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REV. BRO.
ATHANASIUS GURIA
S.D.B.

BROTHER ATHANASIUS GURIA

30. 01.1936 – 26.06.1999

THE LAST HOUR

BROTHER ATHANASIUS GURIA passed away on 26th June 1999 at 18.45 hours.

He was conscious to the end, though he was suffering enormous pain. His liver had been damaged and his bodily systems collapsed due to problems associated with Hepatitis B virus infection. During the last two days in hospital he began to bleed and vomit blood. The clotting elements in his blood were being destroyed.

That evening many confreres came to see Brother Athanasius, familiarly and endearingly called Athanas. They all left for their respective houses. Fr. Philip Barjo, Fr. Aloysius Hemrom, Sr. Celestina Toppo, Msmhc, his niece, some sisters of the hospital and I stood around his bed. Together with him we recited a few, short prayers and at my suggestion other prayers were said in Sadri, to which he more readily responded. Fr. Philip Barjo gave him absolution and he was happy and thankful. It was time now. I whispered into his ears, "Jesus, Mary and Joseph, I give you my heart and my soul; Jesus Mary and Joseph, assist me in my last agony; Jesus, Mary and Joseph, may I breathe forth my soul in peace with you." I imparted to him also the Apostolic Blessing as he breathed his last. Both Fr. Philip and Fr. Aloysius were so overjoyed and they had this to say to me: "Brother Athanasius had the privilege of having three priests by his bedside to assist him in his last moments." He was well prepared to return to his Lord and Master.

After his peaceful death we recited a prayer or two and I intoned the hymn: "DIL SE MARIAM PYARI HAI" (I Love Our Lady very much), an old, favourite hymn of Brother and many of us .

THE LAST MONTH

Brother Atanasius came up to Shillong to spend the last 30 days(26.05.1999 - 26.06.1999) of his life in Sunnyside with the Novices and where he spent the longest number of his Salesian Apostolate. He moved around a little from his room to the chapel and when feeling better to the courtyard and watched the Novices at work or admired the beauty of Nature and the flowers. He ate and drank little, suffered much pain and often did not enjoy restful sleep. He found joy and interest in reading the BIBLE. In fact, he got one with a bigger lettering. He chatted with anyone who came to see him and spent time in "CHATTING" with the Lord. The Rosary was his constant companion.

The last two days of his life Brother Athanasius spent in Nazareth hospital. The Doctors could do nothing more to arrest the progress of his sickness and he passed away.

*In Sunnyside with Novices
Living close to all of us
He left us all for paradise
Loving all and loved by us.*

He was laid to rest at the Salesian cemetery in Shillong on 28th June 1999. The solemn concelebrated mass was presided over by V. Rev. Fr. Dominic Jala, the then provincial of Guwahati province. A large group of priests, Brothers, Sisters, Novices, students, friends and well wishers gathered to bid him farewell. His own elder

brother, Mr. Alphonse Guria, Fr. Lazarus Guria, his nephew, Sr. Celestina Toppo, MSMHC, his niece and other dear and near ones of Brother were able to be present at the funeral service.

EARLY LIFE

ATHANASIVS GURIA was born on 30th January in 1936 , at Belangel village, Torpa in Bihar. His parents Joseph Guria and Joanna Khandulna maintained the family with their farm work. At sometime in the early childhood of Athanasius, the parents moved over to Assam to work in the tea gardens of North Lakhimpur area. It was there that the young Athanasius was sent to study from 1949. Later in 1954 he was sent to Bandel, seeing that he had a desire and the inclination to become a Salesian. He completed his Aspirantate in the Salesian house of Sonada, Darjeeling, West Bengal from where he was admitted to the Novitiate.

Under the guidance of Rev. Fr. Bacchiarello, the Novice Master, he prepared himself well for his First Religious profession and made it as a Salesian Brother on 24.05. 1958. There were 10 others who made the religious commitment on the same day in the Salesian Novitiate of Sunnyside, Shillong India.

