

Father Flavio Fedeli

Contributed by Fr Sante Bedon, SDB
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Salesian Priest 1913-2007

Passed away at 4 a.m., at 94, 78 of profession and 69 of priesthood. Admitted to hospital since last August 13 at the Soeurs de Notre Dame des douleurs in Abou Dis, Jerusalem, the dear Brother died down little by little until the final ending, exhausted by old age, the various aches and pains and almost absolute loss of appetite. The previous evening we were close to him, as many times each week, in the rest-home, and there was no telling that he would pass away during the night. Having entrusted him to the caring assistance of the sisters and nurses, we thought of returning the next morning still to take care of him. Instead here was the sad surprise. Unable to get in touch with us by phone, the sisters informed the Inspectorate centre and Fr Inspector accordingly shared with us the sad news. Since last year, clearly, Fr Fedeli was showing signs of poor health. A brother Coadjutor of our community took special care of him. Every day he accompanied him to the Church for mass, meditation, spiritual reading, and to say Lauds and Vespers, in which Fr Fedeli always wanted to join. Very sensitive and polite in manners, he thanked, apologizing for the inconvenience. And we really viewed him as a relic of the past, of those 80 years spent in the Congregation with such unselfishness in the various commitments and as much love for young people, especially the poor ones, whom he had met along his life.

The funeral were held on Tuesday afternoon, October 23. It was attended by some twenty concelebrating priests, chaired by Fr Inspector, brothers from the Salesian Communities of Nazareth, Beit Jemal, Bethlehem, and Jerusalem-Ratisbonne, and a representation of FMA (Our Lady Help of Christians’ nuns) of the nearby Communities. Liturgical service was performed by our Salesian Clergy of Ratisbonne. The homily, delivered by Fr Inspector, stresses the essential features of Fr Fedeli ’s personality, his apostolic spirit, deep piety, strong devotion to Mary, his perseverance in fulfilling at the best his various commitments, mainly in Tehran, where he spent 35 years.

Now his venerated body, carried in procession by Theology students, is buried in the cemetery of our House of Cremisan, close to the pinewood, with other late brothers of this Community, pending the final resurrection in Christ, as faith teaches.

Fr Flavio Fedeli was born in Sementina (Switzerland, Italian Canton, diocese of Lugano), 5 June 1913 by Adele Corti (1886-1970) and Isidoro Fedeli (1884-1965), elder of two brothers. He follows his Father, gardener by profession, first in Faido, later in Melide and, meantime he attended the elementary school. The parents, deeply sensitive to Christian piety, bring up Flavio, instilling in him, as in the other son Dante, a sincere spiritual life, made of small things, affected all their later education. Flavio, among the many things, jealously stored away all life long, kept the keepsake of the First Communion, in the church of Santa Maria degli Angeli, in Lugano, on 19 March 1921. At 11 he begins the first of three years attendance, as day-pupil, at the Don Bosco boarding-school in Maroggia, opened, among difficulties, on 1905, and situated among the best localities of Southern Switzerland, on the enchanting beach of Lake Lugano. Flavio travels there by bicycle from Melide, facing all the hardships of distance, cold, heat and strain. At the time Directors of the Boarding-school were Fr Giuseppe Scianca, Fr Fabrizio Mainero and charged with discipline Fr Candido Valentini, men fit to attract vocations as much as Don Bosco. At the end of third gymnasium, on 1927, young Flavio asks to join the Salesian missionary probationship "Card.

