



Fr. Arthur Grisetti, S.D.B.



At 5:15 in the afternoon of Saturday, January 7, 1995, at St. Anne's Home in San Francisco, the Lord called to Himself, after a long illness, our beloved confrere, Father Arthur Grisetti, S.D.B.

Through his last twenty-four hours he was surrounded continuously by his Salesian confreres, by the Little Sisters of the Poor, by friends, and by the residents of St. Anne's Home. His death was very peaceful. He seemed to suffer no

pain. It was indeed "the death of the just."

The Parkinson's Disease with which he was afflicted was severely aggravated during his last few weeks. Only God knows how difficult it must have been for Father Arthur, who had always been among us a paragon of activity, to understand what was happening to him.

We all thank God that, from the very beginning of his residence at St. Anne's in September 1991, he was the object of particularly admirable

care by the Little Sisters of the Poor and by the affection of his confreres who visited him often, some even daily.

The Sisters asked that a funeral service be held in their own chapel so that the many residents who loved and admired Fr. Arthur could also be present. The Mass was attended by friends and Salesians from the San Francisco Bay Area. Main celebrant and homilist was Fr. Tom Prendiville who was provincial during Fr. Arthur's last years as an active Salesian; in his homily he remarked that the special cross which Fr. Arthur bore with admirable patience must have been the cross of inactivity.

The Mass of Christian burial was held at 10:30 am on Thursday, January 12, in the community chapel at Salesian High School in Richmond. A great number of confreres, friends, and former students came to pay final respects to this great and gentle Salesian. Fr. William Schafer, provincial and main celebrant, presented Father Arthur as a magnificent example of a person of deep faith, of great devotion to Our Lady, of one filled with the goodness of God, who never complained but who patiently carried his cross. His interment followed in the Salesian Cemetery, next to Fr. Alfred Broccardo and to Fr. Ernest Giovannini, his mentors, friends and predecessors as directors of the Salesian Junior Seminary in Richmond.

Early Years

In presenting the figure of Father Arthur Grisetti, let me recall briefly some of his early experiences.

He was born February 22, 1913 in Busto Arsizio, province of Varese, in the Lombardy region of Italy, and was baptized the very next day. His parents were Dionigi Grisetti and Elisa Macchi.

In a recent letter from Busto Arsizio his cousin and classmate, Silvio Colombo, refers to Fr. Arthur's early family situation: "He was the youngest of 13 children (only five of them survived), with his father as the sole breadwinner. Arthur showed immediately a special aptitude for study, and his entire family contributed to make it possible for him

to get a good education at a time when school was not for everyone, given those difficult times. Arthur himself worked for a time as an apprentice textile worker, but his desire to study for the priesthood prevailed." Silvio adds that his last personal con-



Fr. Arthur's Family - Arthur is sitting at bottom left.

tact with Father Arthur was by telephone, at St. Anne's Home, when he had the sad duty of conveying to him the news of Maria's death, Fr. Arthur's last surviving sister. Of the Grisetti immediate family only Arthur's nephew Dionigi and his son Alessandro survive.

John Columbo, his very dear friend and faithful correspondent over the years, informs us from New Hampshire that he and Arthur frequented the same Oratory, that Arthur was a born leader, a sign that youth work was going to be his chosen field. It was also at that time that a strong desire for the missions began to grow in him. When Arthur was twenty, his pastor, Fr. Giovanni Rigamonti, directed him to the Istituto Cardinal Cagliero of Ivrea where, in October 1933, he joined two other young men from his home town, Ernesto Faggioni and

Giovanni Colombo.

With Don Bosco

"I am happy to give my highest recommendation for Arthur, both for his piety and for his strong missionary vocation," wrote his pastor to the Salesian Director, Fr. Giuseppe Corso. After completing what was usually a four-year program in only three years, he formally asked to be admitted to the Salesian Novitiate on May 31, 1936, expressing his readiness to go wherever his superiors desired: "I trust in the help of God, of Mary Help of Christians and of Don Bosco which has never failed me," he wrote in his application. On July 13 he received the cassock at the hands of Bishop Ernest Coppo, S.D.B.

