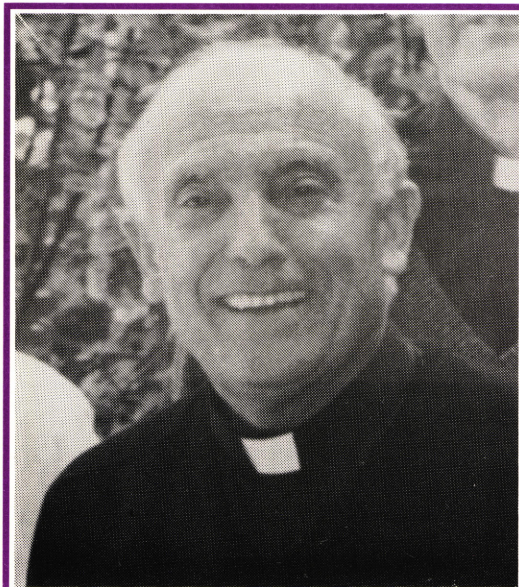


+1989 40B290

Don Bosco Youth Centre and Hostel
715 Sydney Road
Brunswick Victoria 3056
Australia



FATHER LUIGI DI FIORE SDB
(1921-1989)

*"Do not be afraid of anyone and do not worry. Have reverence
for Christ in your hearts, and honour him as Lord. Be ready at
all times to answer anyone who asks you to explain the hope
you have in you."*

1 Peter 3:14-15

FATHER LUIGI DI FIORE SDB

Father Luigi Di Fiore undoubtedly died, as he would have wished, "with his boots on". God blessed Fr. Luigi with good health, an unusual amount of dynamic energy, a contagious cheerfulness and a real zest for life up to the very day he suffered a massive stroke and fell into a coma. He never regained consciousness before the Good Lord called him to his eternal home shortly after midnight on Sunday 12 February 1989.

In the parish of St Margaret Mary Brunswick, where he spent his last years as assistant priest, "Don Luigi" is remembered most of all for his extraordinary apostolic energy and his genuine concern for those most in need of his love and attention, which undoubtedly overflowed from his big heart full of love for his God and his brothers and sisters.

In the homily at a special parish vigil mass Fr. Michael Jackson, the parish priest at St Margaret Mary's, spoke of Fr. Luigi's tremendous pastoral zeal. "He was ready at all times to help people. He gave away all the gifts which came his way and he had a very caring manner. I thank God that I had with me a real saint. How much he did for this parish in the short time he was here! We are certainly richer for his having lived amongst us."

The impact that Fr. Luigi's kindness made on the parishioners, largely through his constant family visitations during his year here at Brunswick, registered very strongly in the huge crowd that filled the parish church to overflowing at the Rosary and Parish Mass celebrated for the eternal repose of his soul.

Among his confreres at Don Bosco Brunswick, as indeed throughout the Australian Province, Fr. Luigi is remembered and loved most of all for his wit and jokes on any topic for every occasion. He had a fascinating ability to bring cheerfulness and liveliness to the community table.

Some of Fr. Luigi's family live in Adelaide, Australia. His sister Pasqualina, niece Josie and her husband Paul, and their daughter Pauline certainly remember Fr. Luigi for his wonderful affection and concern for them, as I am sure all his family does.

Even though so far away, Fr. Luigi never for one moment forgot his beloved India where he spent the prime years of his Salesian life. While here in Brunswick he developed a whole network of families who were sponsoring a large number of the most needy children in India through their education. It was also Fr. Luigi's expressed wish that when he died, donations, rather than flowers, would be given for the Salesian Missions in India. A large amount of money was subsequently raised in this way for his beloved India.

After Fr. Luigi's death, Fr. Joseph Baracca SDB, a great personal friend, wrote to me and among other things mentioned the many projects which Fr. Luigi put his heart and energy into, during his six years as Provincial of the Madras Province (1965-71). Fr. Baracca was Provincial Economist at the time:

- Kristu Jyoti College at Bangalore (a studentate of Theology);
- a Hall for 3000 people at Cochin;
- a school for 1000 children at Perambur (Madras);
- land for an aspirantate in Kerala;
- Church and 20 rooms at Kotagiri for Spiritual Retreats, now the Novitiate for Bangalore;
- land for the Provincial House in Madras. A printing press and aspirantate for brothers was also built on this land.
- Mathias Nagar in Madras comprising 85 houses for poor families.