A SALESIAN

After his First Profession Brother Athanasius was assigned to the community of Don Bosco Technical School, Shillong. He would spend the rest of his 41 years as a Religious carrying out a variety of duties that were expected of what was called a FACTOTUM. He remained in Shillong from 1958 to 1960. He was then appointed to North

Lakhimpur mission (1960 - 1969) where he was to witness the sad event of the departure of all foreign Missionaries from Assam. Before he reached Shillong again to work in Sunnyside for a long period of nine years (1975 - 1984), we find him in various houses for short stints: St. Joseph's Minor Seminary, Dibrugarh(1969-1970), Parishes of Dekhijuli (1971-1973) and Tangla (1973-1975). From Sunnyside, Shillong, he returned to Tangla(1984) from where he was called to the newly founded parish of Dimakuchi(1984-1985) and then to Kumarikatta (1985-1987). For three years (1987-1990) he helped in the farm at Umran from where he was transferred to the parish of Garobadha where, as he noted with joy, the late Bishop Orestes Marengo was then carrying out pastoral work as a retired Bishop. The last years of his life saw him at Boko (1992-1993), the Provincial House, Guwahati (1993-1994) - where he was brought especially for medical treatment - Dimakuchi (1993 -1994) and Doomni(1998-1999).

A SALESIAN EVERYWHERE

We are quite familiar with the expression “Don Bosco, a priest everywhere “and recalling the fact that Brother Athanasius worked in very many houses in our province during his life as a religious we can truly say: Brother was A SALESIAN EVRYWHERE. In keeping with the traditions of the time, Brother Athanasius was admitted to profess as a “CATECHIST SALESIAN BROTHER” and his place in the Society would be designated as a Factotum. In this age in which people strive for specialisations and for self-fulfilling tasks, such a job description would be frowned upon. And yet, as in the example of Brother Athanasius the truth of Religious Life is more and more clearly brone out:

The Important question is not :

“What the religious **DO** in the society “but what must religious **BE** in the society”.

BROTHER ATHANASIOUS A MAN

As a man, Brother Athanasius may have been marked by many limitations but that did not deter him from seeking what was good. In fact his superiors noted how this young, newly professed religious who was rather timid in carrying out his duties, had a good apostolic spirit. He may have been intellectually limited and not exposed enough for the many demands that were made on a Factotum but this did not leave him without the good will to serve his communities.. In fact he himself wrote how dejected he felt at times because he was not able to carry out very difficult assignments according to the expectations of his superiors.

SICKLY but HARD WORKING

Earlier on in his life, Brother Athanasius had been suffering from some serious ailments like Tuberculosis of the lungs from which he was to recover fully due to care and treatment. During the past few years he had been suffering from various other health troubles. It was only in January of this year that he was diagnosed as suffering from the killer disease caused by Hepatitis B. Virus. The doctor noticed that his was quite an advanced case. In April 1999, Brother had to be hospitalised and eventually he was brought up to Shillong. After being discharged from Nazareth Hospital he was to spend just one month (26.05.1999 -26.06.1999).in our Novitiate community from where the Lord called him to himself.

The last months of his life were marked by intense suffering which we were unable to fathom because Brother Athanasius was never too much of a complainer. Of suffering, especially the physical ones, he had enough all through his life. His illnesses were, in a large way, brought about by the hard and dedicated work that he put in wherever he was placed. In fact, some confreres did remark that here was one who was consumed by hard work. He did not seem to rest. Those who assisted him would be able to imagine in some way, how much he had to suffer during the last days of his life. He laid foundations for all this in the Novitiate. The superiors noted that he was capable of making enormous amount of sacrifice. He was one of the few who knew what it was to mortify himself at table.

A MAN OF PRAYER

One of our senior confreres, Fr. Sylvanus Sngi Lyngdoh, remarked over and over again, how he was struck by the example of Brother Athanasius during the time they spent together in Provincial House. Brother was a man of prayer. He prayed a lot by himself and took initiative in leading community prayer. He had just been back from Bangalore where he had gone for the Brothers' meeting and where he had to spend the meeting time practically sick in bed and we did not know the gravity of his case. Prayer was his solace and support in the latter part of his life as it was also earlier on.

IN MISSION CENTRES AND INSTITUTIONS

As a religious who worked in both Mission centres and religious Institutions, Brother Athanasius was privileged to spend most of his time and energy looking after boys in

schools and boardings and after young Novices. He had a special heart for the poor, rural youngsters in the missions. For example we can testify to the concern and anxiety he experienced in seeing that boys were really cared for in Dimakuchi and Doomni, the last two places of his apostolate.