Cagliero" in Ivrea. His father was contrary, more than anything, because, after the untimely death of Dante, hoped to get a helping hand by Flavio. The two brothers got fully along, were fond of each other, the mother was very pleased and held them up, as Cornelia, Mother of Gracchi (of ancient Rome), as her most valued jewels. While Flavio was in Ivrea, his brother Dante attended the Don Bosco boarding-school in Maroggia. He went down with fulminant pneumonia and in a day "closes his youth, as dew in April, and in a smile of light". In the family the grief is great for a death so sudden; Dante is buried in Agra. The whole family is anguished and the heart of Flavio, who was fond of his brother is smitten by grief (1929). The mother, a woman of unshakeable faith, nonetheless allows Flavio to pursue his way, and writes, sending him her photo:“Wherever you go remember your mother, who loves you with deep affection and fervently prays God for you to reach the way to Perfection and Holiness". Instead dad asks the son Flavio to come back to the family, but, now too, his mother moves in, reminding that one must not take back his son once bestowed on God. After a year of studies in Ivrea, well trained for missionary life, after clerical clothing, he was committed by his Superiors to Palestine. Till his last days of life he will keep the Crucifix received on that occasion, and on his deathbed too, as on all other days, he wants it, with the Rosary beads, under the pillow, as "fellow passenger" to the last destination. Since these years, just from 1927, an extensive correspondence is interwoven between Flavio and his aunt Gina, sister of his mother. A correspondence lasting until 1940 and of which he keeps 81 long letters, imbued with affection and rich spirituality. Aunt Gina, an Elementary school Teacher of old, brought up in the sound pedagogy and the sense of professional duty, through advices, encouragements, possible explanations, is present in the life of his nephew Flavio, with tact, knowing when to stop, extreme delicacy, respect. No compelling as regards the vocation of his nephew. Some examples: God

called you on a holy life... so, be cheerful... heartily comply with your superiors. .. pray for your brother [the letter is of 1927, before Dante's death], for him to grow up nice, and pray for your grandparents too, Joseph and Mary, for them to convert". "I like your son-like complete reliance in the arms of Our Lady, who grants all gifts. Totally trust your superiors, especially Fr Ambrogio Director [Fr Ambrogio Rossi], who, as you write me, is so nice... Pray, study, play and be cheerful waiting for the day when you are going to wear the frock... [The clothing in Ivrea, 1928]. And, in the occasion of the clothing, too: "Bravo for the success of the exam results. Now get ready for the ceremony that awaits you... I am delighted for your destination to Palestine... with the uniform of the Apostle ". "May Mary Help of Christians, whom you are so devoted of, be always for you a caring and loving Mother... Happy voyage. Besides, your aim at a holy life, made myself utterly happy! "Flavio reaches Cremisan for the novitiate year, which begins on 7 November 1928 to end it, the same date, on 1929.

His aunt follows him with these words: "Your departure has left shock and distress, but mind that for me and your mother your choice has been the best". Later (1931) She briefs him on health and conversion of grandmother Mary, who at last "performed Easter time" i.e., "confessed her sins and received the Holy Communion". As to grandfather Joseph we must wait until 1934, when he decided to receive the sacraments (after 40 years!): a true grace, to get which Flavio too had prayed, on the eve of his perpetual vows, while the aunt wishes him: "Be the day of perpetual vows, for you, the most solemn day of your life" (1934). After novitiate year Flavio remains in Cremisan for Philosophical Studies (1929-31). Aunt Gina follows him with love and expresses her satisfaction at what he's doing. "I hear the superiors are very satisfied with you for your good behaviour... I pray the good Lord to make a holy man of you "(1930). Brother Flavio is already thinking about his training period, set by obedience for the Salesian school in Haifa, and his aunt writes: "I gladly will help You... your superiors are not leaving you without leadership in your new task [as Elementary teacher] may they find in you a submissive soul, ready, delighted to serve God without reserve "(1931). "I urge you to treasure time which is short-lived... to increase your precious virtues" (1931). "A holy priest attracts countless souls, converts the most hardened souls too". And the mother adds: "Remember Me to Jesus and to our Father Don Bosco" (1932).

