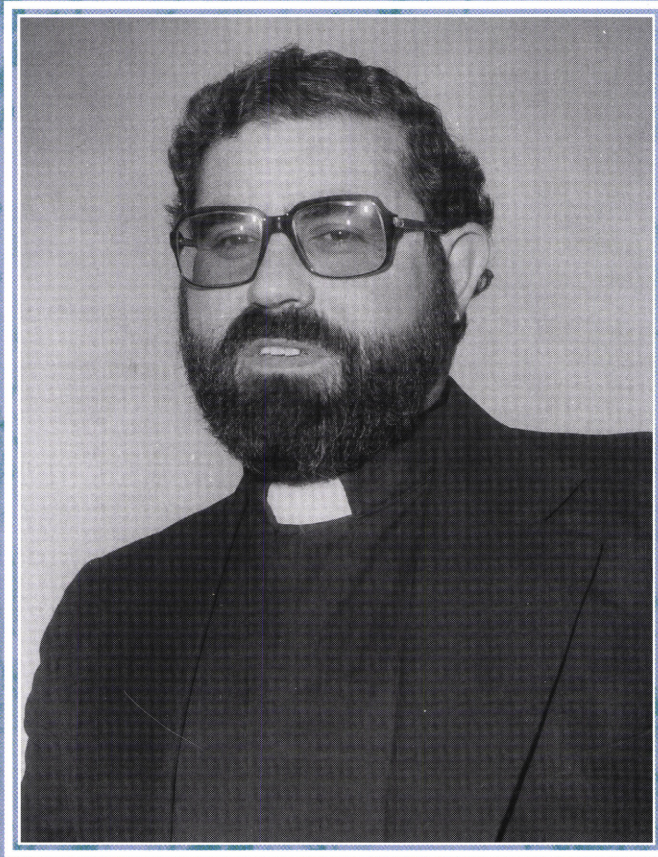


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Fr Raymond Cau SDB



8.4.1938 - 6.3.2003

FATHER RAYMOND CAU, s.d.b.

Salesian, Priest, Friend

A son was born to farmer Mauro Cau and his wife Luigia Todde on 8th April 1938. They lived in Sorgono, a village in the mountains of Sardinia, with their seven children. Nine days later, the newborn baby was baptised in the village parish of Santa Maria Assunta. He was given the name RAIMONDO.

As a young boy, Raimondo cared for the sheep belonging to the family. He went to the primary school in his hometown, and did his secondary education as an aspirant in the Salesian school in Novi Ligure, north of Genoa (1953-55). In 1955 he went to the Cardinal Cagliero Salesian Missionary Institute in Ivrea where, some years later, he volunteered for the missions. He was 19 years old when arrived in Australia on 30th October 1957, where came to be known affectionately as RAY.

A year after his arrival, Ray did his novitiate in Sunbury (Vic.) with Father Ed Power as his novice master. He made his first profession before Father B. M. Fredrigotti (1959), and did his studies in philosophy and teacher training in Oakleigh (1959-61). Ray first came to Port Pirie as a young brother in practical training (1962-65). At the end of that part of his formation, the house chronicler noted that Ray did *"three years of solid and continuous work at the College. The oval and trees are a monument to his hard work. (He was) 'the first Salesian scholastic (cleric) to spend three years (tirocinnium) at Pirie – Ad multos annos."*

Ray made his final profession on 31st January 1965 in Oakleigh (Vic.) and, the following year, he began his theological studies in Salerno. He was ordained to the priesthood at the cathedral in Oristano (Sardinia) on 29 March 1969.

The newly ordained Father Ray returned to Port Pirie as catechist (1970-75), and was bursar of the community (1976-77). In 1978 he was appointed as headmaster of Boys' Town, Engadine, NSW. The work was tough and challenging, but also rewarding to see *"how the kids responded to what we tried to impart to them."*

Ray was then appointed as teacher and assistant at St. Joseph's Regional College, Ferntree Gully (Vic.) from 1980 to 1981 - *"my two years of rest after Boys' Town."*

His next assignment was at Dominic College in Glenorchy, Tasmania (1982-84). He then returned to Port Pirie in 1985 as deputy principal of Saint Mark's College, and from 1986 to 1989 he was headmaster of the senior school. Ray stayed on at St. Mark's as teacher and assistant, and was appointed Rector of the Salesian Community in Port Pirie from 1994-2002.