Of this early period of Salesian formation his old friend, Fr. Ernest Faggioni, writes: "As an aspirant Arthur showed a gentle disposition and a punctiliousness in carrying out whatever was asked. He was always approachable due to his subtle smile and soft spoken word."

After a brief vacation at home, Arthur and five other classmates were asked to go to the United States. He made the voyage by steamship from Genoa to New York, arriving on September 17, 1936. We have just received from his cousin Silvio a most interesting handwritten 47-page diary of that voyage which Arthur prepared for his family in Italy. He and his five companions joined the American novices the very next day in Newton, New Jersey. Fr. James Schaforz was the master of novices.

One year later, on September 18, 1937, he pronounced his first vows into the hands of the then Salesian provincial, Fr. Ambrose Rossi.

From 1937 to 1940 the young cleric completed his philosophy and college courses at Don Bosco College in Newton, New Jersey, graduating with a Bachelor of Arts degree at the end of the 1940 school year. On July 4th he left Newton for San Francisco, having been assigned to the Western Salesian Province to begin his three years of practical training. St. John Bosco boarding school in Bellflower, in Southern California, was his very first assignment. The school had just been opened (in September 1940) under the direction of our famed pioneer Salesian, Fr. Ernest Giovannini. On September 8 of that year Arthur renewed his religious vows as a

Salesian.

On August 1, 1941 he was assigned to the Salesian Junior Seminary in Richmond. He remained there only five months due to the fact that the United States declared war against Japan and the Axis Powers, and all "enemy aliens" were excluded from the California coast where Richmond is situated. Back to Bellflower he went on January 10, 1942. He remained there until August 22, 1943 when he returned to Newton, New Jersey, to begin his theological studies. On September 8th of that year he made his perpetual vows into the hands of Fr. Aeneas Tozzi, Fr. Rossi's successor as provincial. "Salesianus sum in aeternum," Fr. Arthur wrote on that occasion.

His superiors entered the following comments in admitting him to his final vows: "Of solid piety; docile and willing; intelligent and studious." He received the tonsure on July 2, 1944 in Newton at the hands of Bishop William F. O'Shea, M.M.; the first two minor orders on October 29, 1944 from Salesian Archbishop Richard Pittini of Santo Domingo; and the orders of Exorcist, and Acolyte on July 1st from Thomas McLaughlin, bishop of Paterson, New Jersey. He was ordained a Subdeacon in Newton by our Salesian Missionary Bishop Laravoire Morrow on June 29, 1946, and a Deacon on December 21, 1946 in the Cathedral of Paterson by Thomas Boland, auxiliary bishop of the Newark diocese. Finally, June 29, 1947 was the longed-for day of his priestly ordination at the hands of the great Maryknoll Bishop, soon to be martyred in China, Bishop Francis X. Ford.

In his application for the priesthood Fr. Arthur had written: "...No doubt I am still far from that degree of perfection which would be proportionate to the lofty calling to which I am asking to be raised. However, just as at the end of my novitiate I was told that my first profession would only make of me a beginner in the way to religious perfection, so my very ordination to the holy priesthood will serve to make me realize all the better my shortcomings and the need of always greater efforts toward perfection."

Not surprisingly, the comments of his superiors during that period were also very positive: "Of solid piety, quite intelligent, of good spirit, serious

in his studies and a hard worker."

Priestly Apostolate

His first assignment as a priest was to St. Francis School in Watsonville, California as teacher/assistant, in the standard terminology of those days, and later as prefect of studies. St. Francis was then a boarding school for boys, grades 4th through 8th, and requiring 24 hours of supervision and care literally 365 days a year. He stayed at St. Francis only one year as prefect of studies: he had attended Fordham University during the summer months while studying theology in New Jersey, but had not completed all the requirements for graduation, so the superiors asked him to return and finish his graduate program in Education. He took up residence at the Provincial House in New Rochelle, commuting to the university several times a week while doing some teaching in the local Salesian High School. He earned his Master's degree in Education in 1949.

After his first family visit in Italy in the summer of 1949 he returned to California, first as prefect of studies of the Salesian Junior Seminary in Richmond, then as its prefect and director (1954-1960).

