



Rev. Fr. Angelo Codello SDB



My dear confreres,

Fr. Angelo Codello passed away suddenly on 23rd March 1990 at Kovilur, Javadhi Hills, owing to a massive heart attack. In his death we have lost a pioneer missionary, a successful social worker, a convinced religious and zealous salesian priest.

On 18th August 1989 Fr. Codello had suffered a mild heart attack at Kovilur, where he was residing for the past few years, and was admitted in St. Thomas Hospital at Chetpet. On 29th August he was discharged and came over to the Sacred Heart College community for rest and treatment. This forced inactivity was very difficult for him to accept. He was used to being with his people and doing things for them. Hence even after returning from the hospital he used to go to Kovilur almost every week, in order to be with his people on the hills. On the 23rd March 1990 he left for the hills, in the company of the headman of the Javadhi Hills, who had come to visit him at the college. Reaching Kovilur at 5.00 p.m. he asked the driver to prepare some lime juice for him. When the driver brought the lime juice some minutes later, to his shock he found Fr. Codello on the floor, already dead. The driver immediately communicated the sad news to the college community at Tirupattur. Fr. Codello went to his own place to die among his own people.

The funeral service was held on 25th March at 4.00 p.m. in the College auditorium. About 60 priests, salesian and diocesan, concelebrated the funeral mass, which was presided over by Bishop Michael Augustine of Vellore. A large gathering of religious, laity and well-wishers together with about 100 tribal people from Javadhi Hills, wished a tearful good-bye to the pioneer priest of the Javadhi Hills. After the Mass his mortal remains were laid to rest in the community cemetery.

EARLY CHILDHOOD:

Angelo was born at San Pietro di Barbozza in the diocese of Padova in north-east Italy, to Andrea Codello and Matilde Villanova on 17th September 1912. When he was about 5 years old his father, a soldier, died in the first world war. The burden of bringing up Angelo and his younger sister Bruna fell to his mother. She was kind and strict with the children and demanded from them hard work and a simple life-style. This life-pattern Angelo pursued through his life. At the age of 10 Angelo too started working on the farm and vineyard to help support the family. He grew up to be a very active and responsible young man. At 22, his mother arranged for the engagement of Angelo to a girl in the neighbourhood. Both the families were getting ready for the marriage, when suddenly Angelo changed his mind and decided to become a missionary, thus shattering the plans of his mother. But as a woman of great faith and trust in God, she accepted the decision of Angelo, saying she would not be a hindrance to the call of God. When she needed him most, she allowed her only son to join the salesian congregation, thus manifesting a great spirit of detachment.

Another source of trial was the misunderstandings he faced even from some of his closest collaborators, especially with reference to project "PLOUGH". Due to these difficulties he had to leave the project in the hands of others and take up another work at Jamnamarathur. Though this caused him intense suffering he bore it all up with Christian resignation. As he laboured disinterestedly he could also leave the work in the hands of others. What pained him most was the forced rest and inactivity owing to heart trouble during the last months of his life.

Exemplary religious:

In Fr. Codello's life, love of God was expressed in self sacrificing love for others, especially towards the poor. He loved Don Bosco deeply and was inspired by his life of union with God and dedication to others. He was a genuine salesian priest, of solid piety and altruistic love. He once wrote the following in his diary "To think of our neighbour, his interest, his satisfaction and his joy, more than of ourselves is the unequivocal sign of true charity, for to act in this way, not once, not ten times, but always in every circumstance towards all our brethren without distinction, one must love God truly". And again: "Those who love the poor in life shall have no fear of death". Another entry in his diary reads: "Opportunity is the flower of time, which if plucked too late, leaves in our hands the stalk of regret". Fr. Codello let no opportunity pass unutilized. The words of Scripture "As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" (Mt. 25, 40), was the real guiding principle in his life as a priest.