He loved and was loved

Those who came to know Father Ray came to appreciate him as an educator. His classes were always well prepared, even when, in the last two years, he was not a well man. He kept his students alert with a story or a joke, and his feedback on their work in a way that was uniquely Ray's. He was a strict teacher who demanded discipline but beneath that tough exterior was a kind and caring person who went out of his way to help students and show extra care for those who had difficulties. He was one of the few teachers who was seen giving extra tutoring for students after school.

It was not what he taught that his students remember him for, but how – as one who genuinely had the good of the students at heart.

Ray was a keen sportsman. He either officiated at school sporting activities, or played with the students and friends. He would not turn down a challenge to a game of cricket, tennis or squash. When he played for the Napperby Tennis Club, he was nicknamed "Rocky."

That he was quick on his feet surprised many a student as he was occasionally seen chasing students around the yard armed with a cricket bat.

To keep in shape, one house chronicler noted: "*Fr. Cau was up early running his ten laps around the athletic track. He has been running regularly for months, and has worn a beaten path around the track. His pattern has been to run in the early morning on weekends, and after school during the week.*"

And when the games were played and those muscles kept in tone, nothing quenched his thirst better than a bacardi and coke, or a gin and tonic. Ray enjoyed solving the crossword puzzles in the daily newspapers. When he could not find the word he consulted various English and crosswords dictionaries and his own notebook of words and phrases. It was not how many games he played, but how he played and helped others to enjoy themselves that he is remembered for.

The students quickly learned from Father Ray that the chapel is a sacred place and that a certain behaviour was expected of them especially during Mass.

Even in these sacred moments, his sense of humour came through as he would regularly ask for two good looking young men to bring up the offertory in his accent that kept every one guessing.

He looked forward to celebrating the annual Mass for the deceased old scholars and former teachers of St. Mark's College. For him, this was "*an important means of bringing comfort to those who still grieve the loss of loved ones.*"

Wherever help was needed, Ray availed himself to celebrate the Eucharist and Reconciliation whether it be for his confreres, or the Salesian Co-operators, or the Italian community in Solomontown or the diocese of Port Pirie. One of the great joys of Ray's priestly life was to celebrate the wedding of his former students or colleagues in Port Pirie, Glenorchy, Engadine or Ferntree Gully, to baptise their children, and to visit the families of current and former staff and students, and friends. He enjoyed sharing a meal with his many friends, and was in turn a wonderful host to all his guests.

The Shepherd

As a young boy, Father Ray grew up in the mountains of Sardinia, looking after the sheep belonging to his family. One can only imagine how, at that young age, Ray learned to care, protect, to love, to feed his flock and gather the lambs in his arms (*cf. Is. 40:11*). If, in his years of formation, he was looking for a model to follow as a Salesian and priest, Ray would have found it in the Good Shepherd and in Don Bosco.

Ray did what shepherds do: helping, caring, comforting, guiding, accompanying, enjoying company, cherishing nature... just being there... for others.

A staff member said, "*Even though in the last few months Father Ray was not able to teach, just his being around gave one a sense of assurance, that all will be well.*" He was always happy to be out in the yard catching up with the students, or talking to them while lining up in front of the canteen. His confreres looked forward to his company at retreats or Salesian gatherings, and his unique contributions at Provincial Chapters and meetings.

Ray did not leave us a treatise on pastoral theology, none of us remember him as a writer, a theologian or even as an eloquent speaker, he just lived as and did what a good shepherd would do. His love for the Eucharist, his devotion to our Blessed Mother, his prayer-life was simple but deep. His students remember him as a teacher who had the ability "*to make us feel special even if he called us all ugly*" (C. Button and O. Aitchison). His former students knew him as strict, hard and tough with his discipline, but "*beneath his tough exterior was a kind and caring person, ... a father, ... a good ol' Aussie bloke with an Italian accent whom every one loves and admires. No frills, what you saw was what you got*" (D. de Palma). All who knew him loved him dearly because he had a way of making others feel loved.

This is the man who was "one of the best-loved confreres in the Province" (Fr. I. Murdoch),





"A dear friend" to his colleagues, students and friends. This is the man for whom his students have "*a place in our hearts that will be with us forever*" (C. Button and O. Aitchison).

In his breviary, he kept this email message he received on his birthday from a former student: "*Hello Ugly! Have a good day. Eat some cake and ask somebody to make you a cuppa. I'm thinking of you.*" Ray loved, and was loved so much by all.

Calvary

The Rector Major, Father Pascual Chavez, was absolutely right when he said in his homily at Ray's funeral: "*I would say that from the first moment of his illness, Fr. Ray began a Lenten journey, marked by the cross....*"

On September 25 2001, Ray had an operation to remove his gall bladder. Almost a month later, he was re-admitted at the Whylla hospital and operated for cancer. While still in intensive care and recovering from the operation, the Province and the Port Pirie community mourned the death of Brother John Larkins on 26 October 2002. This saddened Ray immensely. His Lenten journey had begun.