THANKYOU and SORRY

Gratitude and great sensitivity to any good done to him had become second nature in Brother Athanasius. His letters are full of **THANKYOU** and other expressions of gratitude. Many of his confreres were able to do him some good turn even in the most negligible of ways have experienced the warmth with which the good Salesian continued to thank, to the point of making us embarrassed. In a word, where many things are taken for granted it is not common to find people who feel obliged to thank others for even what is presumed is their due.

Brother was as profuse in his apologies. As a man, he himself admitted, there were many times in which relationships were broken. But he would mostly be the one to take the first step in seeking reconciliation through due apologies offered. When we live in a society which values success and the ostensible, we are favoured by God with examples of humble fidelity. The life of brother Athanasius was that of a blazing star which lights up our skies in remarkable ways. His was one of firm, resolute and persistent search for holiness. As a religious he lived a dedicated life of poverty, never seeking to surround himself with comforts and possessions. He was even scrupulous in asking his superiors for some extra help. His spirit of work was proverbial and it was the practical way he lived his life of poverty to the full.

As one committed to chastity he learned "to love without limitation, to lay down his life in loving commitment to more than those who loved him." He lived, as it were, driven by a sense of unrelenting will of God. Only one strongly committed to a life of obedience could have obediently moved to some 15 houses and to wherever the apostolate required him to move.

We thank the Lord for having given us this generous confrere in the person of Brother Athanasius (Cfr Gal. 1,24) who served God and his neighbour as faithfully as he could. We commend him to God's mercy so that purified by his sufferings, he may be enabled to taste eternal joy with all those who have gone before him..

Kindly say a prayer for me and for all the young Novices who, in some way, may take the place of this valiant Salesian.

We can very well quote the words of St. Paul to the Philippians:

*I thank God every time I think of you
and when I pray for you, I pray with joy*

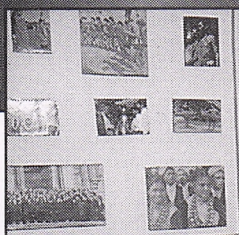
(Cfr. Phil, 1, 3-4)

God bless all those who remember him in their prayer. And may his soul Rest in Peace.

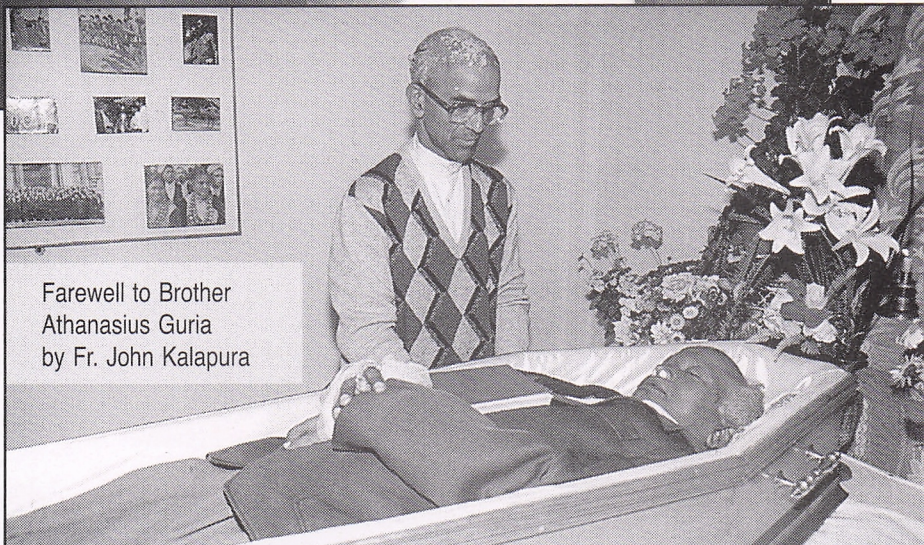
Sunnyside, Shillong 793 008
26.06. 2000

Fr. John Kalapura
Rector

For the Necrology : Born on 30.01.1936
 : Professed on 24.05.1958
 : Died on 26.06.1999



Farewell to Brother
Athanasius Guria
by Fr. John Kalapura



Fr. Lazarus Guria
and Sr. Celestina Toppo, MSMHC,
his nephew and niece



A group of confreres
around his mortal remains



At his concelebrated funeral Mass
presided over by Fr. D. Jala,
the then Salésian Provincial Superior



The Novices and Fr. John at his grave say:
May he Rest in peace