



FUNERAL ORATION OF FR. PROVINCIAL

Salesian Province of St. Joseph, Hyderabad



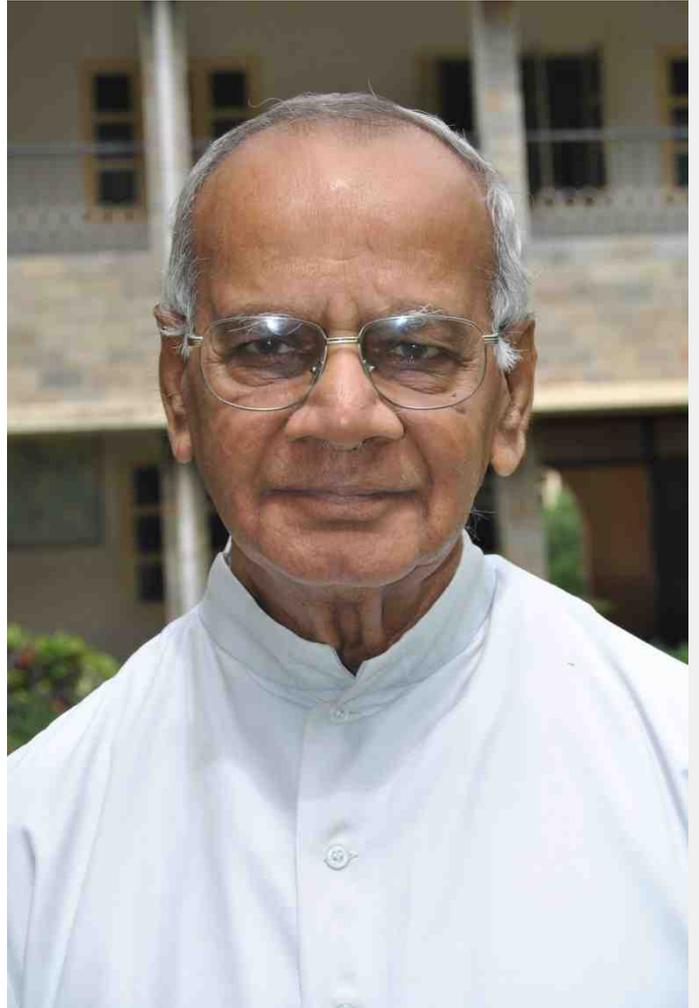
April 2020

Fr Yeddanapalli Anthony Selvaraj SDB (1933-2020)

A humble stalwart who lived and nurtured the Salesian Charism till his last breath!

Dear Confreres,

Greetings of peace and joy of the Risen Lord! Though very unique, I hope you have had a meaningful celebration of the Holy Week and Easter. In the short span of a month, we have lost two of our dear confreres. Fr Yeddanapalli Anthony Selvaraj passed on to eternal life on 9 April 2020 at 9.30 pm at Don Bosco Mothinagar. Due to the special circumstances created by Covid-19 pandemic, we could not have the funeral mass but only the funeral service and burial on 11 April. The funeral service that was held at St Theresa's Parish was attended by about 30 persons that included mostly Salesians, other priests, sisters, brothers and well-wishers and conducted with due permissions from the concerned authorities. The service began at 2.00 pm. It was live streamed and many confreres including myself participated online. I could not be present for the funeral service as my quarantine period was not yet over and I was advised to stay back in the Provincial House. The burial service was conducted around 4.00 pm at Sacred Heart Novitiate, Manoharabad. I thank the Rector and the confreres of Don Bosco Mothinagar community for taking care of Fr Selvaraj for the past six years. They had been extremely kind and generous in looking after our dear confrere. I also express my gratitude to St Theresa's and the Novitiate communities, Fr Thomas Santiago, Fr Androth Jose and Fr Rajesh Salagala for making necessary arrangements for the funeral service and burial. While Don Bosco Mothinagar community will be offering 30 masses for the repose of his soul, I request all the other communities of the Province to offer a mass each for the repose of the soul of Fr Y. Selvaraj. A month has passed by since the death of our dear Br Dennis. The Provincial House community has completed offering 30 masses for his soul. I am quite sure that all the communities have celebrated a mass each for the repose of the soul of Br Dennis. May our dear confreres intercede for our Province. Here I share with you the Eulogy read at the funeral service of Fr Yeddanapalli Anthony Selvaraj.



