

Salesian House,
Piosasco,
Turin.
18th January 1967.

Dear Confreres,

In the early hours of December 6th last year

FR. ANGELO FRANCO. SDB, Ph. D, DD.

died at the age of 81.

He was born on December 11th 1885 at Cantavenna, Piedmont of Luigi and Gabriella Salveraglio, modest farmers and exemplary christians. Angelo attended the elementary school in his home village and then passed on to the college of St. Charles of Borgo St Martino, the first Salesian College to be founded outside Turin, and which had been visited many times by Don Bosco. It was here that Angelo decided to try his vocation as a Salesian priest and in 1900 he entered the Salesian novitiate at Foglizzo where he took the clerical habit and made his religious vows. From Foglizzo he went to Turin-Valsalice, but remained there only a short time before he was asked to go to Rome for philosophical studies at the Gregorian University, where he obtained his degree in 1905.

Towards the end of the same year he was asked by Don Rua to go to Troy (New York) where he did his practical training. He then went to Hawthorne for his theological studies. Having returned to Italy in 1910 he continued his studies for the priesthood whilst acting as secretary to Don Albera. In June 1911 he was ordained and said his first Mass in the sanctuary of Mary, Help of Christians. The following year he became a doctor of theology in the faculty of theology at the seminary in Turin. Humble, pious, learned in the sacred disciplines, he displayed a true apostolate for good in the houses of Ivrea, Fossano, Penango – with a long period of military service in the war of 1915–18.

Wartime over, Fr. Franco received from the Rector Major Don Albera an obedience to go to the English province, where he left an unforgettable impression in his direction of important colleges and houses of formation.

From 1919 – 40 the houses of Burwash, Oxford, Battersea, Shrigley and Blaisdon felt and enjoyed his prudent, wise and shrewd direction and his fatherly kindness. In a very special way these qualities were displayed during the time he spent in the aspirantate at Shrigley. He was the first Rector in this new foundation and he created an atmosphere of joy and happiness in which the traditions of authentic Salesian life could flourish. For the boys at Shrigley the words of Fr. Franco were a synthesis of all that he had learned of the greatness of Don Bosco, the congregation and the Salesian life. One of the past-pupils of Shrigley said. . "He was a great-hearted man, kindly, very delicate in his dealings with young people. In speaking to us he aroused great enthusiasm for the Salesian vocation and particularly for the missionary work of the congregation."

During the period of the second World War, Fr. Franco continued his priestly apostolate in England with full liberty to exercise his priestly ministry amongst the Italian prisoners. When, in 1947 he no longer considered himself suitable for the duties of governing houses and other responsibilities, he agreed – at Don Ricaldone request – to be Rector of the Institute of theology at Aptos (California). From Aptos he went as confessor to New Rochelle, then to the Salesian studentate at Newton. Fr. Franco had acquired a vast ascetical and Salesian culture; he had perfected himself in the English language and had a fine literary knowledge of it. During these years he wrote in English the biographies of Don Rua, Don Beltrami and Don Albera, which later on in the United States became publications sought after in the Salesian world.

When Fr. Franco became ill he returned to Italy. Happily it was about the time of the 50th anniversary of his priesthood and his relatives and friends were able to celebrate with him. After a short stay in his home village he went to stay at Monte Oliveto, Turin. Soon afterwards, as his health was deteriorating, he was moved to Piosasco, where he spent three years being cared for by the confreres during his time of suffering and prayer. Many confreres from America, England and Ireland called to see him during this time and to thank him for giving himself so wholeheartedly to the development of the Church and the Congregation in their countries. The Rector Major and members of the Superior Council visited him frequently.

During the last days of last November he was struck by a cerebral embolism, which did however enable him consciously to receive the Sacrament of the Sick and to receive and bless his relatives gathered at his bedside. He died early in the morning on the 6th December. The funeral was attended by the Rector Major Don Ziggotti and very many confreres. At the request of his relatives, Fr. Franco was buried in the family grave at Cantavenna, next to his uncle, a Canon, who had encouraged and helped Angelo to fulfill his expressed desire to become a priest.

Dear confreres, in concluding these few thoughts, I would ask you to remember a comment made by Fr. Franco to his brother, Doctor Joseph, in one of his last visits made to Piosasco. . "I am expecting one of my better days" He was surely alluding to his imminent death for which he had prepared throughout the course of his life with works of christian charity and with religious observance. Fr. Franco never said a harsh word about anyone. He loved God's people in all walks of life. Fr. Faber (How well Fr. Franco knew his writings.) said: "Kindness is the shortest road to heaven." And if Fr. Faber is right, Fr. Franco is safe home.

May he rest in peace.

Fr. C. Lorenzo. SDB.