From the letters of his aunt it came to our knowledge, as a consequence, a further detail about the spirituality of Br Flavio. "From what you let me know - his aunt writes – it always comes through the sweet serenity of mind that convinces me you are on the right lines" (1932). During the three years he spent in Haifa teaching in elementary school, he livened up games, organized tournaments and summer camps: the photos show him surrounded by hundreds of young people, in uniform or less, with pennants fluttering to the breeze and showing all the enthusiasm and life of their young years. The Br Flavio shares, participates, livens, in line with the teachings received. The aunt writes him: "study to pursue to perfection the Salesian system, regardless of, as you say, the hardships required " (1933). The Director of Haifa, Fr Pietro Bolognani urges him to treasure the lessons and advices of his aunt, saying that in them is a rich sense of ascetic doctrine. After the three years of training in Haifa, Br Fedeli is back in Bethlehem for theological studies. Still four years of intense effort of preparation for the great day of priestly ordination. "You are so lucky - his aunt writes - since complying with your superiors you are sure not to make mistakes" (1935). And his superiors are Fr Natale Del Mistro and Fr Oreste Forastelli, two excellent educators of characters, rich in experience and priestly virtues. The Br Fedeli makes the most of their teachings with docility, fully accepting them and becoming increasingly a zealous Pastor of souls. In the course of theological studies he is also mind and heart of Salesian Oratory of Bethlehem, he smartly avails himself of the experience gained in Haifa and develops its range of action. Here too among hundreds of young people, the courtyard echoes of music, songs, voices... In church, in the Church of the Sacred Heart, prayers, songs, invocations... Br Fedeli is the soul of the whole, with his smile appealing and good, its discreet and humble guide, careful and precise, encourages, draws and moves... Bethlehem's young people, the poorest, listen and back him, follow, pray with great devotion... The Oratory is house, church, school and courtyard, as Don Bosco wanted, even for Br Fedeli, who knows and does his best to show it.

Four years go by quickly and the longed for, eagerly waited for, date arrives. The aunt is heard of sometimes. "Walk, walk without stopping to the radiant goal now so close... trying not to deny anything to Jesus" (1936). "Here is, dear Flavio, your last year (Subdiaconate). Let it be the most fruitful, the most generous and rich in love and sacrifices ". "Barely few months separate us from seeing you go up the altar, consecrated priest of the Lord". And the grandparents: "We hope to see you soon and hear the good advices of yours" (1937). And in 1938 too: "and I (always his aunt) pray that your first mass be the prelude to an endless series of Holy Masses celebrated with the same faith and burning love". On April 24, 1938, at the hands of S. E. Mgr Fellingner, Auxiliary of the Patriarch of Jerusalem, Don Flavio Fedeli is ordained priest with three other Salesians: Fr Costanzo Girauda Antonio Farrugia and Fr Antonio Lunardi. After the feastings in Bethlehem, Fr Flavio goes to his homeland in Misinto (Milan) to enjoy with the relatives and fellow-citizens, who know him and admire his good heart, the goal he has reached. Among his parents, grateful to God, the aunt and grandparents. The blessing of the Holy Father Pius XI addressed to the Reverend Vicar Monti, arrives to Misinto from the Vatican City, on 10-05-1938: "His Holiness grants newly priest Fedeli propitiatory, beseeched Apostolic Blessing. Signed: Monsignor Confalonieri ". The aunt in one of the latest letters writes: "Flavio dear I am happy to have seen you and have found in you the priest I, time and again, asked the Lord". And the grandparents: "Wishing you to carry on being nice and good as formerly... with your beautiful good nature" (1938). In her last letter, the 81 of the collection, on 1938 aunt Gina seems to take leave of Fr Flavio, still entrusting him with an exhortation, just about a testament: "Flavio, up with your heart: See, and if you cannot see, believe... Be generous ". Once a priest, Don Flavio begins his pastoral mission in Jerusalem as teacher, charged with order and discipline at school and the library. He stays there for two years. It goes

without saying that he does his best, as shown elsewhere, to get welcomed, not only, but to create around himself and Don Bosco that sympathy which charms and makes the disciple more submissive and compliant. That is to achieve that Salesian method of preventive system which often gets authentic conversions and absolute educational effectiveness in approaching young people. In Jerusalem Fr Flavio shows every detail of his nature: meek, clever, humble and nice. His sweet gaze breaks through the heart, appeals, prompts, it forces smiling and brings forth friendship, participation and sharing of ideals.