Eulogy of Fr Yeddanapalli Anthony Selvaraj SDB

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live..." (Jn 11: 25)

We are deeply saddened at the loss of Fr Yeddanapalli Anthony Selvaraj, the oldest confrere of the Province and the longest to serve in the territory of the Province (1966-2020). Fr Selvaraj died on 9th April at 9.30 pm at Don Bosco Mothinagar surrounded by the confreres of the community. I offer my condolences to Mr Lawrence, his nephew, Sr Shally and all the family members of Fr Selvaraj and to all the Salesian confreres, to Fr Y.M. Joseph who is present here, to all the priests, brothers, sisters and friends who have known him and who were part of his life. I wanted to pay a visit to him on Easter Tuesday when my quarantine period would have been over. Sadly that is not to be. Unfortunately, I am not even able to attend his funeral to bid him final farewell. Fr Selvaraj was the first Salesian priest whom I had met and it was he who invited me to consider the Salesian way of life. For the past 6 years, Fr Selvaraj was part of the Salesian community of Don Bosco Mothinagar. During the last phase of his life, he spent a lot of time in prayer, solitude and contemplation. I thank Fr K.K Joseph the rector, Fr V.M George, Fr Gopu Peter, Fr T.V. Jose, Mr. Joseph and Mr Sunny for taking great care of him, being always attentive to his material, spiritual and medical needs. May God bless them abundantly for their generosity. I also would like to thank Fr Jayapaul and the confreres of St Theresa's community, JMJ sisters and the hospital community for looking after Fr Selvaraj whenever he was sick and for all the arrangements for a fitting farewell. I thank Fr Thomas Santiago, Fr Androth Jose, Fr Rajesh Salagala, Fr K.P Mathew and the Novitiate community for making necessary arrangements for his burial at Sacred Heart Novitiate, Manoharabad.

Whenever I returned to Hyderabad after my visits to communities, I used to be almost religiously faithful to paying a quick visit to Don Bosco Mothinagar community to see Fr Selvaraj and Fr Chacko Thattil. If I failed in this duty, there would be a flood of phone calls from Fr Selvaraj, the content of these calls being always the same, 'when are you coming to see me?' I am happy that I had many opportunities to visit Fr Selvaraj and to accompany him during the last years of his life. Fr Yeddanapalli Anthony Selvaraj SDB was born on 17 April 1933 as the 5th child to Yeddanapalli Arulaiah Naidu and Annamma at C. Nammiandal, a little village about 20 Kilometers from Tiruvannamalai in Tamil Nadu. He was born after four girls and his parents considered the gift of a baby boy as a divine blessing given them through the intercession of St. Anthony of Padua.

After the completion of 5th Std. at St. Joseph's Secondary School Cuddalore belonging to the Archdiocese of Pondichery, he was admitted to Don Bosco Vellore as a boarding boy at the request of his sister who was a teacher. This was the beginning of his attachment to Don Bosco. It was here that he had expressed his desire to Fr. Hugh Tuena SDB, the then Rector, to be sent to Tirupattur as an aspirant for priesthood in the Salesian Society. He was one of the 12 Aspirants sent by Fr. Tuena from Vellore at the end of May 1947. The Lord indeed blessed him with such good memory and understanding that he always stood at the top of the class. He was immensely grateful to Fr. John Med, his Rector and to Fr. Dennis Duarte and Fr. John Mallon who were Prefects of Studies. He thus completed two years of College Studies too at Sacred Heart College, Tirupattur from 1951 to 1953.

After 10 days of retreat at Kotagiri he left for Yercaud to enter into Novitiate in 1953. During the summer holidays before entering the Novitiate he was dissuaded to join a religious congregation as he was the only male child of the family. He was told that he should become a diocesan priest so that he would be in a position to take care of his family, an idea that was dismissed without any second thoughts both by his parents and by Fr Selvaraj himself. It was this selfless sacrifice

and generosity of his parents that motivated him and strengthened him in his resolve to persevere in the religious state of life.

