



FR. ATTILIO GIOVANNINI, S.D.B.

SS. Peter and Paul Church

San Francisco, California

Father Attilio Giovannini died at the home of his sister in the land of his birth on September 30, 1981. He and his brother, Fr. Ernest Giovannini had left San Francisco, California ten days before that to make a brief visit to Turin and to their home town of Casabianca. It was while visiting his family that Fr. Attilio was called to his reward.

In a certain sense his death there in his beloved Piedmont was providential. He had expressed *viva voce* to at least two Provincials

and to others here in the San Francisco Province the desire to be buried in his native place.

He had been in poor health for several years. He suffered from cancer of the esophagus. Although he had a strong constitution and responded well to the care of specialists, he never regained his former vigor. I have heard it said that he himself predicted that he would not survive this final trip to Italy, nor return to his mission at SS. Peter and Paul Church in San Francisco, where he had spent

the last eleven years of his life.

The Mass of Christian Burial was concelebrated at his home parish in Casabianca on October 3, 1981. His brother, Fr. Ernest, was joined by forty-five other priests for the Concelebrated Mass. Fr. Giacomo Morgando, S.D.B., at that time the Director of the Michael Rua Oratory in Turin, gave the homily. Fr. Arthur Lenti, S.D.B. was among the concelebrants and represented our San Francisco Province.

A Memorial Mass was celebrated for Fr. Attilio in San Francisco at SS. Peter and Paul Church. The principal celebrant was Fr. George Williams, at that time the Regional Superior of our English-speaking provinces. Mr. Joseph Giovannini, brother of Fr. Attilio and Fr. Ernest, was present for the Memorial Mass.

Fr. Attilio was involved in a great variety of Salesian ministries during his 54 years of religious life and 45 years of priestly service. However, there is no doubt that the main contribution he made to the Church and our Salesian Congregation was to be involved in the formation of Salesians and Salesians-to-be.

His own early family and Salesian training was excellent. During his high school years he studied at Valdocco as a resident student (1922-1926). He made his novitiate at La Mogilia (Chieri) and made his first profession there on September 18, 1927. Blessed Philip Rinaldi presided over that ceremony. Fr.

Rinaldi also received his renewal of vows (1929) and his perpetual profession (1931).

He did his college studies at Valsalice (1927-1929), his practical training as assistant to the novices at La Moglia and then Pinerolo (1930-1932). He studied theology at the Gregorian University in Rome (1932-36) and earned an S.T.L. degree.

He was ordained in Rome in the Church of St. Ignatius on July 28, 1935.

His close association with places dear to our Salesian History and to the history of the Church would be very evident in later years as he passed on to many young people in Italy and in North America his deep knowledge of the Gospel. Fr. Attilio shared his love for Christ

and his knowledge of the Salesian way of following the Savior with many Salesian aspirants, novices, and philosophy and theology students as the years passed.

The first few years of his priesthood were spent as a theology professor in Chieri. Then, in 1941, he was named Master of Novices of

the Subalpine Province in Italy.

In 1948, though he knew very little English, he was sent to be Master of Novices at Don Bosco College Seminary in Newton, N.J., USA. Everyone on campus affectionately called him "Father Master." His constant request was that we publicly correct his errors in pronunciation or grammar at any time – even during a class or conference.

FR. ATTILIO GIOVANNINI, S.D.B.

Born: February 21, 1910,
Casabianca, Diocese of Ivrea, Italy

Professed: September 18, 1927

Ordained: July 28, 1935,
Church of St. Ignatius, Rome

Died: September 30, 1981, age 71
Cantarosso (near Casabianca), Italy

Religious life: 54 years

PRIESTHOOD: 45 YEARS

He remained in Newton until 1954, at which time he was made Director of the aspirantate in West Haverstraw, N. Y. After four years there and two years as Director of the Salesian Theologate in Aptos, California, he returned to Newton for another four years as Master of Novices.

Thus he spent a total of ten years as Master of Novices in the United States. During those years, 350 novices came under his care.

Even when he concluded his final year as Master of Novices in 1964, his work of helping to form young Salesians was not over. He spent two years as pastor at St. Anthony's Church in Paterson, N. J. (A "famous" robbery took place there during his pastorate --- a holdup at his rectory).