On 1940, at the outbreaking of war, he is confined, with all the Italian Salesians of Palestine, in the House of Bethlehem, which had become a concentration camp, "field X". He had worked there as a theology-student in full freedom, now he works there with other brothers, with the young people of the Oratory and the school, staged rough and ready, under British command. Who, according to Fr Fedeli, too good, used the prisoners well and let them out for occasional trips in the outskirts of Bethlehem, clearly well escorted. "An experience about which Fr Flavio does not willingly talk, but certainly has fixed, in his life and in that of all the interned Salesians, a gloomy shadow. In 1943 he is allowed to go to Cremona. And this relieves him. Young, zealous, rich in spirit, he applies himself to the apostolate as catechist - spiritual father of young people." Clouds disperse and the sun shines again, two years later in 1945, when obedience committed him to a new job, in Tehran, the capital of Persia, as was called then, the capital of Iran, as we call it today.

There is a parish, the parish of "Immacolata", a school, attended by many young people, Christians and not. He begins as charged with school discipline (1948), and was appointed Director from 1948 to 1957. From 1957 to 1969 is treasurer, responsible of the alumni and library and in the meantime he learns the Farsi. He is Director again from 1969 to 1972, then vicar and again Treasurer from 1972 to 1980, the year of his expulsion from Iran. 35 years of Salesian activities in Tehran. "A life!" He was deviser, maker, leader in the development of "Don Bosco College" Andisheh ("wisdom"), leading the school to the extraordinary figure of 1500 students, the best School of Tehran, the most sought-after, by Highest circles of the business and military managerial class. Only because of the Khomeini Revolution, after a few days of forced internment at home, together with other brothers "For reasons groundless and absurd, Fr Fedeli leaves his second home, expelled in 1980. A brother reports: In the last two months under house arrest Fr Fedeli, like the other brothers, was calm. His only regret was that on the night between July 1 and 2, among other things, they had taken away from his room, all the letters received and kept for decades (including the ones of aunt Gina) and because the background in which he had lived for 35 years was suddenly so unsafe and ruled by arrogant and unscrupulous people who justified the worst horrors through religious reasons. I remember him as in the best years, timely, methodical, as administrator always set on fulfilling his duties with conscientious compliance. Every Sunday afternoon he went to the parish "La Consolata" to perform Holy Mass in English for an international community, mainly consisting of Filipinos, Indians and Iranian Christians. Discreet, never in an annoyed mood, he dealt with brothers, pupils and relatives with the extreme correctness, not averse to joke and gag, especially at table with the brothers. He was updated with the daily reading of newspapers and magazines and was of the most scrupulous punctuality in liturgical celebrations, compliant with rubrics and the new liturgical system decreed by Vatican II. The Alumni from about 40 years ago, without being requested, have of their own free will given him this witness: "We, former students of "Don Bosco College" of Tehran (Andisheh) remember Fr Fedeli as a particularly dear figure. He showed himself the person most capable of spreading peace, the most kind and good over the 12 years the majority of us spent at Don Bosco College.

A man whose presence gave you a sense of calm and peace and that confidence a young man feels in parents' company. Fr Fedeli devoted his whole life to the upbringing of the young, providing us with values that still today are difficult to find. He has left in us an extraordinary imprint as regards the formation of our character. He is part of ourselves. May he rest in peace and his soul be rich in joy! Fr Fedeli leaves, forever, Iran on 1980. On his return to Italy, he is granted audience, along with the other brothers, by the Pope, H. H. John Paul II, who listens to them with attention, as you can see from the perfunctory pictures, and he stays on talking friendly with these witnesses of faith. Fr Fedeli too manages to report to the Pope some details about the grounds of drastic measures taken by Iranian authorities towards our brothers and the nationalized school.