In his personal notes from those days we read: "I shall give much of my time and energy to working for others... I must make the best of these four months; I must dig down deep in my soul a well where the refreshing waters of grace may never dry up, so that I will be ready to dispense those waters without ever running dry myself... I shall try to spend these months in a more constant union with Jesus throughout the day, in all serenity and cheerfulness... Away with all worries and sadness! Only sin can make me sad but, even then, confession is always at hand... I shall keep my eyes fixed to heaven and have a ready smile for anyone who approaches me... Make everyone happy—'omnia omnibus' my motto..." Certainly, this is what must have sustained him throughout his priestly life and rendered his ministry so efficacious both as a teacher and as a director.

After his term as director, Fr. Arthur's physical condition gave signs of weakening. The superiors became rather concerned, and his assignments be-

came more varied and of shorter duration: teacher at St. Francis School in Watsonville (1960-1962); teacher at Bellflower (1962 to January 1963); prefect at Richmond (1963-64); associate pastor at Corpus Christi, San Francisco (1964-66); associate pastor and prefect at SS. Peter and Paul, also in San Francisco (1966-1969); provincial secretary and assistant treasurer at the Provincial Residence in San Francisco (1969-1971); associate pastor at Corpus Christi (1971-1972); again, provincial secretary (1972-77); associate pastor at SS. Peter and Paul (1977-1978); finally, associate director of development at our provincial office in San Francisco (1978-1985).

Ministry of Suffering

Parkinson's Disease was beginning to affect his movements. With time it was decided to retire Fr. Arthur from all responsibilities. His active pastoral ministry, including weekend supplies in various parishes where he was deeply loved and appreciated, had come to an end.

The year 1987 marked his 50th Anniversary as a Salesian. He celebrated it quietly and intimately with friends and confreres at the Provincial Residence. He began moving about with great difficulty, needing increasing assistance from those around him and more frequent supervision by his own doctor. His speech was becoming more slurred and harder to understand. His movements were getting slower, his usually quick step was becoming wobbly, his straight form more and more stooped.

All this he was bearing with an air of resignation and even with a smile. The words of Psalm 54 come readily to mind: "I have God for my help. The Lord upholds my life... I will sacrifice to you with willing heart and praise your name for it is good: for you have rescued me from all my distress." (Ps 54: 8-9)

He carried his cross bravely until his last moment. I am reminded of what Jean Jaques Olier, founder of the Sulpicians, said to his seminarians as he encouraged them to become victims for Christ: "The community, as a victim of Christ, will see in the cross a very propitious altar, on which each one will exert oneself each day to offer his sacrifice... for

Christ." (*Introduction A la Vie et Aux Vertus Chretiennes*, Paris: Le Raneau, 1954, p. 175). How well this describes the last years of Fr. Arthur's life!

On September 1, 1991 Fr. Arthur moved to the Little Sisters of the Poor's St. Anne's Home in San Francisco. Another dearly remembered Salesian, Fr. Larry Byrne, lived out the last years of his life there, afflicted with the same disease Fr. Arthur was now experiencing. The last stage of his earthly life had begun.

Of this richly graced period St. Anne's Home's superior, Mother Margaret Charles, writes: "During his years among us Fr. Arthur made many friends. In his quiet, unassuming way he touched our lives. Peaceful acceptance seemed to be the essence of his spirituality, and he reflected this at all times. His illness was painfully trying for him, of this we are sure, but he did his best to keep going with determination and dignity. We were very happy to have him as part of our family at St. Anne's."

Tributes and Memories

A long-time friend and classmate, who shared Fr. Arthur's birthplace and youth, writes: "Arthur had a very fine personality: he was smart, jovial and somewhat shy, along with being very kind and gentle. He was an avid mountain climber and hiker; he greatly enjoyed ice-skating. Our friendship grew more fondly during the last ten years of his life. I feel certain that he is in Heaven, since he had his Purgatory here on earth." (John Columbo, Chocornua, New Hampshire, January 1, 1995)

"He was extremely intelligent. Latin, Greek, English, he knew very well. He was well balanced, emotionally and intellectually. He did not criticize, although sometimes it was natural to do so. He kept quiet, and let things go. I noticed he was prayerful, very prayerful, and received the Sacraments devoutly. He was anxious to get to work, to be with kids, to spend his life with them. He was quiet, retired, and rarely let his emotions run. Arthur was a very quiet man, humble and respectful. A very good priest. May God give him the reward of his good life and of the pain he experienced in his illness." (Fr. Paul Aronica, S.D.B., January 25, 1995)

"I was ordained a priest in 1947 with Fr. Grisetti who had been my companion as a novice and dur-



Fr. Arthur in a lighter moment

ing theological studies at Newton, New Jersey. I will always remember him as a gentlemanly, scholarly and saintly Salesian. As a student he was always at the top of his class.