However Fr. Luigi was not only well known in Australia and India, but can be truly thought of as an "international figure" in the Salesian Congregation, one of the many aspects of his life which comes through in the following homily which Fr. Julian Fox our Australian Provincial preached at Fr. Luigi's funeral mass Wednesday 15 February 1989.

"Armed with nought but a smile, a cheerful 'Don't worry, be happy', and that hymn to the love of God that had been his whole life, a man

set out on a journey. He was solitary — not unaccompanied by confreres or prayer, but solitary in the way that hospitals admit of. Within a few hours, his was to be a pilgrimage of silence, and indeed his final ministry, wordless, has been to lead us to plumb the caring silence of God himself.

“Such was the simple, final fact of the observable history of Luigi Di Fiore. Strange thing, history. Brunswick could not be much further from Benevento. Two full years out of a possible eleven in Australia is a poor fraction compared with thirty-eight in India out of almost fifty as a Salesian. April would have seen Luigi forty years the priest. Can God only count to three? Perhaps the mistake is to overstress the history only to miss the mystery.

“We will spend time, then, with the mystery. It is always the homilist’s task, on the occasion of a being’s entrance to eternal life, to articulate the saving mystery of Christ, to strengthen the hope of those present, and to foster faith in the paschal mystery and the resurrection of the dead. To do so I will, like God, count to three. First the Scripture today, bearing in mind that Jesus has taken time out to join his friend Luigi on his journey at a time when liturgically we are all walking with Jesus to Jerusalem. Second, something of the history of this wonderful man, this missionary, this priest and Salesian, because the new life, the dying and the rising, the hope and triumph of Paul and Luke have been joined to flesh and bones that we know and a wrenching of the spirit that we feel. Third, a reassertion that this man’s history reveals the truth of the mystery we are proclaiming along with Paul: that nothing will come between us and the love of God, neither death nor life, nor any created thing can come between us and the love of God made visible in Christ Jesus Our Lord.

“First: the Scripture. In the Roman winter of 57-58, Paul wrote: ‘These are the trials through which we triumph, by the power of him who loved us’. It was in a Roman winter of 87-88, but some two thousand years later, that Luigi and I were walking around and around the Pisana one afternoon. You need to know that after but one year in Australia, Don Di Fiore had been called to Rome to be director of the Courses of Ongoing Formation.

“It was to be a three year appointment. Then it became six, then nine. Rome, it seemed, also worked in threes. A promise retracted, a word gone back on is described in Italian as ‘smentita’, and the word nearly came to his lips, but you cannot say it when you smile, and Luigi always smiled. In fact, he had received a telephone call from Fr. McPake some time well before my arrival in Rome: ‘Good news for you, Luigi’. It was like

the Emmaus walk of old. His heart, warmed nine years ago in the Australian sun, now burned with hope again, despite some sadness at the prospect of leaving Italy, home and friends. 'Indeed here below there is no place or situation where we can be completely happy', he put it, 'however, I accept this message of a return to Australia as the clear manifestation of God's will, and I am sure he will give me the joy of fulfilling it.'

"Luigi was always urged by the power of God's love, and so he always seemed to triumph over trials. Those who lived and worked with him here this year past, and those who benefited from his priestly and Salesian ministry, saw him like the disciple returned to Jerusalem, heart enkindled, constantly recognizing Jesus in the word and bread of each day. It seemed appropriate to choose words from the letter to the Romans on this occasion, especially from Paul's hymn of love to God; and given the season, but also the symbol of the journey, it seemed even more appropriate to link Lent with Easter, Luigi with that death to self which meant always letting go of yesterday. Wherever he'd been, he dared not live there, and his roaming spirit desired only its true home in heaven.

"Second: the history. Luigi Di Fiore was born 28 August 1921 at Morcone (Benevento). By 1939 he was in India, at Tirupattur, making his novitiate after an aspirantate at Gaeta in Italy. Perpetually professed in 1946 at Kotagiri (still India), he was ordained three years later at Madras. He returned to Tirupattur as catechist, taught scripture for four years at the seminary, and in 1955 was appointed Rector, first at Tirupattur, then at St. Bede's High School Madras, and finally at Don Bosco Bombay. That experience of 10 years convinced his confreres and his superiors of his pastoral and administrative worth, and he was appointed provincial of Madras province.

