

SAVIO COLLEGE
DINGLI - MALTA

Dear Confreres,

It was just two days before the solemnity of the Assumption of Our Lady that the Lord called to himself

**FATHER
PHILIP
GRECH SDB**

in the early hours of the 13th August 1988, at the age of 67, in this centenary year of the death of St. John Bosco, about whom Fr Philip wrote a list of works especially during the last years of his life. We can say that he became the salesian biographer of the saint in Malta.

Fr Philip was born in Żebbug, Malta, on the 11th May 1921. There he was also baptized, confirmed and received his elementary education in the school of that town until he entered the junior Seminary at the age of 11, to continue to the Major Seminary later on. He was the only child in the family and used to say that his parents were very pleased that he was going to be a priest.

He was just 18 years of age when he started a three-year course in philosophy followed by a four-year course of Theology in the University of Malta. One of the events Fr Philip used to remember with a certain joy was when he read the speech of welcome to the newly appointed Archbishop of Malta, the well-known Mgr. Michael Gonzi, in front of the Cathedral of Malta, in Mdina. This same Bishop ordained Philip Grech as Deacon in April 1946, and ordained him priest on the 11th August, 1946. The people of Żebbug gave a big welcome to their newly-ordained priest.

After his ordination Fr Philip continued further studies in Nottingham, England. After his return to Malta he taught Arts at the Seminary of Malta in Floriana and he worked hard in the Catholic Action Movement for several years. His apostolic spirit and his pastoral charity attracted the attention of the Archbishop who appointed him Parish Priest of St. Julian's, Malta.

He organized his parish very well and he looked after his people with great love and personal interest. Today his parishoners still feel that it was a great pity that he had to leave them after only four years as their pastor. Not a few of them kept visiting him in hospital as well as at Savio College during the last months of his illness.

However, in the depth of his heart, Fr Philip had always favoured the young. No wonder then, that he decided to leave the parish and join the Salesians of Don Bosco who had their communities in Sliema, next to his parish. He went to Shrigley, England, for a year where he taught the aspirants there while being an aspirant himself. In 1957 he started the novitiate in Burwash, England, and he continued it in San Gregorio di Catania, Sicily.

Fr Philip took his final and perpetual vows in the Salesian Congregation on the 30th November, 1962. From October 1959 to September 1968 he was again a teacher of the aspirants, this time in Pedara, Sicily, where he helped with the novices, as well. Fr Philip always had a soft spot for junior Seminarians. He was convinced that the seed of vocation to the religious life and the Priesthood must be cultivated in the early years of life. Whenever and wherever he could, Fr Philip did his very best to promote "vocations to the priesthood". Today most of the Maltese students who followed him to Pedara are Salesians of Don Bosco, and owe their vocation to the tireless and unstinting efforts of Fr Philip.

In October 1968, the Salesians opened a new house in Dingli, Malta, which was to be a house for vocations and formation of personnel. Once more, Fr Philip had to be with young people who are called to follow Christ. He became the first Headmaster of Savio College, an office which he held for two years during which he was also the Vocations' Promoter. We saw him busy with propaganda activities, printing hand-outs, organizing vocational exhibitions, giving retreats, etc.

When he had to stop teaching due to his failing health he found it very hard to leave the students. He still corrected their works in his room and he prepared written notes for the teachers. He hated to be withdrawn from school or the community scene. One of his constant preoccupations was the fact that he was not with the community for prayers, for relaxation and for work, even though he could not do otherwise.

Now, that he was becoming physically weaker and weaker, he dedicated himself to writing only. He had written or translated works before, and now he continued to write poems, plays, hymns, and above all, articles for the Maltese Salesian Bulletin. He had written the lives of Don Rua, Zefferino Namuncurà, Laura Vincuña, and others. One of his last works was the life of Don Nazzareno Camilleri SDB. The life of St. John Bosco which he translated from the Italian original, was and still is a best seller in Malta.

Fr Philip died peacefully in the Lord on the 13th August, 1988, only two days after he had celebrated the 42nd anniversary of his ordination to the priesthood, surrounded by his few relatives who came to see him from Australia, his family in Malta and the confreres. A few hours before he died he had said Mass.

His smile attracted many souls to the Lord. He was known for his loyalty to the church and he was always and everywhere an exemplary priest. The importance of the teaching of the Catechism was a point he always stressed. He believed in the apostolate of the laity. His pastoral love was shown in his life-long enthusiasm with Don Bosco's motto: "Da mihi animas, coetera tolle."

Please, do remember him in your prayers

Francis Zammit SDB
Rector

For the Necrology:

Fr Philip Grech SDB died at Savio College, Dingli, Malta, on the 13th August, 1988, at the age of 67; 42 years of priesthood and 30 years of religious profession