Ill health continued to pose a great challenge to Fr Selvaraj, who was now a novice under Fr Egidius Sola SDB. He began to have a severe cold, cough and fever for a few days. He was suspected of having T.B. and was advised to get ready to leave the Novitiate. But in a few days' time he recovered his health and went on to make his first religious profession on May 24, 1954. It was at this juncture that he was revealed a secret by Fr Tuena, who was his Rector at Don Bosco Vellore. Fr Tuena referred to Selvaraj in his letter to Fr Med as the one in brackets specifying that "this boy is the youngest in the group; very good in studies; but a bit weak in health and often homesick." These brackets however proved to be the protecting brackets of Our Lady as shown by the fact that he persevered in his religious vocation while many other aspirants never returned to the Novitiate from their holidays.

He began philosophical studies at Mount Don Bosco, Kotagiri in June 1954. After a few months there severe and chronic headache returned to torment him. He was sent to CMC Hospital, Vellore for treatment. Fr. Pianazzi, the then Provincial asked him to come to Madras for further treatment. He was given 10 c.c.s of saline injections for ten days after which he returned to Kotagiri to complete his philosophical studies. He was then sent to St. Bede's High School to begin Practical Training and was shifted to Don Bosco High School, Katpadi for teaching in Tamil, taking singing classes for boarding boys, etc. The next two years of his Practical Training (1957 - 1959) saw him involved in teaching English, Maths and Catechism in the same school - about 35 classes/hours per week, not counting the daily Gregorian singing classes.

On 24 May 1959 he was allowed along with his batch mates to make Perpetual Profession at Yercaud though they had finished only 5 years of Temporary Profession. In June 1959 he started theological studies in Mawlai, Shillong. In the fourth year, an attack of Asthma made his life difficult for some time. Fr. Antonio Alessi, the Provincial of Guwahati Province on his visit to the Theologate instructed the Rector to have him examined immediately by a doctor who upon examining him diagnosed that he was suffering from Pleurisy, which had to be treated instantly with 40 injections. This timely diagnosis saved him from contracting T.B. On 1 May 1963 he was ordained priest along with 28 of his companions by Msgr. Louis Mathias, the Archbishop of Madras-Mylapore. His joy knew no bounds as he was joined by all his family members on the day of his ordination - father, mother and four elder sisters. His motto for priestly ordination was: "He must increase, but I must decrease" (Jn. 3. 30).

At Dominic Savio, Tirupattur he was appointed as Headmaster of the Upper Primary School and Prefect of Studies in the Boarding. The following year (May 1964) he was appointed as the Assistant Parish Priest of St. Francis Xavier's Church, Broadway, Madras. He was then transferred in May 1966 to St. Michael's Orphanage, Guntur as prefect and teacher of Arts and Trades. Thus began his life in Andhra Pradesh in a Technical School where he served for 14 long years continuously in various capacities as Prefect, Manager of the Carpentry, Confessor, etc. During these years he had to look after the training of 110 boys in carpentry and raise income to feed the boarding boys. God blessed him and the house with plenty of orders for various types of furniture for Tobacco Company Guest Houses, furniture for schools and colleges; doors and windows for buildings, etc.

It was Fr. P. C. Thomas, the then Provincial who sent him for a three month course in spirituality to Germany. His trip to Europe starting from April 1975 proved providential as he met a Prayer Group (Theresien group) from Switzerland. The Leader of the Group, Mrs. Liselotte Steiner invited him to visit Luzern and to address a few words to the Group explaining our work in India. This was his first contact with benefactors and friends from Switzerland, who through his constant

correspondence and encouragement, went on to help our children of the Institutions where he was placed.

