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**SALESIAN PROVINCE
“ ST. PAUL ”
THAILAND**



**FR. RAIMUNDO GARCIA SANTOS
(1931 - 1998)**

Provincial House,
210-212 Krungthep Kritha Road,
Hua Mark, Bangkok, 10240,
THAILAND

Dear Confreres,

“Death for the Salesian”, says our Constitutions, “ is made bright by the hope of entering into the joy of his Lord ” (cf. Art.54). In this spirit of hope, in less than a month God has called to Himself a Salesian from our Thai province in the person of

Fr. Raimundo GARCIA SANTOS, SDB

who died on 21st April 1998 at St. Louis Hospital Bangkok, Thailand at the age of 67, 49 years of profession and 38 years of priesthood.

His Family

Father Raimundo was born at Orense (Galicia), Spain on the 28th of September 1931 of fine parents, Angel Garcia and Lucila Santos. His father was a military civil guard like his two grandfathers who were also named “ Raimundo ”. His mother was a housewife and a dressmaker. At home Father Raimundo was called “ Mundito ” by his relatives. He was the eldest of the three children, the other two being Aurora and Jose.

While “ Mundito ” was still young, the family was transferred to the Quarters of the Civil Guards of Sevilla (Andalucia), Spain. There the Spanish Civil War broked out but the City of Sevilla was not taken over by the communists. The Military forces who have supported General Franco have defeated the communists. However, Mundito’s father got gravely ill and died at the young age of 33 years old and was buried at Sevilla, Spain. After that, the family settled at Valderrodrigo, Salamanca with their maternal grandparents. Valderrodrigo, Salamanca is a small town of farmers and ranchers.

Salesian Beginnings

Raymundo Garcia Santos entered the Salesian Aspirantate at Montilla, Cordoba during the years 1944-1948 and his Novitiate at San

Jose del Valle, Cadiz during the years 1948-1949. He made his first profession on the 16th August 1949 and was sent as a missionary to Thailand. He made his practical training at Sarasit College, Banpong, Ratchaburi Province. He made his renewal of triennial vows on the 15th August 1952 and his perpetual profession on the 15th August 1955.

His theological studies were done at the Salesian Theologate, Melchet Court, Romsey, England from years 1956 - 1960. The following observations were given to him on his application for the Sacred Ordination: "Very satisfactory in piety, conduct and studies, sensible and reliable. His health, recently not so good, has since improved. He will be a useful Salesian later on". Father Raimundo got unanimous positive votes from both the local and provincial councils and was accepted for ordination.

Ordination to the Priesthood

On the 3rd July 1960 with 17 other candidates to the priesthood, His Lordship, the Bishop of Clifton, England the Right Rev. Joseph E. Rudderham ordained them priests for the Salesians of St. John Bosco. A year later Father Raimundo took a specialization course on Pastoral Theology at the Pontifical University of Salamanca, Spain. His priestly motto was: Love, Justice and Peace.

His Salesian Ministries

Father Raymundo had not really enjoyed a robust health since his ordination. However, his first ministries were mainly associated with the schools either as Prefect of studies or as Rector. He was Prefect of studies in Don Bosco Bangkok (1961-1966), Saengthong Haadyai (1966-1968) and Arunvitthaya Bansaeng-arun (1968-1969 and 1972-1973). He was Rector at Sarasit College Banpong (1969-1972), Saengthong Haadyai (1973-1979 and 1989-1995), and St. Dominic Bangkok (1979-1980).

His stomach ailments troubled him very often since 1978. He had operations due to his gall bladder where small stones were found. It seems that he regained his strength. So that called by the voice of obedience he was entrusted the delicate and important task of governing and animating the THAI Province as the provincial superior from the 30th November 1979 to 30th November 1985.

After the tenure of his office in 1985, he was assigned at the Fatima Church (1986-1989), Saengthong School (1989-1995) and back to Fatima Church (1996-1998). The parish ministries were where his untiring work and happy memory of his example as a missionary priest excelled. He spent the last year of his life at the Fatima Church where the parishioners, the teachers and the children showed much esteem and affection for him as

evidenced by the funeral rites where the Church was overflowed by the faithful and his admirers.

