

R I P



Rev. Bro.

HAW BARNABAS

S.D.B.

Died on 3rd November 1988

"Father Thomas, please come down at once. Bro. Barnabas is not well."

It was Francis Areng, the school clerk who interrupted my class for catechists who had come from the various villages. It was Friday, 3rd November, 1988. The catechists had come for the First Friday devotions and monthly recollection.

Since Bro. Barnabas, a heart patient, used to have some problems every now and then, I suggested that Fr. V.U. John be called. He used to attend to Brother and would know what to do.

But there was urgency in the clerk's face, *"No. You must come at once!"* I left the class at once and came down from the hall in haste and followed the clerk to Bro. Barnabas' school office. He had suffered a massive heart attack and apparently had not much time more. I gave him absolution and anointed him with the oil of the sick. We rushed him to the nearby hospital in our mission Ambulance only to hear from the doctor, upon arrival there, that Bro. Barnabas was no more. It was 5.00 p.m. just a day after All Souls' Day.

We placed the body of Brother Barnabas in the Parish Church where a requiem Mass was celebrated that evening itself. Besides the three priests of the Damra Mission, other priests and sisters from the nearby missions, the village catechists, nearby Christians, and boarding boys and girls participated in the Mass. The catechists, some Don Bosco teachers and a few boarding boys and girls kept an all night vigil in the church at Brother's mortal remains.

On the 4th a solemn Eucharistic sacrifice was offered in the church which was packed with Brother's friends and acquaintance. Many priests from the nearby missions and Salesian communities joined the solemn concelebration.

After Holy Mass Brother's body was placed in front of the church on an ornately prepared dais for the beloved teachers and pupils of Don Bosco Damra to see him for the last time, before being taken to Shillong for the funeral. A prayer service was held. The friends of Brother who could not accompany him to Shillong gave funeral orations in various languages. Hindu and Muslim Scriptures besides the Bible were read and prayers offered for Brother. Many were seen crying. We had to cut short the service and in spite of some protests from the local people and Don Bosco teachers, we had to take Brother

to Shillong, according to the order of Fr. Provincial to lay him to rest with the other deceased confreres.

The body was taken to Sacred Heart College Mawlai where a funeral Mass was celebrated for Brother. Students of Theology participated in the Mass. On Saturday, 5th morning after the Eucharistic celebration, Brother's mortal remains were taken from Sacred Heart College to the Cathedral Cemetery where very many priests concelebrated the Eucharistic Sacrifice, presided over by Rev. Fr. Provincial. Many Sisters and Brothers and pupils of the Catholic institutions of Shillong had come to bid farewell to Bro. Barnabas. He was laid to rest forever on the late afternoon of 5th, November 1988, the centenary year of Don Bosco's Death.

Barnabas was born on 15th March 1928 at Hatigarh Tea Estate, about 45 km from Dibrugarh. He was the eldest son of Joseph Mura Haw and Magdali Horo.

Mura Haw was a tea garden labourer in the Hatigarh Tea Estate. He was young, enthusiastic, very cheerful and quick with his nimble fingers in picking the tender leaves of tea. He soon attracted the attention of the Lutheran Sardar who was looking for additional helpers to supervise the labourers of the growing tea industry.

Mura Haw married Magdali Horo at a grand wedding ceremony performed in the pagan place of worship according to the traditional religious rites. They were blessed with 6 children – Barnabas heading the list and Ambrose, closing the line. Agnes, Lucia, Teresa and Serephina are the sisters in the order of their age.

Little Barni not only brought joy to the new couple of Line. No. 6 of Hatigarh Tea estate when he came to see the light of day on 15th March 1928. He also brought the light of Christ to all the members of his family and to the whole line No. 6 when he entered the fold of Christ at the age of 12.

Joseph Bhengra, the Pracharak and Barni Haw, the youthful and enthusiastic youngster, were the instruments Christ used to bring the light of the Gospel to Hatigarh tea estate.

Fr. Boscardin regularly visited the village after a small community was formed. Young Barni's house was the place where father stayed and celebrated the Holy Eucharist. Two years after the small

community was established a thatched church with mud walls was built. Barni was a zealous worker in the church construction.

He had started attending the village school at the age of ten. He was clever in class, smart at games and a leader in the village. Barni was a hero who led his peers in football matches and hockey games and at various village festivals.

When Fr. Boscardin took Barni to Dibrugarh to continue his M.E. school studies at the suggestion of Pracharak Joseph Bhengra, his companions were disappointed, attests Vincent Horo the present Pracharak who was a classmate of Bro. Barnabas. They thought that they were losing their hero. Who would lead them to victories at interschool matches? Who would enliven their village festivals? Little did they dream that the young Barnabas was blazing a trail for them to follow. He was like a beacon for a host of Adibasi youth to follow the call to work in the Lord's vineyard. Several youngsters, both boys and girls followed the example of Bro. Barnabas to priestly and religious life. Many succeeded in following Brother. Many more who did not follow the same calling as Brother, left the village and went for higher studies and now occupy leading places as good citizens and exemplary Christians. It was Bro. Barnabas who gave them the example and encouraged them.

The young ones left in the village would be longing for Barnabas to come back to them during his holidays. They would flock to him to learn their catechism, new hymns and songs, dramas and playlets, to have a try at his guitar and harmonium. His holidays brought fresh enthusiasm in the liturgical functions and the prayer meeting of the village. The catholic community increased in number and fervour. Drinking was practically stopped and the youngsters looked up to life with greater seriousness.

