



St. Anthony's Church
853 Third Avenue
Elizabeth, New Jersey
April 24, 1983

Dear Confreres,

In the early hours of February 3, 1983, the long and laborious earthly pilgrimage of our incomparable confrere

FATHER ANTHONY BREGOLATO

came to an abrupt end. He had lived 81 years, 8 months, and 14 days, more than 63 of them as a Salesian of Don Bosco and more than 53 as a priest of God. To the very last, he was the staunch and loyal Salesian that he had been all his life.

On Sunday, January 30, when the parish was celebrating the external feast of St. John Bosco, he suffered another mild attack in the long series of heart attacks that ultimately choked the strong fiber of his existence. Sitting on his bed and trying to regain his breath, he told me plainly, "This time I am not going to make it." He had made it other times and rallied to the amazement of his physicians and confreres. This time, however, his words proved prophetic. Yet, that same day he insisted on coming downstairs and sharing the noon meal with the community, and in the evening he went to the Rugani residence, where he ate heartily the last full meal that he really enjoyed.

Monday, the 31st of January, once again he wanted to join the community, swelled to 15 members by the presence of our Salesian Sisters, but he hardly touched any food. The next day, as the priests of the parish traveled to West Haverstraw for the Province's parish personnel workshop, Father Bregolato was taken to the hospital for the last time. That same evening of February 1, his attending physician and personal friend, Dr. Ralph Oriscello, diagnosed pulmonary edema with partial paralysis. Father was in the final stages of his heart ailment and Parkinson's disease. The Doctor asked me for permission not to use life-supporting systems, that would bring the patient no advantage, considering his advanced age.

And so it was that in a few short hours, Father Anthony Bregolato yielded his soul to the Creator the morning of February 3. Always a free and independent spirit, he was so till the very

end. He could not stand being fussed over. He wanted to do by himself, without troubling anyone. The night before he died, he asked me to remove his spectacles (meaning the oxygen mask) for they had had to tie his hands down. Then he told me, "Go home and take some rest. There's nothing you can do for me now." That is why he died by himself, in the dead of night at nearby St. Elizabeth Hospital, while the nurse was looking the other way.

His strong, assertive, and independent personality stretched even beyond the grave. Wanting to render him a fitting homage and pay him a last appropriate tribute, we had prepared an elaborate funeral and were anticipating a large turnout of friends and parishioners, as well as Salesians, when lo and behold Father Bregolato saw to it that the best laid plans would be foiled. No doubt he prevailed on the Lord to send us a timely snow storm that paralyzed the whole area. Only a few brave souls could plow through the storm on Sunday evening, February 6, to attend the wake. And but a few more could come Monday morning for the Pontifical Mass of the Resurrection, offered by Bishop Dominic Marconi, Auxiliary of Newark and Vicar for Union County. Nobody would be allowed to fuss over him even in death.

Father Anthony Bregolato was one of those giants, towering head and shoulder above the common run of men, that appear occasionally on the stage of human events. He was brilliant, he was learned, he was wise, he was witty, he was sincere, he was loyal, but above all he was kind and compassionate — a true priest of God, "taken from among men and appointed for men in the things that pertain to God, that he might offer gifts and sacrifices for their sins." (Hebrews 5, 1) Father was a man of deep, quiet faith that did not transpire outwardly, but that was always there, to give him that peaceful serenity which made him a tower of strength, to help and inspire people who were in need of consolation and comfort. He did not need lengthy dissertations or long-winded explanations. He could come immediately to the point, by an intuitive sixth sense that helped him size up the situation at once. And then he was admirably equipped to give just the right kind of advice that the situation required.

Like St. Joseph, Father Bregolato was that "faithful and prudent steward that God set over his household, to give them their food in due time." (Luke 12, 42) "Faithful and prudent, just and upright!" these are the human qualities that sum up the great and magnanimous spirit of Father Bregolato. There were hard times in his life, when things did not always go the right way, but he knew how to keep an even keel and guide others unerringly through the storms of life. Among the many testimonials of esteem and affection that were voiced by our parishioners, allow me to quote but one, that of Miss Josephine Novello, "God in His infinite goodness has bestowed abundant blessings upon the Church of St. Anthony of Padua and its parishioners. One of the truly outstanding blessings which He has showered upon us was the moment, the day, when He sent Father Anthony Bregolato to shepherd His flock in Elizabeth. Fr. Bregolato has been an eminent disciple of Our Lord. His warmth, his sincerity, his humility, and most of all his love for his fellowman has affected all of us in many unforgettable ways."

Father Paul Aronica, in the provincial news letter SERVICE, capsulized beautifully the sentiments of all the conferees that ever knew him. "There was a time when it might very well be said that Fr. Bregolato was a PILLAR of the Province. Though never Provincial, he exercised an authority of greatness which emanated from him. That was true especially from 1939 to 1969, when he served as provincial councilor, pastor of St. Anthony's Parish in Elizabeth, and later of Mary Help of Christians in Manhattan. Most solicitous for his conferees, he was a great help in easing the province and even Salesian headquarters in Turin through the lean and painful years of the Second World War and of the immediate postwar period."

Father Bregolato was born at Torreglia, a quiet residential village in the Coll' Eugane!, southwest of Padua, on May 20, 1901. At the age of 16 he entered the Salesian junior seminary of Penango and a year later the novitiate at Foglizzo, where he made his first profession September 8, 1919. After serving in the Italian army for two years, he began his practical teacher training in Italian schools. In 1926 he was assigned to the United States, then badly in need of priests to serve the Italian immigrants of the New York area. He learned English, which he spoke proficiently with a pleasant accent, while teaching at Salesian High in New Rochelle and then at Mary Help of Christians School in Tampa. There he was ordained a priest in 1929 by the late Bishop Patrick Barry of St. Augustine, a true friend and admirer of the Salesians.