We can feel the heart of Fr. Codello in the following words he wrote to COME NOI in 1986: "It is a joy to work here for the rehabilitation of our poor brothers of the Javadhi Hills. It is a pity that I am getting old and am not able to do as much work as I used to. But I am very grateful to God for enabling me to work and be in contact with the people of the Hills. I love these people from the bottom of my heart and feel loved by them. My life is totally consecrated for them, without any feeling of regret. The real need is the education of the people. Our work of the PLOUGH has been for the uplift of the people and because of this work, life has come to the Javadhi Hills. Even though we have not worked miracles, all, including the highest civil authorities, are of the opinion that our presence has injected life into our people."

In 1989 writing to a group of people in Italy he thus expressed himself: "I feel I am at the end of my life, but I desire to continue to live, work and help my brothers, the tribal people."

That the people with whom he was in contact, really appreciated him can be gathered from the many letters he used to receive from them. Captain Leonard Cheshire (founder of the Cheshire homes throughout the world) wrote to him on 1st January 1985: "I thank you for your kindness and friendship that you have shown me over the years. Frequently I think of the days when you used to drive me round on your motorbike looking for a property, or how you and your family drove those many

Living and working in North Arcot, Fr. Codello was fully aware that scarcity of water was perhaps the greatest problem faced by the majority of the people. From 1970 onwards he concentrated his attention on providing water for the people of North Arcot: he sank 2086 open wells and 18 bore wells! No wonder the Rotary Club of Vellore presented him with the "Best Rural Rehabilitation Merit" award for 1976. From January 1972 to 1977 he worked at Poosimalikuppam for the rehabilitation of 90 families of Tamil repatriates, victims of a cruel cyclone. The project consisted in providing agricultural aids (seeds, plants, fertilizer) farming assistance (bulls, hens), clothing for the people, medical care, elementary education, office facilities, etc.

Pioneer of Javadhi Hills:

From January 1976 Fr. Codello focussed his attention on the upliftment of the tribal people of the Javadhi Hills. He went there at the request of the then Collector that something be done about their water scarcity. Many, including the Collector, knew how successful father was in the matter of providing water. At strategic points in Jamnamarathur, Kovilur and some other places he constructed 2 big lakes and 16 small lakes and also dug 30 wells. He helped to level land for cultivation. In all these efforts he was ably supported by agencies like COME NOI of Turin, Italy. Fr. Codello was very closely connected with the PLOUGH, a society for social, agricultural and rural development, affiliated to COME NOI, Turin. Besides arranging for water, he rendered all types of services to the farmers of the hills: expertise, better seeds, agricultural implements. etc. Fr. Codello motivated the people to work with dedication for their own betterment, for the completion of the projects he had started for them. He believed in equality and the power of love. He paid just and equal wages to men and women thus creating an awareness of minimum-wages-policy and equality of persons. Fr. Codello genuinely loved the tribal people, so much so he used to say: "I like to die at Javadhi Hills". God granted his wish.

Fr. Codello was a man of self-discipline and hard work. "I want hard workers not social workers", he once told a group of Social Work Trainees. Arriving as a novice at Tirupattur in 1938 he slogged under the scorching sun of North Arcot, often in his thick black cassock, according to the custom of those times. He grew vegetables of all sorts, reared rabbits, pigeons and hens. While constructing the phosphatite at Yercaud he used to travel by motorbike to far-away Mysore forest to buy timber, surprising the checkpost personnel even at the dead of night on the ghat roads.

One night while driving up from Salem to Yercaud he was knocked down by a car and one knee-cap was shattered. In spite of all medical care the knee was never the same and troubled him till the end of his days. But he endured the discomfort with patience and optimism and went about his work as if everything was fine.

In the last years of his life he suffered much from Parkinson's disease, which made writing and taking meals very difficult, even humiliating. He suffered that too with patience and equanimity.

Angelo as a salesian:

With special permission Angelo, already a well-built young man, was accepted in the aspirantate of Ivrea, Italy, on 28th September 1934. On 10th July 1938 he received the cassock at the hands of Fr. Vincent Scuderi. As he manifested his desire to become a missionary he was chosen to go to India.