The audience ends with the Apostolic Blessing. He then goes to his home-country and in Switzerland, where he can still meet aunt Gina, now exhausted by age (she will pass away on 1984, over ninety), relatives, friends and acquaintances and feel the family atmosphere, in the quiet and peace. On his return to the Holy Land, his Superiors send him to Cremona. Where He shall stay for 26 years, from 1981 until his death on 2007. Accepted by superiors of the theological Studenthood and by the brothers, students and coadjutors, he "girded up his loins" with extemporary simplicity and humble manners, valued and loved by all. He assists the treasurer and, gardener's knife on hand, goes round all over the pinewood, clears, prunes ... and breathes healthy air. Always steadfast in performing the acts of piety, affable with all, discreet, helpful in what he can: he is of great example to young students who see him as a model of Salesian ascetic life. Many choose him as spiritual father, they accept, mainly in confession, his calm and persuasive word since supported by a witness of life, clear, successful. A proof of this are, among others, the so many condolences which arrived on his death. "In him I saw the man of God who speaks with simplicity of the truth, without hurting, and he's able to convey serenity and harmony, the man who gets along, even now, from heaven he unites the community" grateful to Fr Flavio for the assistance given to the Community of Cremona with the serenity, the work and the witness of Salesian life." "In his simplicity he has always been, for us too, then as theology student, an example of self-denial true

to his consecration, not by name only, but in fact". "At the news of his death I wept. He had been my confessor and was a “holy” man. "I remember his love for the work (each morning in the woods!), his kindness in greeting brothers in the morning, at breakfast, (each student on his own language), let alone his silent and active life". "My suffrages from my heart for Fr Flavio, Salesian model according to Don Bosco’s teachings”. "Fr Flavio was undoubtedly an example of simplicity, of altruism and faith in God". "Fr Flavio: a nice person, calm and warm-hearted". "Let us thank the Lord for the good life spent for Jesus by Fr Flavio”. "I still have an unforgettable memory of him as a brother humble and faithful... a real example for all students of Cremisan". "Many brothers knew and remember him". "May the Lord grant him peace and joy of heaven". In Cremisan, surrounded by brother-students in feast, Fr Flavio celebrated the 50° of priestly ordination (1988), the 60° (1989) and the 70° (1999) of religious profession and the 90° year of age (2002). Fr Fedeli is around in the Community, noiseless, quiet and unassuming, but everybody “senses him” ; reveres, values, feasts him, while bit by bit he is drawing near the evening of his life. Standing, not disheartened under the weight of despondency and loneliness, but vital and stocky, as long as he is able. He cherishes his house of Cremisan. The saddest of all the months, was the one in which we were forced to lead him to the rest home of Abu Dis, Jerusalem, for the suited medical treatment. He was always asking: "When can I go home?" and his concern moved bystanders to tears. Now he is no longer with us. His figure of man of God, obedient, humble and good stands on the horizon of this Holy Land, "holy" for his nice character and the life worthy of being remembered and followed. Be his memory blessed for ever! At the end of this modest commemoration, I thank, on behalf of the Salesian community of Cremisan, how many have been close to us with encouragement and prayers, the doctors who have treated with such patient prodigality our sick Fr Flavio, the Soeurs de Notre Dame des douleurs of Abu Dis, Jerusalem, who have looked after with kindness and particular carefulness and the relatives who have been present with love and grateful affection. In the cemetery of Maroggia (Switzerland) the following epigraphy is read : Of the dead we must speak only well. We are born in tears we wear tearful years In tears is over Our last day.

We have endeavoured to speak well of our dear Fr Flavio, it was the least we could do, given his wonderful figure of Salesian and priest; we understand and experience that tears are only a sad reality of life, but, as Fr Flavio, in faith we see Christ risen and we expect the same luck for each of us. We hope for us such a blessed lot and, meantime, let us pray God to send someone to substitute us and continue to spread his kingdom in the world. With deep esteem and sincere fraternal affection

Fr Sante Bedon, SDB - Director

for the Salesian community of Cremisan

- " Faculty Biography - The information on the fathers was requested and received by Robert Dabaghian from Salesian archives in Rome, Mr. Stefano Muro kindly undertook the task of translation from Italian to English. "