In 1930 he was assigned as Prefect of Studies to our boarding grammar school at Goshen, New York, and in 1933 he returned to New Rochelle, where he taught at Salesian High, while attending graduate courses at Fordham University. He obtained his M.A. in classical languages in 1934. From 1934 to 1938 he served on the Latin Department of the New York State Board of Regents, and in 1940 he received his doctorate, also from Fordham University.

From 1935 on, Fr. Bregolato was associated with our parishes in the New York area, serving first as assistant at Transfiguration Church, Mott Street, in the heart of New York's Little Italy. Those were days of intense activity in the then predominantly but fast changing Italian parish, and Fr. Bregolato was in the midst of it all. In 1939 he was assigned to his first pastorate, at St. Anthony's Church, Elizabeth, New Jersey, where he served with distinction and zeal during the troubled days of World War II, until 1948.

"He became pastor at a very trying time in our history and served nine years," writes Fr. Bosio, former pastor at St. Anthony's. "The great depression had compounded the nagging debt that was stifling progress. It was Fr. Bregolato who patiently *nickled and dimed* the debt away. At the end of the first half of his tenure he was able to burn the mortgage. That was at the height of the war, 1944. Then he set to the task of saving for a *rainy day*. When he left St. Anthony's in 1948, he had firmly laid the foundation for the rapid development that took place in the 50's and early 60's. The school, the rectory, the convent, all became a reality because of the enlightened fiscal policies of Fr. Bregolato."

"While keeping a firm hand on the finances and exercising the ordinary duties of parish life with fidelity and zeal," continues Fr. Bosio, "Fr. Bregolato will especially be remembered in Peterstown (as this section of Elizabeth is called), as *the angel of mercy* during those terrible war years, when many of our young men were killed in action or returned from the front wounded and maimed. To break the sad news to nervous relatives was the task of the gentle priest from St. Anthony, who also helped the families rebuild their shattered world in faith and hope."

Father Bregolato was instrumental in obtaining state accreditation for our Don Bosco College in Newton. Working closely with Fr. Ambrose Rossi, the Provincial, and with Fr. Patrick O'Leary, the Dean, he helped prepare the academic framework. On the day of the state authorities' visit for the approval of the college, Fr. Bregolato taught a course in Cicero that impressed both students and Dr. Morrison, head of the visitation team.

In 1948 he was appointed pastor of Mary Help of Christians Church, on East 12th Street, New York City, the grassroots of our Province. He served there for 21 years, witnessing economic and spiritual changes that would have discouraged a weaker man. He kept the church in excellent condition and never lessened his apostolic care of the shifting population. Sacramental life and the care of the sick and elderly were his special concern, in spite of the fact that his own health was yielding to the demands of age.

Father Bregolato was very loyal to the Province at all times, helping it out financially, and steering it through troublesome times. He cooperated with Provincials in all projects. His door was open to all confreres, and they came from all over the Salesian world. He was a generous host. He brought Don Bosco great honor in 1934 when he organized the commemoration of his canonization in St. Patrick's Cathedral. He promoted devotion to Mary Help of Christians, and worked generously for the chapel of Mary Help of Christians in the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, Washington, D.C. His confreres both admired and loved him for the appreciation he had of them.

Ill health forced Fr. Bregolato to give up his pastorate in 1969. He returned to Elizabeth, and here he served as parish priest till his death, helping out with the Italian apostolate and with the care of the sick. His refined manners, further mellowed by age, drew many friends to the Salesians and to our Parish. His long and varied experience gave him prominence throughout the Province even after he left the Provincial Council. He was a keen judge of human character, not easily swayed by empty words or fooled by vain show. In many instances, his good common sense, expressed in pithy humor, obviated many a sticky problem.

Fr. Virginio Mancini, his faithful collaborator for many years in Manhattan, said of Fr. Bregolato with quiet dignity, "He was a wise, witty, learned, kind Salesian priest, who won the hearts of all."

I would like to conclude this sketchy summary of a full and dedicated life spent entirely in the service of the Congregation and of the Church, by expressing the wish that some day someone will take time to write a complete biography of this pioneer Salesian, so that his memory and his example may not perish but serve to enrich many future generations of Salesians.

With a few minor changes, the conclusion to the eulogy I preached on the occasion of his funeral may well serve as a conclusion to this letter. Knowing Fr. Bregolato's love and understanding of our Province and of our confreres, knowing how he would like us to do even better than we have been doing, we would like to engage his power of intercession, now that he is in the presence of God our Father, Mary our Mother, and Don Bosco our Founder . . . We want him to help us build our Province, our Salesian Family, into the community of faith and love that God wants us to be.

This is the commission we give you, dear Father Bregolato, now that you have left us. In heaven you have to work for us. You have to draw us together and help us really love one another. You have to find a replacement for yourself, too, among the young men of our parishes and schools. You have to remind our people of what St. Bosco told us long ago: "The greatest blessing God can give a family is a son who becomes a priest." Help our people encourage, not discourage, vocations to the priesthood and the religious life, mindful of the fact that God never comes to deprive us, but to enrich us, when we are generous enough to say Yes to Him.

And now, dear Father Bregolato, we will not say Addio but Arrivederci, not Good-bye, but Till we meet again . . . in Heaven, in the home of God our Father.

Fraternally in Christ,
Fr. Alvin Manni, Director-Pastor

Data for the Necrology: **FATHER ANTHONY BREGOLATO**, born May 20, 1901, at Torreglia (Padova), Italy; died at Elizabeth, New Jersey, February 3, 1983, at the age of 81, after 63 years of religious profession and 53 years of priesthood.