

Easter, 1974

Dear Confreres,

On Sunday, 29th July at 7.30 a.m. Brother Carmelo Galea rendered his noble soul to God. He was in the 83rd year of his age and the 60th of his religious profession. I had the privilege to be at his bedside as he peacefully awaited the call of his Good Master. During the last eighteen months of his life, though not entirely bed-ridden, Brother Carmelo had been very unwell. He underwent a serious operation and though this brought about a considerable improvement, he still had to bear the infirmities of old age, especially sleepless nights.

It was impossible for us to give Brother Carmelo the skilled medical care and constant attention he so much needed during his last illness. Consequently, through the generosity of the Blue Sisters he was admitted to their hospital at Saint Julians where he experienced every possible care. He never tired of expressing his deep gratitude and he would protest that he did not deserve to be looked after so well. During his stay in hospital, he endeared himself to the good Sisters and to all the patients. Whenever he was well enough he would be seen getting about slowly to visit those in other wards. His encouraging smile, his sympathetic and consoling words, and occasionally, his still powerful voice to the accompaniment of his guitar, all helped so much to raise the spirits of his fellow patients.

Above all, his sound spirituality was manifested in the way he would speak about God as a Father Who was intimately concerned about us all, in the way he lived in the presence of Our Blessed Lady and Don Bosco. It was common knowledge among patients that meeting with Brother Carmelo was equivalent to coming nearer to God, for he seldom spoke to anyone without introducing some spiritual thought concerning the love of God and of one's neighbour. During his last few days he not only accepted death with resignation but patiently longed and prayed for it as a "Happy union with God".

Brother Carmelo was born in Birkirkara, Malta, on 16th August, 1890. He was the second in a family of six, three boys and three girls. His father died before the youngest was born. His attachment to his mother remained with him throughout his life, and he would speak with gratitude of the truly Christian upbringing which himself and all his brothers and sisters had received. Though Carmelo was the only one in the family to become a religious, the Christian spirit of dedication which had been fostered there prompted all his brothers and sisters to be active members of the Maltese Secular Institute known as M.U.S.E.U.M., dedicated to the teaching of Catechism to children.

His first contact with the Salesians was at our Oratory in Birkirkara which he attended. In 1910 he entered Saint Patrick's, Sliema, as an aspirant, and two years later he went to Turin where he started his novitiate at San Benigno Canavese. Throughout his life he suffered the consequences of a serious attack of pleurisy which he contracted while engaged in storing snow in the cellars during the winter months; this was used as ice-blocks for cooling in the following summer, before the time of refrigerators and deep freeze. Due to this illness Brother Carmelo was later to continue his novitiate in the milder climate of Catania, Sicily. He made his First Profession on the feast of St. Francis of Sales in 1914 at San Gregorio, Catania.

It must have been soon after this, while brother had the duty of linenarian, that he welcomed into the school a new boy called Luigi Ricceri, arranged his belongings in the linen-room and showed him his place in the dormitory while whispering into his ear a word of encouragement. Soon after his election as Rector Major Don Ricceri received a letter from Brother Carmelo recalling this occasion. In his reply Father Ricceri wrote how he well remembered it with joy and gratitude. Brother made his Second Profession on 2nd February, 1917 at Saint Patrick's, Malta and his Perpetual Profession on another beautiful feastday of Our Lady, 24th May, 1923, at Istituto Domenico Savio, Modica Alta. Indeed, throughout the years the correspondence Brother received from so many past pupils in Sicily showed the great friendship and esteem which had developed during his apostolate there.

In 1933 he returned to Malta, to Saint Alphonsus Oratory, Sliema, where he remained until his death. It is impossible to enumerate all, or to relate in detail the varied activities of this hard-working Salesian. For many years Brother Carmelo was in charge of the theatrical productions at the Oratory. He was a producer and script-writer; one of the pioneers in this field here in Malta. His versatility, originality and creative zeal were further shown by his publication of a small book of Maltese poetry which highlighted his remarkable perception and appreciation of human life and the wonder of nature. Though his primary aim was not literary excellence, his works have contributed to Maltese literature and have been a great inspiration to many, but before all they were certainly of great educative value. At an age when the cinema was still unknown the Salesian productions provided some of the most original and wholesome entertainment in these Islands.

Generations of youths passed through the Oratory during his lifetime, and I think it is no mistake to say that their lives have been enriched because they met Brother Carmelo. He had a kind word for each one, and he found time to be concerned and accept involvement. For many years he was choir-master, and he was particularly happy to teach the youngsters their catechism.

The vast number of people who came to pay their last respects at his funeral were a witness to the loving esteem which past-pupils and friends had for this dear son of Don Bosco. In the homily of the concelebrated mass, during which it seemed so fitting that white vestments should be worn, it was pointed out how truly verified in this good brother were the words of our Holy Rule (Art. 122), "Death to a religious is not sad. It is full of the hope of 'enter into the joy of the master' and 'when a Salesian dies working for souls, the Society has won a great triumph.' I have no doubt that our Salesians in Malta have another devoted friend in Heaven.

The Requiem Mass was celebrated in the Oratory Chapel which brother loved so well, and where he had prayed for so many years and found the strength to serve his Lord. Brother Carmelo Galea's remains were laid to rest in the Salesian grave at the Addolorata Cemetery. May he rest in peace.

FATHER ANTHONY SUTHERLAND, S.D.B.,  
Rector.

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Entry for Necrology:

*Brother Carmelo Galea born in Birkirkara, Malta, 16th August, 1890, died in Sliema, Malta, 29th July, 1973 in the 83rd year of his age and the 60th of his religious profession.*