Award

Among his special honor award was the “Knight of the Cross” Award from the King of Spain, His Highness Juan Carlos I. The royal decree of the award was dated 5th November 1987, Madrid, Spain.

Ambassador of Christ.

“Paternal Care was one of the characteristics of Fr. Raimundo” said His Excellency Bishop Praphon Chaicharoen, SDB who gave the homily at the funeral mass. He always acted like a father. He represented the love of Christ for the humanity. He continued Jesus’ mission here with us. That made all the persons daring to approach and be near him. Like Don Bosco, “his love is that of a father, brother and friend, able to draw out friendship in return” (cf. Cons. art. 15).

Friend and Counsellor of the Teachers

As Salesian educator he showed great attention to the teachers. He made their concerns his own. One teacher who knew well Father Raimundo at Saengthong School for years testified that he was always with them either accompanying or giving them the necessary counsel to do their mission of education to the young. He would personally take care of their on-going formation through personal talks and seminars. He was always available to listen to them. He always insisted on their being ideal teachers and leaders. Above all, he wanted them not only “teaching” but “witnessing and practicing”. He was a friend and a counsellor to them.

A Genuine Salesian

Fr. Anthony Nopporn Joseph, SDB who was closely working with him for these last two years at Arunvitthaya School remarked that Father Raimundo was a 100 % Salesian from head to foot. He was completely at home with the children. He loved to be with the Savio Club members. His pastoral love for the parishioners and the children was genuine. He always dreams of their happiness and success in life. No wonder at any recess time, he was always surrounded by the children and students.

Minister of God’s Forgiveness

The ministry that Father Raimundo preferred best during the last years of his life was the Ministry of Reconciliation in Christ. This was

attested by Father Louis Phonchit Phoolvithayakij SDB, the parish priest of Fatima Church saying, “Father Raimundo was always available for that ministry to all: to priests, religious and faithful. He would sit down for hours and hours at the confessional box in order to offer opportunities to people to approach this sacrament. He wanted God’s forgiveness to all. His wanted that sinners be back and forgiven . He wanted God’s new life to them.”

His pastoral love

Father Raimundo so loved by God was also loved by all the parishioners and children. “In all the years that I know Father Raimundo” said one parishioner of Fatima Church, “I have never heard someone speaking ill or complaining about Father Raimundo. Everyone was only loving and respecting him especially the little ones, the children. Everyone felt at ease with him. His presence with the people was actively felt. His joy with them was contagious.” Needless to say, he felt at ease with them and wanted to be one among them. Indeed, his pastoral love for the young was the center of his life and missionary spirit.

His salesian characteristics

The virtues that characterized Father Raimundo’s life as Salesian priest and missionary were genuine spirit of attachment to Don Bosco, initiative, enthusiasm, hard work, love for the confreres and above all love for the Blessed Lord and the Blessed Mother. (cf. a letter of Fr. Thomas Panakezham to Father Raimundo Garcia Santos in order to encourage him in the acceptance of the work of animation in the province as the new appointed provincial , dated 31 December 1979)

His last Days

Father Raimundo knew that his last days were coming during his last hospital check-up visit at San Camillo Hospital, Banpong. It was February 1998. His doctor informed him that his case was beyond medical remedy. Father had nine medical operations which were somehow successful. This time, however, he accepted this announcement with peace and tranquility. He even talked to some confreres at Nazareth of these coming last days.

Father Raimundo’s last week at St. Louis Hospital Bangkok was in the atmosphere of an Easter Octave Joy. Even though the Superiors were very much insisting and encouraging the doctor to save Father’s life, the doctor’s verdict was this: “it is impossible to make an operation because of Father Raimundo’s lack of blood. A blood transfusion will only make

the matter worst. Medical intervention and treatments were impossible now”.