On 3rd October 1938 he arrived at Bombay under the leadership of Fr. Cinato and in the company of others like Baracca, Clavel, Caldarelli, Nicoletto and Maschio. He entered the novitiate at Tirupattur on the 2nd December 1938. Fr. Joseph Carreno was the novice master and Bro. Mantovani the assistant. Bro. Codello made his first profession on 8th December 1939, together with Bros. Casarotti, Comandù Baracca, Med, Bernick and Nicoletto. From 1939 to 1942 he studied philosophy at Tirupattur. The following year he and several other foreign missionaries were detained in the concentration camps at Deoli and Dehra Dun. But there they started the study of Theology. On 24th April 1944 the salesians left the camp and arrived at Vellore. It was at Don Bosco School, Vellore that Bro. Codello made his perpetual profession on 8th December 1945. After completing his practical training at Don Bosco, Vellore (1944-46), he continued his Theology studies at Kotagiri and Shillong. On 3rd Oct. 1948 Codello was ordained a priest at Mawlai, Shillong, by Bishop Stephen Ferrando SDB, of Shillong-Guwahati.

Salesian Missionary:

Fr. Codello worked as a dynamic missionary at places like Polur, Kortampet, Arni, Sagayathottam and Vellore. He was Rector at the Don Bosco School, Katpadi, and at Sagayathottam; prefect at Don Bosco, Katpadi (on 4 occasions) and at the Retreat, Yercaud; confessor at St. Joseph's technical school, Katpadi, and Salesian House, Tirupattur. When he served in mission stations, he was very particular that the children got education. He sent as many as possible to boarding houses providing them with fees, clothes, books and stationery. Often it was very hard for him to convince the parents that the best way of helping the family was educating their own children.

Fr. Codello had a kind heart. He was moved by the poverty and misery of the people. He did his best to improve their economic situation; he helped them to believe in their own personal worth as human beings.

Builder and Social Worker:

When Fr. Codello was prefect of The Retreat, Yercaud, he built the philosophy and the church. While the workers struggled to carry 1/2 or 3/4 of a bag of cement, Fr. Codello with a bag in each hand would climb up the scaffolding, laughing at the men and nodding disapprovingly at the women who were carrying 3 bricks each! He constructed the imposing boarding house, church and youth centre at Don Bosco, Katpadi. For three years (1960-63) Fr. Codello took care of the St. Joseph's farm, near Mahabalipuram, that belonged to the archdiocese of Madras-Mylapore.

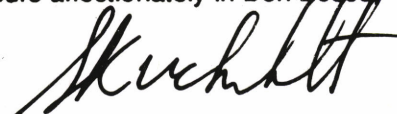
miles to Turin to welcome and look after me. These and many other memories will remain with me always as a source of strength and joy. I know that right up to the very end you will work for the poor and for the spread of God's Kingdom; your example is a source of inspiration to me."

From another letter of 25th May '89: "Your work is a great success, as a pioneer of the Javadhi Hills. You are for us a great teacher and an example of authentic life, which you so powerfully communicate through your way of life there. May the Lord bless you. He will help you always." On the 14th June '89: "Your generosity, availability and concern for the poor and needy are shining examples and challenge, not only to the missionaries but also to those of us who enjoy the comforts of this life."

On 16th December 1989 Fr. Codello celebrated the golden Jubilee of his religious profession in the midst of the Sacred Heart College Community. It was the celebration of a life lived with love for God and neighbour, true to his motto: "Remain in my love."

During the last 7 months he stayed with the community he used to describe the hard but happy early years at Tirupattur. He stressed the unity and family spirit that prevailed in the community of salesians who came from 22 different nations. The spirit of Don Bosco overcame every barrier. During those months Fr. Codello was regular at community practices of piety and meals. He was cheerful with a ready wit and humorous anecdotes. His breviary had several passages marked here and there. He used to say often that he was ready to die. And ready he was when the Lord called him at Kovilur on 23rd March 1990 to remain in His Love for ever. May his soul rest in peace!

Yours affectionately in Don Bosco



FR. STEPHEN KUNCHERAKATT SDB.,
Rector.

For the Necrology

Born on 17.9.1912,

Professed on 8.12.1939,

Ordained a priest on 3.10.1948,

Died on 23.3.1990.