Christian education from his family and from the village school. His vocation to be a Salesian was born with his contact with Salesians and he joined the aspirantate at Campello in 1911. In 1914 he was admitted to the novitiate in Madrid. After his first profession in Madrid he completed his philosophical studies from 1916 to 1918 at Campello. After a three-year period of practical training he completed his theological studies and was ordained in Campello on 14.06.1924. In 1925, on the occasion of the golden jubilee of the first Salesian missionary expedition to South America, V. Rev. Fr. P. Ricaldone sent out a circular asking for volunteers to go to the missions. Fr. Uguet lost no time in presenting his request to be sent to the missions. He was soon sent to Turin for the necessary formation and orientation. Selected to go to India, he set sail for Bombay on 31.05.1925, in the company of Fr. Francis Marmol and Fr. A. Pianazzi.

His first appointment was to Jowai mission where he remained only for six months in 1926, because his health was very frail. In fact, the Superiors wanted to send him back to Spain so that the native air would improve his health. But Fr. Uguet's faith strengthened him and he stayed on. He was then asked to be Catechist in Don Bosco school in Gauhati and later in 1927 transferred to the Catholic Orphan Press (C.O.P.) to be the assistant vicar. He was also in some way involved in the contract by which Bandel Church was handed over to the Salesians. "With the demise of Fr. Uguet," recalls Fr. Dal Broi, "we have lost the last eye-witness of the handing over of Bandel Church to the Salesians by the Padroado in 1928".

From 1932 he was appointed the Rector of the C.O.P. During the war years he was asked to be first acting Provincial

and later was appointed Provincial of the province of Calcutta that comprised the whole of North India. His total tenure of office as Provincial extended to ten years, from 1940 to 1950, quite a difficult period due to the war. From 1950 to 1952 he was again made Rector of the C.O.P. for a three-year period after which he was sent to Dibrugarh as Vicar General, Parish Priest, and Rector.

In 1956 he returned to Calcutta to be the Rector of Don Bosco School, Liluah. During this six-year period Don Bosco School, Liluah, made gigantic strides in all aspects. The foundation stone of the Don Bosco multipurpose building complex was blessed on 31.01.1956 by Archbishop F. Perier of Calcutta and laid by Dr. D. M. Sen, Secretary of education for the state of West Bengal on 03.03.1956. The new building was blessed and inaugurated on 02.10.1959 by Archbishop F. Perier. Fr. Uguet got the marshy grounds filled up to turn them into large and green playgrounds. A beautiful, grand theatre hall also was part of a dream come true in this period. Improvements in the boarding, and a chapel with a new look, made life happier for the boarders as well as the confreres. To get all these works done Fr. Uguet had spent a lot of time and energy running about in Calcutta. In spite of his busy schedule of work he never missed the fatherly contact with the boys and confreres.

After his term as Rector in Liluah he was appointed Rector in the C.O.P., a place quite familiar to him, as he had been there twice before as Rector. His next appointment was to the Don Bosco Polytechnic, North Calcutta, where he contributed much by his experience and skill in the initial stages of the polytechnic. He was then given a little break and transferred to Bandel as confessor and in-charge of the retreat house. From 1970 to 1974 he was asked to be Rector in Don Bosco School, Okhla, Delhi. During this period he worked hard to organize the work in the School and for the acquisition of land for a proposed school in Haryana.

During the remaining years of his life he devoted himself and all his time to the ministry of confession. He was for one year confessor in Liluah from 1974-75, and then for two years, from 1976 to 1978 in the Oriens Seminary, Shillong, and back again in Liluah for two years. He returned to the Oriens Seminary for two years from 1980 to 1982 as confessor and then

returned to the province as confessor in Don Bosco Okhla, Delhi, from 1982 to 1985. The Spanish government in recognition of his outstanding service as a missionary awarded him with a medal.

As his frail health began to cause anxiety, he was brought to the provincial house where he spent his last years from 1985 to 1989.

Fr. Uguet an Exemplary Salesian

Confreres and people who have known Fr. Uguet have always noted in Fr. Uguet, a typical salesian quality, cheerfulness mixed with spontaneous humour and wit. It was enough for Fr. Uguet to appear for confreres especially the young ones to gather around him to enjoy his company and to have a good time with him, although at times, he was unaware that his facial expression, the peculiar voice and his manner of narrating events provoked peals of laughter from his listeners. Right from the beginning of his career and when he was Provincial in Calcutta, his tact and humour won him and the province many friends and benefactors, and brought the Salesians in contact with other religious of the area, especially the Jesuits.

As a religious he was very obedient and never objected to any job that was offered to him. He had been given a number of appointments during his life time, and the changes were frequent. But Fr. Uguet accepted everything with great faith, in a spirit of obedience and with his characteristic good humour. His spirit of poverty was always exemplary. When he was brought to the provincial house, already frail in health, he made sure to have the Rector called to his side and handed over the little money he had in his purse.

He was very human and very appreciative to others for whatever was done for him, especially in his old age. He could be upset when things went wrong, but he was quick to forgive and the matter would be closed after a frank discussion. His love for the community was always strong and he would try to come for meals with the community whenever he could.

Fr. Uguet's spirit of sacrifice was extraordinary and could withstand difficult journeys, the type he made once in 1950 with

Fr. Dal Broi, when he wanted to visit Mal Bazar and Damanpur parishes under the PIME fathers. "During this trip I admired the spirit of sacrifice of Fr. Uguet", recalls Fr. Dal Broi.

He was a wise and prudent administrator. Rev. Fr. O. Paviotti can testify to this. "Fr. Mariano Uguet was a well-known personality in Calcutta from the 20's right into the 70's. He it was who made the C.O.P. a source of income for the vast province of Calcutta, then comprising all the North East. We were very poor. There was no institution to depend on. The world at large too was poor. The well-being that came after the war was still far away. The C.O.P. directed by Fr. Uguet was a great boon to the Salesians of Northern and Eastern India".

In his old age too he knew how to keep busy. He never seemed bored or tired. He was an avid reader and kept himself constantly up-dated and well-informed. Were it not for this good habit, he would have found his old age experience quite boring.

While presenting to the confreres the life of this veteran Salesian, I would like to exhort everyone to emulate the spirit of cheerfulness, sacrifice, and the human qualities like optimism and humour in Fr. Mariano Uguet. Let us be generous towards him in remembering him in our prayers, so that the Lord may recompense abundantly for the good work Fr. Uguet has done as a missionary in India.

Ever yours affectionately in Don Bosco,

Rev. Fr. Thomas Polackal, S.D.B.
(Rector)

**Provincial House
Salesians of Don Bosco
52A, R. N. Chowdhury Road
Calcutta - 700 015**

Date : 01.03.90
