

April 2, 2007

Death Notice No. 9 (To all Unit Administrations):



The Province of the Italy, recommends to our fraternal prayers our dear brother, **ALFONSO SANTORUM**, priest, who died in the service of the Blessed Virgin Mary on March 6, 2007 in Verbania Pallanza in the 93rd year of his age and the 74th year of his religious profession.

Our brother, Alfonso Italo Santorum, peacefully went back to his Father's home while living at Villa Chaminade in the quiet silence of the last years of his long life, a life which was marked by very intense apostolic activity and a deep Marian spirit.

He was a very well-known figure at Verbania during the 1950's for his capacity to dialog with youth of both sexes and for his innate joviality which put all at ease with him. In the decade following the Second World War, he was animator and spiritual counsellor for a lot of young people of the city, both in at school and in the parish. His spiritual direction and preaching, which were often persuasive and appealing, were at the centre of his ministry as a young priest and these would remain characteristics that were always linked to his pastoral work.

He had a serious style that, nevertheless, was married with an explosive charge of joyfulness and which sprayed charity even in unexpected situations. This enabled him to approach, to understand and to help everybody, particularly the suffering, the troubled in spirit and those otherwise afflicted.

He grew up in a Christian family atmosphere. He possessed a caring spirit and a delicacy of feeling, ever since his childhood. On January 12, 1915 he was born to his parents, Emilio and Angelina, owners of a small inn and shop at Vigne di Arco (Trento), Here his family did not skimp in their efforts in assisting the soldiers near to the front during the war. They cared for the injured, in the beginning Italian prisoners, and then later, Austrian ones.

From this precocious experience came his passion and his devotion to helping Italian refugees in Switzerland during World War II. At the time, he was in Fribourg where he was studying for priesthood at the Marianist International Seminary and was attending courses of theology at University. The restrictions coming from World War II even struck those who sought safety in that neutral country. As a precaution, most of exiles were put in holding areas where the limitations of freedom, other restrictions, and sometimes even hunger, were most evident. In a Catholic Canton the cassock was a sort of a pass. Thus, Fr. Alfonso started his weekly visits to the exiles and, little by little, by involving other Marianists from the seminary and from Villa

Saint Jean, he was able to help them. Together with “care packages”, there were always chats, card games, encouragement, and confidence-building.

In this way, Fr. Alfonso was able, with characteristic Marianist spirit, to bring all the people together, without regard to rank or distinction. There was Mario, an investigated syndicalist worker; there was Carlo, a political dissident intellectual; there was Giorgio, the soldier who choose to not betray the oath; there was Jolanda, the princess, firstborn of Savoy. He established with each of them a relationship that became friendship, and, later, deep trust when in July 1944, Alfonso Santorum was ordained a priest in the cathedral by Mons. Sieffert.

The spiritual link many of these and other people persisted over the years (until today), as was clear by the numerous weddings, baptisms, First Communions presided over by Fr. Santorum after his return to Italy when the war ended.

It was upon his return to Italy, Fr. Santorum found that an apostolate which perfectly fit his talents and characteristics, was awaiting him. His experiences as a teacher and animator, prior to his theological studies, had pointed out his communicativeness and dynamism. In community life, his sociability and the kindliness of his optimism made him popular among his brothers. The priests who had called upon his services him in their parishes for preaching and spiritual direction attested to the goodness of his catechesis.

The superiors of the Province thus entrusted him with spiritual animation and vocational ministry for the regions of North Italy. Even though he belonged to Marianist communities in Pallanza and Brusasco, his mission had to extend throughout many different dioceses, at some distance from home.

The flexibility of his character and his intelligence made him suitable to various needs of parishes. His affability won the admiration, even of those estranged from, or outside the Church. His spiritual direction was requested by many people. His presence in parishes of around Verona and those of his native Trent, soon became common, especially for important ecclesial events and for youth retreats.

To get around, Fr. Santorum used a bicycle, which gave him some independence. His good health and his physical strength allowed him to trek miles and miles every day and, if necessary, to return home again that night to his community. The use of the bicycle put him in touch with racing cyclists who were training for local competitions and national Tours. He would he ride up alongside them and, jokingly, compete with them. Thus were born his friendship and association with champions like Bartali, who came to see him at Collegio S. Maria on the occasion of his passing through Verbania during *Giro d'Italia* in 1951. There was also Gimondi, who stayed in touch even after his victory at the *Tour de France*.

His apostolic “wandering” made his encounters with sportsman of all types quite easy. His interest in sports, moreover, helped him in his contact with young people. Surpassing all of these, though, we will not forget that he was a spiritual counsellor and confessor for *Inter*, his

favorite professional soccer team, during the years of Sivori, Barison and Angelillo, and that many times, he brought the players to Pallanza for retreat.

Obviously, after the invention of motorcycles, Fr. Santorum himself switched from bicycle to “moto” as well. He first used a Belgian war surplus bike, which was the envy of all young people around him. Then, there was a Ducati and a Guzzi. Still later, he moved to car: a FIAT utility car which, since then became, together with the Rosary and the Blessed Virgin’s medal, the companion and the witness of events, adventures (foreseen and unforeseen), victories and defeats of his apostolate.

The main work of his life can surely be considered his care and enthusiasm for promoting religious and priestly vocations in the Church. But, he also focused forming families into what were really small domestic churches. How often did he preach the spiritual exercises! How many courses of vocational ministry! How many orientation weeks or personal talks! How many acts of mortification, fasting and abstinence for the intention that God would make the young people he was meeting happy by showing them their most appropriate vocations!

In effect, many of these young people witnessed that the Lord used this priest to help them choose their own state of life and to become mature, developed persons. Today many of them are priests in various Italian dioceses or religious congregations today. Most of the Italian Marianists of the last several generations heard their first call to religious life from him. Since 1950, when, the first foundations opened in Italy, almost all of the Italian Marianist sisters, directly or indirectly, matured in their vocation under his advice and his guidance.

At his passing, so many families came to Villa Chaminade to attend his funeral rites. They constantly remarked about how close they felt to Fr. Alfonso, and about his important role in helping them to grow in love and fidelity in their marriages and in raising their families.

Fr. Santorum sketched a beautiful path, as a priest and as a Marianist. Now he has passed on to us the call to be a similar witness. May he rest in peace!