



Istituto Salesiano
San Giovanni Evangelista
Via Madama Cristina, 1
10125 Torino

Feast of St. John Bosco

Dear Confreres:

On September 3, 1982, at 8:30 a.m., our dear

FATHER EUGENE DEMARTINI

just a few days before his eightieth birthday, left us to keep his appointment with the Lord. Though sudden, the end did not come unexpectedly for him. "I am afraid you will not find me by the time you get back after preaching the retreats," he had written to me some three weeks previously. And so it was. I missed seeing him alive by two days.

He had spent the last four years of his life at "La Residenza," a rest home near Turin, about which he used to say, "E l'anticamera del paradiso. It's like heaven's waiting room." The beauty of the place, the excellent care lavished upon him, the frequent visits of the confreres from the nearby Salesian houses as well as from

his own relatives did much to allay the nostalgic feelings he often experienced for his beloved America, to which he had given nearly sixty years of his life.

Fr. DeMartini was born on September 17, 1902, at Lu Monferrato, some thirty miles from Don Bosco's birth-place. He used to recall with joy that his father had met and spoken with our Founder, as a student at the Salesian school in Borgo San Martino and when the Saint visited Lu. Don Bosco was known and loved at Lu as much as at his native Castelnuovo. It is no wonder that many young men of the village should follow in the Saint's trail, among them his third successor, the Servant of God, Father Philip Rinaldi.

For Eugene the call to religious life meant quite simply becoming a Salesian. His heart was set on going to the missions, and he applied for them at the end of his course as a Son of Mary, in 1921. The United States were unexpectedly to become his mission field. He was one of many Salesians who, at New Rochelle, had as their novice master the saintly Fr. Francis Binelli, our province's greatest and most direct link with our Founder.

As a young clericⁿ, after his philosophy course, Eugene was one of the "founding pioneers" of our Tampa school. He was ordained on July 4, 1933, in the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians in Turin after completing at the Ateneo Salesiano of Crocetta the theological studies he had started in the United States.

Our parishes on the eastern seaboard were to be Fr. DeMartini's choice field of apostolate for nearly fifty years. Transfiguration and Mary Help of Christians Churches in New York City; St. Anthony's Church in Elizabeth, NJ; and Holy Rosary Church in Port Chester, NY, each in turn benefited from his zeal. After a brief stay at Holy Rosary Church in Birmingham, Alabama, he was assigned to Corpus Christi Church in Port Chester, where he was to remain the last twelve years of his active Salesian life. For three years during this period he headed as director the two Port Chester parish communities.

This was his only term as director in his long Salesian life. A tireless worker, Fr. DeMartini was happiest when serving in humbler capacities. Directors and pastors who had him in their communities can readily bear this out. He gave of himself unsparingly, with a dedication, a sense of duty and a precision for detail which some even thought excessive. And this to the very day when, aged and sickly, he realized reluctantly that he could no longer be active.

One more point should be made. Though engaged in parish work throughout his Salesian life, Fr. DeMartini always found time to be involved in youth work. He had a way with youngsters who were easily won over to him. Wherever obedience assigned him, he took on leading roles in Boy Scout work, for which he became known and loved far and wide. During his sick days at "La Residenza" he loved to reminisce about the active and hectic days of his long Salesian life, often with tears in his eyes. "And now I am good for nothing," he would add. "But I am grateful to the Lord for all that was, grateful too for the peace and serenity of this place."

"Don Eugenio" will long be remembered at the "Residenza" for his kindness, his ready smile, his interest and concern for people -- qualities that were so manifestly his all through his life. To the house-guests he was the priest "who was forever praying and who always had a good word for everyone." Until a short few weeks before he died, he dragged himself to the chapel to concelebrate Mass with the chaplains or just to be present. The long, lonely hours in his room were filled with prayer, the breviary or the rosary beads forever in his hands.

His funeral, held at the church in Lu where he was baptized, was a touching tribute by the townspeople, the local clergy and a host of Salesians -- Fr. Mario Carpanese, Fr. Joseph Stella and the writer representing the New Rochelle Province. He now rests with his parents in the family mausoleum.

To the end of his life Fr. DeMartini kept in his breviary a picture card of Don Bosco, on the reverse of which his saintly novice master, Fr. Binelli, had written: "Eugene, remember: you will share with Don Bosco bread, work and paradise" -- words admirably fulfilled in Fr. DeMartini's life.

We pray that they be so fulfilled in our life too, as we ask the lord to grant his faithful servant Eugene "abundance of joy" in the house of our Father.

Fraternally in Don Bosco,

Fr. Peter M. Rinaldi, SDB

Data for Necrology: FR. EUGENE DEMARTINI, born September 17, 1902 in Lu Monferrato, Italy; died in Rodella d'Alba (Cuneo) Italy on September 3, 1982, at the age of 80, having completed 60 years of religious profession and 49 years of priesthood.