Along the way, there were many who, like Simon of Cyrene and Veronica, travelled with Ray: his anxious family, his confreres, his students and staff, his many friends, the medical staff in Port Pirie, in Whyalla, and St. Joseph's Nursing Home (Port Pirie).

After his release from hospital and several courses of chemotherapy, he felt able enough to travel to Rome in late November. Ray wanted so much to see and to be with his beloved sister, Maria Barracciu, his family and friends in Italy. Ray wanted so much to see them.... It must have been a very emotional reunion.

The journey came to a sudden halt on 18 December, when Ray suffered a stroke which left him paralysed in the right side and unable to speak. From here on, the scenario resembled Calvary.

The stroke he suffered nailed him to the Cross, like his crucified Good Shepherd whom he loved and followed faithfully. In the weeks that followed, he was utterly helpless without the constant and loving care of his sister and family, and the medical staff at the Tivoli Hospital and the Sisters at the Casa di Cura Pio XI in Rome.

News that Father Ray had taken a bad turn saddened every one deeply when it reached Australia. All his confreres, his students, his colleagues and friends could do was watch "from a distance" (*Mk. 15:40*)... praying, ...accompanying, ...comforting him through emails, cards, letters and phone calls...(which Brother Peter Swain patiently and faithfully delivered and read to Ray).

"Standing near the cross" (*Jn. 19:26*) were Ray's sister and family, his dear friend Brother Peter Swain, the Rector Major, Fr. Pascual Chavez, Fr. Corrado Bettiga and the confreres of Casa Generalizia (Rome) ...also praying, ...accompanying, ...comforting, ...often, just being there with him.... And when he had drunk the cup completely, ... It was finished (*Jn. 19:30*). Ray bowed his head and entrusted himself into the hands of his Risen Shepherd (*Lk. 23:46*). It was 3:40 pm., 6 March 2003.... His life was changed, not ended (*Preface of Christian Death I*).

The Communion of Saints

Our Province was blessed to have had a confrere and friend like Father Ray. It was no easy sacrifice for his family to lend us their dearly loved Raimondo for 46 years. When it became clear what his Lenten journey would consist of, Ray longed to be with his sister and family. As they accompanied him throughout his missionary life in Australia, they stayed by his side in this most difficult and painful part of his journey. May our prayers and the knowledge of how dearly loved Father Ray is in Australia bring them comfort and peace.

In life, this big-hearted host brought many together around the table of the Shepherd's banquet and table of his home. In his deathbed he brought together his family in Italy, his confreres and many friends in Australia, and the confreres at Casa Generalizia and those in Australia. Father Corrado Bettiga and his community did for Ray what his Salesian family in Australia were unable to do "from a distance." In his typically unpretentious way, Ray deepened of a sense of belonging (*Const.*, 59) and strengthened the spirit of brotherhood (*Const.*, 58) between the confreres in Rome and Australia. Such an experience of the communion of saints on earth is profoundly touching. Thank you Father Corrado Bettiga and community at Casa Generalizia for this experience of communion.

Father Ray now rests in his Risen Shepherd in the company of the saints and his loved ones who have passed on. What we know, remember, cherish and love about Ray - his goodness, his humour, his hospitality, his closeness to God - will no doubt be enjoyed in the heavenly banquet as we all did when Ray was with us. That Ray is now at peace comforts us; that he is now in good company, no doubt entertaining the saints with his stories and humour, gladdens us.

In loving memory

There are many stories that are told and re-told "in loving memory" of this remarkable man we all know as Father Ray Cau. The Lord kept his promise. He sent us a shepherd after his own heart (*Jer. 3:15*) in the person of this simple Salesian priest, Father Ray. We have tasted and seen the goodness of the Lord (*Ps. 34:8*) in the life of this ordinary man Father Ray.

May the memory of Father Ray encourage and inspire all who knew him to become shepherds also to many young and ordinary people as a Salesian, priest, educator and friend.

Father James K. Hoe, s.d.b.
Rector
Port Pirie, South Australia

Dates for the Necrology

Born: 8 April 11 1938,
Sorgono Sardinia

First Profession: 31 January 1959,
Sunbury (Vic)

Perpetual Profession: 31 January 1965,
Oakleigh (Vic)

Ordination: 29 March 1969,
Oristano, Sardinia

Entered eternal life: 6 March 2003, Rome, Italy

