



BRO. RAMON DE LA CRUZ, SDB

10 January 1940 – 1 March 2014

BRO. RAMON DE LA CRUZ: *With His Boots On*



THE DAY BR. RAMON DIED

March 1, 2014 was the day Br. Ramon de la Cruz died, with his boots on.

It was another ordinary day for Br. Mon, as he was fondly called. He started the day, as usual, at 4:30 in the morning with a hike around Site 2 of the Bayan ni Juan in Calauan, an agricultural municipality 75 kilometers south of Manila in the province of Laguna. Site 2 is one of the three communities of thousands of relocated informal settlers from the capital city.

Bayan ni Juan is an impoverished relocation site in a sprawling hundred-hectare property meant to provide ready homes and

sustainable livelihood specifically for estero-dwellers displaced by the rehabilitation of Manila's Pasig River and the fury of typhoons hitting the capital city several times during the year.

Bayan ni Juan provides the resettlers with a place to live, but there is no place to make a living. In 2010, the Salesian community was established to share the life of the people and secure a better future especially for the young. Site 2 is the place where the Salesian community of three confreres temporarily reside in housing units reserved for future resettlers.



During this early morning hike, Br. Mon prayed the first of the four mysteries of the Rosary. He prayed all the joyful, sorrowful, luminous, and glorious mysteries every day. It was an idyllic morning, with the twin mountains of Mt. Kalisungan and Mt. Atimla as backdrop of Br. Mon's daily hike and prayer.

Then he went for the community's daily meditation. He was always the earliest in prayer. After breakfast he was off for his daily chores.

That day he was in a hurry to finish the roofing of the chapel's extension. The makeshift chapel could not anymore accommodate the increasing number of people from the three communities going for the Mass. He also had the piggins and the kitchen to repair. He was that day, as in any other day, "maagap at masipag", always ready for manual work.

At 3:45 in the afternoon, he prayed the rosary with the people and prepared them for the daily Mass. After the Mass, at 5:45 in the afternoon, he went biking to Site 1. He was back to Site 2 by angelus time, pushing his bike and complaining that his bike made him feel tired. He was offered water, but he politely refused. As he walked toward his "housing unit", he collapsed and immediately turned black and blue.

He was rushed to the hospital, but he had no more pulse and heartbeat while on the way. He was declared "dead on arrival". His embalmer noted two ruptured arterial veins at the back neck.

It was not just another ordinary day for Br. Ramon de la Cruz after all. It was the day of his parting from his ordinary life. But he wanted to die just as ordinary as he lived. He didn't want to cause trouble to others. As typical of Br. Mon, he exited quickly and silently, and gracefully as well. His room was spick-and-span, as if wanting to leave this life squeaky-clean so as to enter the next room of eternity.



THE STORY OF HIS SOUL

Br. Ramon de la Cruz was born on 10 January 1940 in San Miguel, Manila. Br. Mon lived with his family for some time in the Mother House of the Sisters of the Religious of the Virgin Mary (RVM) in Quezon City, Metro-Manila, where he had an aunt among the Sisters.

His parents, Juanita Mejino and Feliz de la Cruz, were from Villasis, a farming town 180 kilometers north of Manila in the province of Pangasinan. Eventually, Br. Mon's family settled in their native place. It was here in Villasis Elementary School and in Pangasinan Central Colleges in Villasis where Br. Mon spent his grade school and high school years.



He entered as an aspirant to the Salesian life in February 1965, and by 23 June 1966 he was accepted into the novitiate. He made his first profession as a Salesian Lay Brother on 29 June 1967 in Canlubang, Laguna, where he finished his professional degree in education. He made his perpetual profession on 24 May 1976 in Parañaque City, Metro-Manila.

While in formation, his formators found him sociable, willing in cooperation, respectful to corrections, zealous in the apostolate, decided in his vocation choice, regular in spiritual direction, humble in service, self-reliant.



Br. Mon loved classical music and Pilipino literature, decorating and drawing houses, and outdoor labor, especially carpentry, house painting, welding, and gardening. Besides returning to the missions in Papua New Guinea, his unfulfilled dream was to become an architect.

He disliked those who were afraid to work under the sun, while he showed care to workers most exposed to dirt and hazard. He would give a parcel from the paltry dinner of the confreres to the security guard or ambulance response team. Br. Mon was rooted to the earth, to the land and the water. He was at home with agriculture and aquaculture.

Br. Mon also disliked those who were afraid to get near sick people. He himself wanted to dedicate his life working in a leper colony before he entered the Salesian seminary. He was alert to the welfare of sick people. He kept a special prayer for them in his daily intentions.

Br. Mon disapproved showy and domineering attitudes. He was sensitive to situations when he felt he was sidestepped and quite irked when contradicted. On the other hand, he appreciated people who understood him and confided in people he trusted. He was open about his craving for deep emotional connection but also resolute about guarding his boundaries.

He lived a frugal life, knowing the ins-and-outs of the meager resources the Salesian community in Calauan have for their common life and pastoral work. But he also knew how to delight in “rich fare”, when some local ice cream and imported chocolates or some Italian pasta and Irish cream were donated for the confreres. He would especially reserve them for the younger confreres coming over for their weekend apostolate.



Br. Mon's motto in life was “to love and to suffer.” What he wanted to achieve as a Salesian was “to be a worthy son of Don Bosco.” His two great devotions were the Liturgy and Mary. When all the priests assigned in Calauan were not available for the daily Mass in Site 2, Br. Mon would preside over the Liturgy of the Word for the people. And besides praying all the 20 decades of the Rosary every day, Br. Mon made sure that he built a “Marian hut” at the gate of Site 2 to welcome everyone with Mary's motherly presence. He repeatedly expressed that he owed his Salesian vocation to Mary.

RETURN TO THE WELLSPRING

Br. Mon composed a poem about himself in which he compared himself to a “balon”, describing his life from an empty pit to a cistern ready to collect falling rain and finally to a wellspring of nourishing water. We place this poem in the privacy of his papers, but we bid him with the lyrics of this song:

I have what you need, / But you keep on searching, / I've done all the work, / But you keep on working, / When you're running on empty, / And you can't find the remedy, / Just come to the well.

You can spend your whole life, / Chasing what's missing, / But that empty inside, / It just ain't gonna listen. / When nothing can satisfy, / And the world leaves you high and dry, / Just come to the well.

And all who thirst will thirst no more, / And all who search will find what their souls long for, / The world will try, but it can never fill, / So leave it all behind, and come to the well.

Leave it all behind. / Leave it all behind. / Leave it all behind. / Leave it all behind.

And now that you're full, / Of love beyond measure, / Your joy's gonna flow, / Like a stream in the desert, / Soon all the world will see / That living water is found in me, / Cuz you came to the well.



SALESIANS OF DON BOSCO
Philippines–North Province

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