He later pursued higher degrees. In his prime, when he held positions of authority, he never lost his gentle and kind ways. When he suffered ill health for many years, he was a holy example in his later years to all who came to know him. It is consoling to know that he had a very peaceful death, dying, as it were, in God's arms. For that is how he lived throughout his exemplary life. His characteristics remind me of those of Fr. Joseph Quadrio (whom I also knew under different circumstances) whose 'quiet' life became a resplendent light at the 'Crocetta' in Turin, where he died at an earlier time." (Fr. Frank Klauder, January 9, 1995)

"Condolences to you and to all our confreres for the loss of our dear Fr. Arthur! For years he exercised the apostolate of patient suffering with

Christ for your province, for our Society, and for the Church. I was deeply impressed by his serenity when I visited him. His simplicity and bearing pointed to his peace and readiness to make his journey home to heaven. God be praised!" (Fr. Jerry Sesto to Fr. Bill Schafer, January 17, 1995)

Fr. Harry Rasmussen, who lived many years with Fr. Arthur and was also his Provincial, writes: "Fr. Arthur was energetic and determined. When he took on a task, he did not back off until he had accomplished his goal. When he was Director of our High School Seminary in Richmond, he showed the students and the staff what hard work could accomplish. During work periods he was right there with the seminarians doing maintenance. He was not afraid to get his hands dirty. When the camp at Bonny Doon was being built, the contractor got a lot of help from the older aspirants and their assistants—and from the Director, Fr. Arthur. It was there that Fr. Arthur fell from a ladder inside a wooden water tank that he was assembling and fractured a vertebra... His strength and determination was also evident when he went on a hike with some of the boys. Only the fastest hikers could go with him. He could climb hills and mountains with speed and ease. Even on his visits to his native Italy one of his great joys was to spend some days hiking in the Alps. As Fr. Bill Schafer mentioned in his homily at the Mass of Christian Burial in Richmond on January 12, Fr. Grisetti was an excellent speaker. He gave well-prepared homilies and excellent 'goodnights'. His knowledge of St. John Bosco was quite vast; this was frequently evident in his talks. He often claimed that it was almost a torture for him to speak in public. Perhaps that is because he put so much preparation into every talk he would give. But youngsters and people in the parishes where he worked or helped out appreciated his clear, practical presentations. This same clarity was also his characteristic as a teacher. He was an especially good language teacher. He knew how to make even Latin interesting, a rare accomplishment indeed. He required hard work of his students, but was most pleasant and cordial in his way of dealing with them. Fr. Arthur himself was an accomplished linguist. He learned English very well. In addition to his native Italian, he spoke French and Spanish fluently. Two other characteristics of this dedicated Salesian priest were his sense of hu-

mor and his spirit of humble service. Even during his long debilitating illness Fr. Arthur did not lose his sense of humor. He could laugh at humorous situations, and at himself as well. This quality made him a most pleasing and personable man to live with. You could count on his being there when needed, and you could count on him being in a good mood. He did not wear his troubles on his sleeve. He served the Province in many different ways and in several different places. He preferred the Bay Area to Southern California because he suffered greatly from the heat. As provincial secretary for both Fr. Bernard Justen and myself, he was extremely reliable and available. He knew how to keep confidential matters to himself. He learned the many important details of the secretary's task and was a great source of help to the provincials in dealing with dispensations, laicizations and other complex canonical procedures. He served as a translator, a chauffeur and a trusted companion to the provincial during his years as secretary. He would offer his advice, but only if he were explicitly asked to do so." (Fr. Harry Rasmussen, S.D.B., Director of Novices, Rosemead, California)