Then, once again he was sent to do formation work – this time as Director of the Salesian aspirants in Chieri, Italy. Those of us who were in touch with him during that three-year period knew that he missed the United States and the chance to use both English and Italian in his apostolate and to be near his brother, Fr. Ernest, who worked in Watsonville, California, after concluding two terms on the General Council in Turin.

Attilio Giovannini was a master at the art of spiritual direction both within the Sacrament of Reconciliation and in other settings. At SS. Peter and Paul Church he was very much appreciated as a confessor by the parishioners in general, but especially by the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and by the children. They could sense that he was a man of God and a true Salesian.

Of course, he was involved in all the various activities of the parish, but it was his depth and expertise as a spiritual guide that was most treasured and appreciated.

He served also as Spiritual Director of

the Holy Name Society there. When he celebrated his fiftieth anniversary of religious life in 1977, those men put on a splendid banquet for him. They too were most grateful for the spiritual help he was providing.

I knew Fr. Attilio (I always called him "Father Master") in New Jersey, in Piedmont, and in California. He was always the same cheerful, lovable priest. There was a constancy and humility about him that was most charming and attractive. He had the stability of the "contadino." He was an understanding and down-to-earth man.

He explained painstakingly to us the meaning of the Salesian way of life and of the vows. But more importantly, he exemplified the Salesian spirit and a great love of Don Bosco in his own life. It was certainly not by chance that the word "exemplary" was used often by his superiors when they were admitting him to vows or Orders. Fr. Morgando used the same term to describe him in the funeral homily he gave in Casabianca.

He not only taught others about obedience and many other natural and Christian virtues; he practiced what he preached. He was available for whatever needed to be done.

He was forever joking about wanting to be a missionary in Chubut in Argentina. One day in Newton, Father Patrick O'Leary, who was very fond of Fr. Attilio, pulled the cleric Clem Cardillo aside and asked him, "Is it true that Father Master wants to go to Chubut?"

"I'm not sure," replied Brother Clem, "He does talk a lot about it."

"Well, tell him not to go," said Fr. O'Leary, "it's hot as hell there!"

Fr. Attilio never did go to Chubut. But he brought his serenity and sense of humor to many other places. Some of his assignments required a great deal of courage. All of them

demanded learning, wisdom and holiness. During his earthly pilgrimage he seemed very much in contact with the Spirit of Jesus, the Source of all good gifts.

On July 14, 1926, young Attilio Giovannini wrote a letter asking to be admitted to the Salesian novitiate. In it he stated that for a long time he had dreamed of being a Salesian. He called on the Lord and the Venerable Don Bosco to make that dream come true so that he might "do a lot of good among young people."

He accomplished not only that desire, but he also helped so very many of us follow Christ Don Bosco's way. We hope that from his place in the Salesian Garden in paradise, Father Master knows that we who were formed by him will be ever grateful for what he constantly taught us by word and example.

When we were novices, Father Master began his yearlong series of conferences with a talk about *trust*. He encouraged us to trust in the loving care of a provident God. He urged us to trust in the motherly protection of Mary and to rely on St. John Bosco as a true father and role model. Then he spoke of trusting our superiors --- God's representatives.

He went on to say that we had every reason for self-confidence as well. In that con-

ference, he suggested that we repeat often with St. Paul: "I can do all things in Him who gives me strength."

Then he concluded by telling us that we could grow and help one another grow by carrying on what Don Bosco would call "the apostolate of cheerfulness."

It was obvious to his novices that Father Master was a man of prayer. During my novitiate, he accidentally cut off a finger and had to spend a couple of days in Newton Memorial Hospital. We found out that this was the first time since his ordination that he ever had to forego celebrating daily Mass.

Fr. Attilio Giovannini was a man you could trust. There was something genuine and authentic about him. You could open up to him and you knew that what you told him in confidence would be kept confidential.

Like any human being he had his limitations and his problems. But he was resilient. He bounced back. He was serene, and he was a gentleman. He had taught us that Christ himself is the Source of our joy.

I believe that he lived and died in close union with Jesus. He cooperated with the grace of perseverance and died with his boots on! We have loved him in life, and we have not forgotten him in death.

By a grateful novice of the Class of 1950-51:

Fr. Harry W. Rasmussen, S.D.B.

Director

St. Joseph Salesian Youth Center /Novitiate
Rosemead, California