In one of his many operations at the Mission Hospital Bangkok, Father Raimundo used to say that “We are in the Hands of God who guide the hands of the operating doctors” (cf. his letter addressed to Fr. Provincial and Confreres written on the 1st December 1978). This time, though, two days before his death, he could not utter those words because he could no longer talk. Yet, he knew everything, realized everything and felt everything. Fr. Peter Daniele, SDB who was very near him during the last days said. “the atmosphere of the last days was very moving. The teachers, alumni and friends from Haadyai came. The teachers and parishioners from Fatima Church were there. Priests, religious brothers and sisters, Spanish friends and Embassy personnel were there. It seemed to be his moment of joy”. It was to be their last moment of encounter with him. That Saturday of the Easter Octave was a “ Gospel-in action” scene. It was as if Father Raymundo was saying farewell to all of them showing them that as he had lived for them so now he is dying for them, just in the same way that Jesus was appearing to the disciples and showing them his hands and his side to them (cf. the Gospel of the following day, John 20:19-31).

Indications of his closeness to death was more imminent by Sunday, the 19th April. “What a faith-inspiring to see the presence of many around him, a testimony of real friendship, a witness of a true christian community of disciples”, exclaimed Fr. Peter Daniele,SDB. His Excellency Bishop Praphon Chaicharoen SDB, confreres, sisters, teachers, parishioners and children came to visit him. Those around him were praying and interceding with fervour for his recovery. Others were just crying. Because of his inability to speak, he showed his sensibility by allowing his tears to flow freely, too.

On Monday, the 20th of April, Father Raymundo’s condition worsened. The priests who visited him have given the papal blessing with its plenary indulgence. “He was tranquil, serene, no sign of any suffering”, said our Fr. Peter Daniele who was assisting him. Some people and friends were still coming to see him. After allowing the last group to leave, Father Raimundo passed to his reward peacefully in the morning of the 21st April 1998 in the presence of Fr. Peter Daniele and Lay Brother Peter Kimchuan Riu-ngam, thus having the grace of receiving the prayers and the papal blessing from the assisting priest. By Divine coincidence the daily Gospel reading of the day was “... Do not be amazed that I told you, You must be born from above” (cf. John 3,7). Truly, Father Raimundo has now truly entered into the vision of heavenly realities.

The Funeral

The funeral services were a worthy recognition of this Salesian Missionary. Many salesians, priests, religious sisters, parishioners and all his admirers came and filed past his coffin to pay their last love and respects. A large crowd filled the Church of our Lady of Fatima for that funeral mass. Everyone followed the services with devotion and admiration. It was a proof of their recognition of his virtues.

The funeral eulogy of the Provincial, the Rev. Fr. Philip Somchai Kitnichi, served as a thank you echo for those who had been at the funeral services. “I would like to thank you all in the name of the Salesian Society- you, who had come to pay respects to our dear Father Raimundo. Thank you for the communities of Saengthong and Fatima Church who have taken good care of him during his last years. Father Raimundo loved and is especially attached to this parish, desired to be with the parishioners and decided to be buried here. Please, continue to take care of him”, said Fr. Provincial.

God does not count the days, the months or the years. He counts the intensity of love and dedication in the maturity of holiness and service according to one’s vocation. So God has thought that even at 67 years old, Father Raimundo was ready and available to get a new assignment for the new scholastic year 1998: “to be a model for our salesian life on earth and an intercessor for us in heaven”.

Once again, our Salesian Province would like to thank the parish priest, the community and the parishioners of Fatima Church for their christian and salesian concern for our dear departed Fr. Raimundo Garcia Santos. It is on these occasions that we realize the consolation of belonging to a big family.

In Christ and Don Bosco,
Father Leonard Ochoa, SDB
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For the necrology

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born at Orense (Galicia), Spain on September 28, 1931, died in
Bangkok, Thailand on April 21, 1998 at the age of 67, 49 years of
profession and 38 years of priesthood.

He was for 6 years (1979-1985) Provincial of the THAI Province.