In June 1977 he was appointed as the First Vocation Promoter of Salesians in Andhra Pradesh while being a member of the Parish of Brahmanakodur, which catered also to the training of 4 aspirants. The killer cyclone of November 19, 1977 brought him to St. Michael's Orphanage, Guntur where he continued his work as vocation promoter for three more years. At the same time he was appointed Director of the Regional Centre for Vocation Promotion, shifted from Hyderabad to Guntur, for the whole of Andhra Pradesh. This gave him the joy of working for vocations to Religious and Priestly life in the entire state of Andhra Pradesh. Having finished his term as vocation promoter in 1980, he was transferred to St. Antony's Industrial Institute, Kadapa as its Rector from 1980 to 1983, after which he was sent to Gunadala Aspirantate as confessor and as propaganda in-charge for the development of Andhra Region. In August 1984 he was asked to shift to Don Bosco Premnivas, Mangalagiri as Prefect of Studies. In May 1985 he returned again to Gunadala as confessor and in-charge of propaganda. He was requested to take up the work of Vocation Promotion once again. The one month vocation camp that he organized in May 1986 with the help of theology students saw 80 youngsters attending the camp and 35 of those youngsters entering the Aspirantate.

In June 1988 he was relieved of Vocation Promotion and also from the work of propaganda. He was shifted to Don Bosco, P.T. Paruru as Assistant Parish Priest, where he served whole-heartedly visiting villages and offering Holy Mass in different sub-stations of the Parish. In May 1989 he was appointed Assistant Parish Priest at St. Theresa's Church, Sanathnagar, Hyderabad. It was between 1991 and 1992 that he was able to see to the construction of a new church at Vivekananda Colony, Hyderabad. This was made into a Parish and given over to the Archdiocese in March 1992.

As soon as the New Province of St. Joseph, Hyderabad was erected on 24 April 1992, Fr. Benjamin Puthota requested him to be the Province Secretary and also to set up Propaganda Office for the budding Province, while continuing to be the Rector and Parish Priest of St. Theresa's Church, Sanathnagar. In the following year (1993) he was relieved of the parish responsibility. In the year 1994, after visiting benefactors in Switzerland and Italy, he shifted to the New Provincial House Residence. During the 6 years of his stay in the Provincial House, together with the work of the Province Secretary, he was happy to render pastoral services to the neighboring parishes and institutes. For two years he was privileged to visit the sick in Vijaymarie Hospital, Khairatabad, for two hours every Saturday from 3.00 P.M. to 5.00 P.M. He had the additional duty of being the Confessor of the Novitiate Community at Manoharabad visiting them once a fortnight.

In April 1998, Fr. Medabalimi Balaswamy the new Provincial of the Province, requested him to continue as Province Secretary and in-charge of Propaganda Office, a work which he meticulously carried out till August 2000. From May 24, 2001 he was the confessor of the Aspirantate and Pre-novitiate at Gunadala. The Province celebrated the Golden Jubilee of the Religious Profession of Fr Y Selvaraj on 03 June 2004 at Don Bosco Shrine, Bandalguda, Hyderabad. With the Permission of the Provincial and his Council, he also served as Chaplain of the Cloistered Carmel Sisters while fulfilling the role of confessor for the Aspirants of Don Bosco, Gunadala. From the year 2009 he worked for brief periods at Don Bosco Mission, Patsala Tadiparru; at Don Bosco High School, Guntupalli where he was asked to take care of Aspirants from Orissa; and at Don Bosco, Nava Jeevan, Punganur. On 27 November 2012 - the day of the Golden Jubilee of his Priestly Ordination - a combined celebration for 5 Salesian Priests was organized at the Provincial House, Hyderabad. On 15 May 2013 he moved to St. Theresa's Church, Sanathnagar, Hyderabad to live a retired life. From 2015 to 2020, till he breathed his last on 9 April at 9.30 pm, he was a member of Don Bosco

School Community at Mothinagar, Hyderabad. We thank God for the wonderful example of discipleship and self-sacrifice of Fr Selvaraj. He has been a great gift to the Church, to the Congregation and to our Province in particular.

He was a man of prayer and deep faith: Fr Selvaraj was convinced about the life of prayer and remaining in God's presence all the time. He never failed to pray his breviary, rosary and to celebrate the daily Eucharist. In his old age when he was no more able, he had asked for dispensation from the obligation of praying the breviary. Life is full of surprises. It is ironic that the one who was extremely sensitive to the finer aspects of the liturgy and prayer, does not have the possibility of a well deserved solemn requiem mass under these unique circumstances of the Covid-19 pandemic. We will have a solemn Requiem Mass for Fr Selvaraj with family members, friends and confreres when the situation returns to normal.

