



FR. JOHN CELORIA, S.D.B.

Born Casorzo Monferrato

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May 12, 1904

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Professed New Rochelle, N. Y.,

August 24, 1924

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Ordained Ivrea, Italy, July 5, 1931

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Entered into life, Tampa, Florida,
November 22, 1972

Mary Help of Christians School
6400 East Chelsea

Tampa , Florida

December 24, 1972

Dear Confreres:

On November 22nd, 1972, Feast of St. Cecilia, Father John Celoria took his flight to Heaven, there to sing for ever the praises of God with the Patron Saint of Music. He was 68 years old. Born of Pious parents on May 12th, 1904 in Casorzo Monferrato, he was brought up in a truly Catholic family of the old type. He soon lost his father and his saintly mother took over the burden of feeding and educating her three children, John and two older sisters. He soon developed a desire to consecrate his life to God in the Salesian Society, a commitment he never retracted for the rest of his life. After the grammar grades in his native village, he was sent to Penango Monferrato, then a Juniorate for aspirants to the Salesian Society. At graduation, he was selected with other companions to come to this country with Father Manassero, then Provincial. He made his Novitiate and Philosophical Studies in New Rochelle, N. Y., attending at the same time Fordham University where he received his BA in education. He returned to Italy for his Ordination which took place in Ivrea July 5th, 1931. Returning to the States, he was assigned to Newton, N. J. as Prefect and Catechist and in 1934 he was made Director of our school in Goshen, N. Y.

For a while he seemed destined to play the part of the neighbor in need rather than that of the good Samaritan. A persistent ailment wrongly diagnosed as tuberculosis gave everyone the impres-

sion that his days were numbered. In 1937 he was sent back to Italy, there to die, as he put it. Yet he recovered sufficiently to serve in the active apostolate not just for many weeks or months, but for many years. In God's Providence a Doctor Lozano not only cured him but revealed to him the real cause of his illness, a defective heart. He was well enough to be assigned to Rebaudengo as Catechist where he aroused great enthusiasm for the missions. In 1940 he was made director of Novi Ligure where he kept the delicate balance between the Germans and the Italians during World War II as he matched wits with the Germans. Always with his neighbor in mind, Father Celoria fed and clothed his boys in a most difficult time. He was called back to the States in 1947 and was made director of our school of arts and trades in East Boston, Massachusetts, and two years later he was made Pastor of Holy Rosary Church in Port Chester, New York.

For over 12 years he served his people diligently. His Parishioners, especially the boys and the poor became his greatest interest, sparing no sacrifice in order to help them. He was beloved by all and with their cooperation he left there two great monuments; the gym-auditorium and the Shrine of Our Blessed Mother, whose devotion he sought to foster in every heart. But there were the invisible monuments which are far more precious, though little known. He played the good samaritan to countless people feeling very keenly their personal pains and sorrows. He did so without embarrassing them, ever keeping in mind their sense of dignity. He came to their aid without having them perceive it.

But there is always a price to be paid for the gift of love. It was only fitting that he should begin his Calvary with a heart that was worn out. It took 10 years and three open heart operations before that beautiful heart came to a stop.

He had enjoyed an unusually cheerful day before he died. His private duty nurse, a young colored man named Dan Davis who cared for Father with the diligence and affection of a son, had remarked upon leaving that afternoon at 2 o'clock, in what good spirit he had found his patient. After receiving Holy Communion as usual, he and Father John went for a morning stroll about the beautiful grounds of the school. Banter and laughter were exchanged heartily. Plans were made for the Thanksgiving Dinner with the Community, and possibly a ride to see Dan's parents afterwards. Little did the two realize that they were taking their last walk together. Toward evening, when Brother Joseph Ackroyd, our infirmarian, went to check on Father to prepare him for dinner,

everything seemed normal. Only a few minutes later, when he returned with the tray, did he find him breathing heavily, sitting in his chair. When efforts to arouse him proved unavailing, brother rushed down to call for an ambulance. Father Director and other confreres who happened to be standing in the hall, went in and assisted him while he received the last rites. Before the ambulance arrived a few minutes later, he had already expired. All the frantic efforts of the attendants as well as the doctor in the emergency room of the hospital could not revive him. He was pronounced dead in St. Joseph's Hospital at 5:55 P.M.

Two main traits characterized Father John Celoria: a deep sense of piety and a great love for our Blessed Mother. As long as we remember him, he was always faithful to his Religious practices . . . office, mass, meditation, spiritual reading and the daily visit to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. They had become a natural part of his inner life. Even in his sickness and during the last two years of his life, when he was not able to say Mass or recite his Office, he never failed to receive our Lord with great devotion and spent long hours in prayer and meditation. His favorite book was "CHRISTIANESTIMO VISSUTO."

His confessions were frequent, humble, sincere and even to the point of scrupolosity and he was constantly united with God and His Blessed Mother. His devotion to the Mother of God, our Lady Help of Christians, was without limit. Taught by Saintly Father Binelli, he consecrated his life to Mary with his own blood. PER-DA-CON-IN-MARIA. All through Mary, from Mary, with Mary and in Mary. Unable to do other practices towards the end of his life, he recited the Holy Rosary over and over again.

Father John was prepared through a long illness to receive the gift of life — eternal life. This gift came to him the evening of November 22, 1972. And he received it gratefully — "Into your hands, Lord, I commend my spirit." May we be equally fortunate to receive our gift with similar dispositions!

Recommending him and our work here in Tampa to the charity of your prayers, I remain

Fraternally yours in Christ,

Fr. Alvin Manni
Director