Fr. Boscardin exerted a special influence on Barnabas. After finishing his upper primary education at Dibrugarh, he was sent to Shillong for his secondary education and Aspirantate. He later went to Our Lady's House, Sonada where he finished his matriculation in 1948. In 1949 he entered the Novitiate at Kotagiri.

He made his first commitment to God in the presence of Rev. Fr. Cogliandro on the Feast of Mary Help of Christians, May 24, 1950 at Kotagiri.

After 3 years he renewed his commitment for another three years and made his final commitment at Sonada in May 1956. He was faithful to his commitment to God for 32 years, until the Lord called him to himself to give him the reward of a good and faithful servant, a loyal son of Don Bosco in the Salesian Society.

As a Salesian, Brother Barnabas served the people at various Don Bosco Schools. He was first at Golaghat for 3 years (1951 - 1953). While there he worked as teacher and assistant to a few village lads who were staying as boarders in the mission. His next appointment was to Dibrugarh where he worked for 11 years (1954 - 1965) as teacher and football coach. At Don Bosco Guwahati he remained for 10 (1966 - 1976) years. He collected school fees and was in charge of some classes in the M.E. section.

His last 12 years were spent at Damra where he worked as Head Master of the M.E. section. Since he knew Assamese well, he was asked to teach Assamese to some Rabha and Garo boys who had taken up the subject as second language for the examinations. His fluency in English, Hindi and Assamese helped him to communicate the message of salvation to the youth of the various tribals and groups in the Damra Mission. He could manage with some Garo to move around with those Garos who did not know English, Hindi or Assamese.

As a boy, Bro. Barnabas' personality and natural leadership qualities made him an extraordinary influential person in his native village. It was his youthful enthusiasm and keen interest in knowing Jesus that first lit the light of the Good News of Jesus Christ in Hatigarh tea estate, now known as Baligan Tea Estate, when he with his father and mother and his younger sisters and a few of his companions and neighbours were baptised by Fr. Boscardin, a loving missionary stationed at Dibrugarh.

In those days children were not much interested in studies. Girls were not even sent to school. Little Barni, however, started going to the Tea garden school at the age of 10 and he proved himself a clever lad.

Brother brought joy to his peers. He was talented in music, dramatics, sports and games. His piety and self-sacrifice influenced other

youngsters to serve the Lord as dedicated persons. Fr. Benjamin Toppo recalls the support Bro. Barni gave him with his encouragement and his good example to follow the Lord in the Congregation.

It was while at Dibrugarh that he realised he would not be able to carry on his ministry in the school with boys unless he got himself properly qualified. His superiors allowed him to do his Pre University examinations in 1968. He subsequently completed also the B.A. examinations successfully. As a boy, Barnabas was the soul of every game, whether in the village or in the school and later in the aspirantate. As a young Salesian in Dibrugarh, he was the expert football coach of the school team. With him there, the school team won many inter - school tournaments and reached the inter - school matches in Guwahati. He was happiest when he was with the boys at their games. Even though he was ailing and approaching his sixties, he never missed being with the boys at their games and other activities. Even on the last day of his life on earth, just a few minutes before the massive heart attack, he was with some boys to whom he had given away few sweets that he had with him. A proficient musician from his boyhood days, Bro. Barnabas longed to know more about the musical tradition of India. In 1959 we find him already doing the third year of the Correspondence Course in Hindustani Music. His Rector Fr. Dal Zovo, had prompted him to undertake this course of studies. He was convinced that, though in the province, at that time, people did not appreciate Indian music, his qualification would eventually add to the cultural contribution of the congregation in the region. He was not mistaken. He is remembered at Guwahati parish for the meticulous care he took to provide good liturgical music whether it was in English or in Hindi.

Brother was very punctual always. He liked and enjoyed doing things to perfection. He was most orderly. Whether it be music, drama, studies, sports and games or extracurricular activities or even buildings and furnishings he saw to it that things were in place. In everything, even during his last years, when sickness weakened him, he carried out his duties with tenacity and exemplary courage, recalls Bro. Ignatius Sunmur, one of his close companions.

We can portray the person that Brother Barnabas was, in the words of Bro. Ignatius, "*Bro. Barnabas was a hard working religious and a good confrere to live and work with. He was a man of strong will and*

firm determination. Whatever he undertook to do, he did with thoroughness and precision. He was a self-made man. He had practically no formal education. He left school after completing only class VIII. Yet he strove hard to improve himself. He sat for his matric examinations as a private candidate and came out successful. In like manner he wrote his PU and BA exams as a private candidate and came out with flying colours."

The loving, solemn and slow moving figure among the youth, among the pupils, along the school premises and the playground will not be forgotten for very many years. One of the most cherished dreams of Brother was to see the Youth Centre materialised in Damra. It remained a dream when he left the place. Thanks to Fr. Paul Panachickal, it has come to existence after 3 years.

Thank you dear Brother for the love you have shared with us, and with the people wherever you worked. Thank you for your patience, your good example and prayers; for leading youngsters to follow Jesus. May the Lord Jesus and His Blessed Mother share with you their glory and joy in our Father's Home in Heaven. Adieu Brother, Adieu, from your brothers and confreres of Damra community.

Fr. Thomas Kochupurackal, SDB.

Necrology

<i>Born</i>	: 15 . 03 . 1928
<i>Professed</i>	: 24 . 05 . 1950
<i>Died</i>	: 03 . 11 . 1988

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