He had unflinching love for the Congregation and the Province: Fr Selvaraj was a hundred percent Salesian. He did not have any personal plans that took away his focus as a Salesian of Don Bosco. He dedicated his total self for the Congregation and the Province. He wanted the Charism of Don Bosco to take deep roots in the Telugu states and now in Odisha as well and this was clearly manifested in his zeal for promoting and nurturing vocations to the Salesian way of life. As the first secretary of the Province, he laid a firm foundation for a well organized filing system and archives of the Province. He was very methodic and diligent at his work. He was not tired of working hard because he did everything out of love - as the Greek proverb goes - "the heart that loves is forever young" and never tired. Every time we lose a senior confrere from our midst, we become aware of the ever increasing responsibility resting on our shoulders for deepening our love for Jesus and the Salesian Congregation and then to eventually live and transmit the same to the younger generations. Fr Selvaraj has done his part of living the Salesian Charism to the full, giving himself unconditionally and with undivided attention to the Lord and to the young.

Not just recruiting, but inspiring vocations: Fr Selvaraj did not just recruit vocations, but inspired them. His personality, the passion that he had for Don Bosco and the Salesian congregation and his invitation to the boys to 'come and see' were so compelling that many boys had indeed 'come and stayed'. There are many Salesians in the Province who are the fruits of his hard labor. He maintained personal contact with young people and regularly sent Salesian material to them. He has travelled extensively in those days, when roads were bad and the means of transport were not that comfortable.

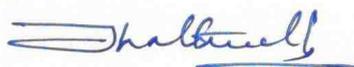
Humble stalwart who contributed to building up Salesians: Fr Selvaraj has not built many buildings during his life-time. But he has helped to build and form many Salesians. From 1975, he was actively involved in establishing the propaganda office, though interrupted at different intervals due to transfers. Through his intervention and efforts, many young Salesians were supported by means of scholarships. When the Province was formed in 1992, Fr Selvaraj was called to be the secretary of the Province and in-charge of the propaganda office. He endeavored to make the propaganda office full-fledged and it was a great source of support to the newly formed Province, which it served till the year 2000. Though the propaganda office does not exist any more in our Province, we are still reaping the fruits of what was sown by Fr Selvaraj. Benefactors through Ms Cecile Beck still continue to support the formation of some students of theology to this day.

Detached from the world to be closer to the divine: "And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life" (Mt 19:29). Fr Selvaraj has lived a life of detachment. He had no possessions. He had the strength to let go of things that did not serve

him. He always lived a simple life. Among his treasured possessions were a photo frame of his novitiate batch, his ordination batch, that of his parents, a rosary and an old CD player. He loved music and even in his old age, he was keen on teaching liturgical hymns to the novices. He soon gave up this passion owing to his failing health and physical weakness. This detachment from things and to a certain extent from persons led him to a deeper attachment to Jesus, Mary and to a life of prayer.

Conclusion

Dear Fr Selvaraj, I raise a hymn of gratitude to God for the gift of you, your long life of fidelity, commitment and prayer to which we have been witnesses all these years. We will certainly miss your silent and prayerful presence, which in itself was an element of enrichment and encouragement for all those who met you and who lived with you. Continue to pray and intercede for us before the Risen Lord and Mary Help of Christians. May your prayers bring us many more holy and committed vocations to Salesian way of life in our Province. May you enjoy the beatific vision of the Lord in the company of all the angels and saints. We bid farewell to you until we meet again in the abode of our Heavenly Father. I also would like to convey the prayerful wishes and condolences of Most Rev. Malayappan Chinnappa SDB, the Archbishop emeritus of Madras-Mylapore who fondly recalled his wonderful relationship with Fr Selvaraj, who was his assistant.



Fr Thathireddy Vijaya Bhaskar sdb
Provincial
11 April 2020