"In 1972, Luigi went to Rome and the General Chapter. It was to be the first of several visits to Rome. A short stint as Rector again at Bangalore, then the first appointment to Ongoing Formation in 1975 in Rome. Back to Madras and St. Bede's again, this time as confessor and finally, Australia. Why this move? Doctors had urged him to abandon the tropics due to health, but there was an even deeper motivation which he expressed in a letter to Fr. Cornell, seeking to discern the Lord's will: 'A strong urge tells me the Lord wants me elsewhere. I am 55 and I hope the Lord will give me at least 10 more years of active service, especially for priestly ministry amongst Italian migrants'. In the end, the Lord gave him a baker's dozen as a reward, I am sure, for his constant effort to seek the will of God in the bread of God's word and God's table.

"Fr. Brosnan rang me this morning to speak of the twelve months that Luigi spent at East Coburg as his assistant to Pentridge.' He was', Father Brosnan says, 'a ray of sunshine in that hole of darkness'. It may come as a surprise and delight also to know that Luigi joined John several times at the greyhounds, where his wit delighted not just the Marantelli's and Sampieri's but also the O'Briens amongst the bookies. If people wanted an active and dynamic apostle unfettered by the complexity of rules, they found it in Luigi!

"Of the 40 years in India I cannot say very much, except that he was revered throughout the subcontinent. Only recently the provincial of the Madras province wrote me requesting that Luigi be available for retreats and celebrations of his jubilee and that of many others in 1990. In Perth last week, many of the former pupils from St. Bede's High School recounted memories and prayed earnestly for a recovery that was not to be. I might add that we are in Perth today largely as a result of Father's visit there some six years ago, and his recommendation that it was a fruitful Salesian vineyard waiting for the picking.

"Third: the history reveals the mystery. Father Luigi Di Fiore had been called from the moment of his baptism to witness to the extraordinary love of God that desires our growth as both human and Christian. The quality of his own formation in that family at Morcone, received at the hands of Bernard and Anna, his parents, along with Pasqualina, Rosario and Nicolina his brother and sisters, and then at the Salesian school at Gaeta, had clearly been such that it prepared him for a lifetime spent in the formation of others. After several decades dedicated to the formation of Indian Salesians, his Roman experience was to bring him into contact with Salesians from all over the world. Many from this Province spent their three or four months under his tutelage. We heard the barzellette, the dozens of jokes and stories he was famous for. We saw him as a man of simple and humble service. Here in Australia, in Adelaide, his nephew Paul, wife Josie and grandniece Pauline knew him as the kindest uncle, generous to the extreme. So did parishioners wherever he ministered. We have the petitions to witness to it.

"Luigi had been called to take part at the Special General Chapter of the Salesians in Rome in 1972. It was at that Chapter that the Salesians recalled that Francis of Sales was Don Bosco's model of zeal for souls, of the defence of truth, of fidelity to the Church and above all else of a completely evangelical method of exercising this zeal: 'charity, sweetness, courtesy, great calm, extraordinary gentleness', as Don Bosco himself

expressed it. They then declared their allegiance to the pastoral method of St. Francis de Sales and his spirit of optimism and joy.

“Luigi had obviously taken all this to heart. Here lies our conviction that in his case nothing separated him from the love of God — not strange cultures, nor Roman winters, nor restless wandering far from home. Not the rickshaw accident wherein he lost a finger, and certainly not the stroke that brought him finally to God’s tribunal. Could anyone accuse him who God had chosen? Inspired by the Spirit who wanted to conform him to Christ, he chose love as the means and method of his apostolate. Like Don Bosco and in the spirit of Francis de Sales he nurtured a permanent sense of joy and expressed within the limits of possibility, a happy disposition.

“I say to Pasqualina, to Paul and family, to all my confreres and to the people of St. Margaret Mary’s gathered here, that whatever the pain, it is permeated today by Easter promise. Ieri sera, dopo la messa, una grande folla di parrocchiani circondavano la cassa da morto. Tutti chiacchieravano. Una donna accanto a me borbotta: 'Ma come! È una fiera davanti al morto qua dentro!'. A questa donna adesso dico di sì. È una fiera senza molti fiori; una fiera di un solo fiore, qualcosa bella per Dio. Una promessa di pasqua tra le pene di quaresima.

“Farewell, Luigi. You are home.”

Fr Peter Kerin, Rector, and Community.



FOR THE NECROLOGY:

FATHER LUIGI DI FIORE, SDB.

Born 28 August 1921.
Professed 8 December 1940.
Ordained 2 April 1949.
Died 12 February 1989.
