

Fr. LUIGI de PRETO



A Life For The Young



**FILIPE RINALDI MINOR SEMINARY
VENILALE, BAUCAU
EAST TIMOR**

Dear Confreres,

In these days, as we remember those who are dear to us who have already passed from this world, I would like to invite you to join our community in our remembrance and prayers for our dear

Fr. Luigi de Pretto

who had passed to the house of the Father in the first minutes of the 7th of January 2001, the feast of Epiphany for this year in East Timor. He had been suffering from a heart ailment for some years, which intensified in the last few weeks of the past year, and eventually ended his life - one of faithful and dedicated service to the congregation.

Fr. Luis, as he was being familiarly called, had left a powerful, even if unassuming example to all of us, salesians, the people of the area of Los Palos and Fuiloro who had known him, and the parishioners of Venilale.

Fr. Carbonell, who was a good friend of Fr. Luis, reminisces: "The simplicity of Fr. Luis must be a characteristic trait of his life, and the generosity in the service of others, which was manifested when he was assistant and priest of the Salesian province of Venice. Several times he remembered his apostolate in San Giorgio, his Venice, and the Dolomites. In fact he was a good montanaro. He liked very much climbing mountains and going on excursions with the boys; and these qualities of walking and climbing were manifested in his apostolate here in Timor when he was going from village to village in the full blast of the war - to places where the Gospel had never been brought - in the area of Lautem and Los Palos.

"I was his companion in Theology. I was in the first year and he was in the 4th year. I remember how he was appreciated by companions and superiors. And I saw him in his preparation for priesthood (1953) as a man

of piety, and conviction in his vocation. No wonder that later on, he was sent to the missions. And after some preparation in Portugal (1969-70), he was assigned to East Timor.

He was rector in Ossu, well remembered by many past pupils. Then he was rector also in Fuiloro (1974-1977), at the moment of the conflict, when the Fretilin sacked Fuiloro. After this, he and the two brothers, Bro. Jose Kusy and Bro. Jose Ribeiro, had to go to Los Palos. They were later joined by Fr. Afonso Nacher, - living in extreme poverty. "In 1979 he was assigned to Fatumaka as a teacher and confessor. And in 1980 till 1986 he was back as missionary in Los Palos. It was in these years that he went around the villages of the district of Lautem, bringing the services of his ministry, baptising many who professed to be Catholics but were not yet baptised. He was respected by both the Indonesians and the Resistance. In August of 1986, he went back to Fatumaka as the Master of Novices."

Those who have known Fr. Luis corroborate these positive impressions about him. The people liked him because of his dedication to his priestly work. Catechists who were accompanying him in his missionary trips, as well as the people of Los Palos and Iliomar remember how he would start his missionary journey from Fuiloro going to Tutuala and later pass through Muapitine, to come out in Iliomar - some one hundred kilometres - all travelled on foot!

In 1988 he came to Venilale, assuming the post of Rector of the aspirantate, and later becoming the first Parish Priest of Venilale. People in Venilale saw the same dedication, with some people later believing that the cause of his being no longer able to walk strongly towards the end of his life was his untiring travels on foot. (In reality, the cause of his weakened legs was the inability of the heart to pump sufficiently the blood to his lower limbs.) When he could no longer go walking to the villages, Fr. Luis made a significant service to the people in the confessional, where he was much appreciated.

Fr. Luis was always delicate, even bordering on being timid. But with regards to duty, he was systematically consistent and strictly faithful. He would talk with nostalgia of the Dolomites and express appreciation of the mountains that surround Venilale Seminary. He used to spend quiet moments just contemplating the mountain of Ariana, first from his own room, and later when the view from his room was covered by the newly constructed study hall, from the veranda behind the study hall. And he would speak enthusiastically of the *quattro passi* (referring to his excursions to the countryside back in Italy). But with full conviction, he could strongly insist that the Salesian principal should be ready to stay at his post, accompanying every teaching-learning activity in the school with unflagging fidelity. He could insist on this point from

school back in Venice.

Fr. Luis was very much detached, even scrupulous with respect to poverty. His heart was elsewhere. And it was in his last days where it was revealed more clearly where his heart was. His arrhythmia was getting frequent. Many times he could not perform his teaching, and later, he could not even say Mass but had to stay in bed. He began to express - often with deep emotion, that he was being a burden to the community. As the other members of the community assured that he remained an asset to the community, he lingered around for some more weeks. But then the Jubilee was ending. It was a fine chance to go home. He began to express that he wanted to go. "Father, don't spoil our Christmas celebration. It will be a sad Christmas for us" said Sister Alma, the doctor attending to him. "It will perhaps be sad for you, but it will be a feast for me." He hang on though, until the eve of the Epiphany. After Vespers of that day, he was happy to have the Readings of the following day read to him: *"Rise, cloth yourself with light, because your light comes, the glory of the Lord shines upon you. For behold, the darkness covers the earth, thick fog engulfs the nations, but the Lord shines brightly on you....."* He listened with serene face in spite of the pain. And, when asked if the reading should be continued, he answered: "No, let us reflect a while on these words." To meet the Lord.... To clothe oneself with light.... This is where his heart was. He could not wait any longer. From then on, only very few soft words from him. Little by little, he passed away, like a candle burning out, just as the Feast of Epiphany was beginning. The Pope was closing the doors of St. Peter. The Jubilee had ended. Fr. Luis passes from this world to meet Jesus' real Manifestation!

Dear confreres, as we reflect on the message of the life of Fr. Luis for us, let us say a fraternal prayer for him as a Godspeed for him to the house of our Father,

Fr. Aguedo B. Palomo
Rector

DATI PER IL NECROLOGIO

Sac. De Pretto Luigi

nato a Schio, Vicenza (Italia) il 11 Novembre 1925
morto a Venilale Timor Est il 7 Gennaio 2001
a 76 anni di eta, 58 di professione
e 48 di sacerdozio.