One final testimony from his faithful companion during the last sixteen years, Fr. Larry Lorenzoni: "I was able to follow rather closely Fr. Arthur's struggle with Parkinson's Disease over the last three and a half years while he was tenderly cared for by the Little Sisters of the Poor at St. Anne's Home here in San Francisco. I would visit him briefly every day from our provincial office, at first to help ease his adjustment to the new environment away from our community (a situation he was facing with some anxiety) and, intentionally, as my personal way to repay in some way his total dedication when he was my associate director for seven years in the development office. What began naturally enough as an act of concern and friendship soon became a personal need for me to be spiritually enriched by those daily contacts with a person I felt was a living saint. His habits of a lifetime became objects of admiration and wonder for both Sisters and residents at St. Anne's: his simplicity, his evenness of temper, his predictable punctuality, his gentleness, his patience and deep sense of gratitude, his religious detachment, his natural virtues of frankness, honesty, practical good sense, and his subtle humor... At the age of 81 he realized that most



Fr. Arthur with Fr. Larry and Mother Margaret Charles.

of his dear friends had preceded him in eternity. How he treasured the few he had left! He would look forward with obvious anticipation to the letters which were coming with predictable regularity from John Columbo, his old friend from Busto Arsizio and former seminary classmate; Mrs. Corradina Belotti from Corpus Christi did so much to brighten his last few years with her letters, telephone calls and visits. Another friend who could never do enough for him was Rita Malatesta, our parishioner and Salesian Cooperator from SS. Peter and Paul's: she saw to it that Fr. Arthur's modest 'pantry' at St. Anne's was always provided with the few things he enjoyed so much: a jar of peanut butter, some favorite Italian cookies, dried prunes and dates, roasted chestnuts in season, sliced peaches soaked in wine, polenta and risotto from Sandra Campbell, our solicitous cook who loved him dearly, and the special chocolates and occasional bottle of Port from his longtime friend Fr. Austin Conterno... 'Visiting Fr. Arthur was always a joy, never a chore,' Rita wrote about her weekly visits to St. Anne's over the years. I had the unique privilege of anointing Fr. Arthur on January 5th, two days before God called him to Himself. Assisting by his bedside were Fr. Bill Schafer, our provincial; Br. Ernie Martinez, whose special loving concern is the welfare of all our elderly Salesians; Fr. Mario Mich, director of our provincial residence; Mother Margaret Charles with other Little Sisters of the Poor, and a number of friends. Together we sang the 'Salve Regina,' knowing that the familiar strains

would soothe Fr. Arthur's spirit: he loved Our Lady so much in life... I was not able to attend his funeral (I was in intensive care at Presbyterian Hospital after heart surgery when he was laid to rest in our Salesian Cemetery on Thursday, January 12), but I felt him very close to me as I was being wheeled into the operating room on January 10... I know I have a very dear friend watching over me, and I pray that I may be as ready as he was for God's final call. 'Good night, sweet prince, and flights of angels sing thee to thy rest!' (Fr. Larry Lorenzoni, to Fr. Mario Mich, January 31, 1995)

Let me finally quote from Fr. Bill Schafer's homily at the Mass of Christian Burial: "Let us rejoice that Fr. Arthur was among us. We thank God for this gift! Let us celebrate the fact that our province and the Congregation have a patron in heaven. Ernie Martinez and I asked him repeatedly on his dying bed to watch over us!"

In conclusion, dear confreres, I would like to ask you, in the name of our entire community, to remember our dear Fr. Arthur Grisetti in your prayers, that the Lord may reward him for the good he has done, granting him the merited eternal rest in the Salesian Garden in Paradise.

Pray also for this community, that we too may be found faithful to the call by which the Lord invited us to follow Him.

Sincerely,

Father Mario Mich, S.D.B.
and Provincial Residence Community

Father Arthur Grisetti, SDB

Born: Busto Arsizio (VA), Italy, February 22, 1913

Professed: Newton, NJ, September 18, 1937

Ordained: Newton, NJ, June 29, 1947

Died: St. Annes' Home, San Francisco, January 7, 1995



Salesians of St. John Bosco

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