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In memoriam

Xaverian biographical profiles



Br. Mario Passuello

24 September 1942 ~ 10 August 2016

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Barbarano Vicentino (VI – Italy)
24 September 1942

Parma (Italy)
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Brother Mario Passuello was born in Barbarano Vicentino – in the province of Vicenza, on 24 September 1942, in a family of farmers, the seventh of eight children born to Alberto Passuello and Maria Zanini. He was baptized on 4 October 1942, in the parish of S. Maria Assunta.

MISSIONARY VOCATION

Mario's family lived a moderate and virtuous life, which taught him, in a direct and profound manner, the meaning-value of honesty, industriousness, abnegation and seriousness in the search for what is good. His parish priest, Fr. Gianbattista Donato, said «Mario Passuello has an excellent temperament».

At the end of elementary school, the thirteen-year old Mario began to feel the first echoes of a choice that would determine the direction of his entire life. He decided to dedicate himself to the religious and missionary life, taking example from his maternal uncle, Br. Giuseppe Zanini (1905–1983), who was a Xaverian missionary in China (1934–1953) and Indonesia (1955–1975). He thus decided to become a Xaverian.

His parents approved of his dream for the apostolate: to make people understand the vital importance of encountering the Lord and give Him the first place in their lives.

He joined the Xaverian Institute on 5 October 1955, attending junior high school in our Vicenza seminary (1955–58), and senior high school in Zelarino, in the province of Venice (1958–60).

His formal entry into the Xaverian Institute took place on 2 October 1960, when he was eighteen years old, when he began novitiate in San Pietro in Vincoli (Ravenna). During this year of preparation to religious life, candidates are asked «to become aware of their vocation in relation to the charism of the Institute, to experience its lifestyle and form their mind and heart according to its spirit ».

He made his First Profession on 3 October 1961 and was ready to begin the course of basic studies: Lyceum (1961–64) in Desio and Tavernerio and the Introductory year (1964–65) in Parma.

The common and constant thread that linked the initial phases of his human and religious growth are revealed by his formators in their reports on his progress:

[Passuello Mario] excels in everything. However, he needs to be watched in order to ensure that he doesn't do too much. His seriousness of character and kindness of heart are admirable (*Fr. Giuseppe Scremin*, high school rector).

Regarding his novitiate year, we can say that he applied himself to meditation, that he attended Holy Mass with good fruits and was faithful to his preparation to communion and thanksgiving afterwards; he transformed study and work into prayer.

He is good company and speaks a lot; he plays well, but without showing an excessive attachment to it. His health is good and he is strong (*Fr. Giovanni Gazza*, novice master).

Passuello Mario enjoys excellent health. He has a passable degree of intelligence and a good academic performance, which is the result of a very serious application to study.

He is meticulous and dedicated in all areas: piety, charity, discipline, study, work and organization. He is very serene and excellent company, open and sincere with all.

He is very reliable in the organization of the community life and every kind of service. He makes a lot of noise with his booming voice and is somewhat severe in his judgments (*Fr. Virginio Pugnoli*, Lyceum rector).

ILLNESS

At the end of the Introductory year, Mario Passuello was ready to move on to the more specific four-year theology studies, but he suffered a serious breakdown that prevented him from continuing his studies for the priesthood.

This serious health problem was an impediment “to the necessary concentration for study and the acceptance of great responsibilities, such as those connected with the priestly ministry”.

His doctors and Superiors advised him to abandon his theology studies. In spite of the great distress this caused him, his reaction was restrained and trusting at the same time. In the first place, he entrusted himself to the merciful Lord and asked Him to take pity on him: «O Lord, hear my prayer, / let my cry for help reach you, / do not turn your face away from me» (*Ps* 102:2-3). In the second place, he presented a new life project to the Superiors, always from a religious and missionary perspective. In connection with this, on 5 October 1966, he wrote to the Superior General, Bishop Giovanni Gazza, who was formerly the bishop of Abaetetuba, Pará, Brazil:

I present my case to you in the hope that you will give it your approval.

This year I have been ill and, after a long series of specific medical tests, I have been told I have a grave impediment to the priestly vocation. Both the doctors and my superiors have advised me not to continue with my studies and I agree with them.

Nevertheless, since I wish to pursue the religious-missionary vocation, after much reflection, I ask to be allowed to continue as a religious Brother in view of a future missionary assignment.

The Superior General, “with the unanimous consent of his Council”, accepted his request, in the belief that he would succeed in becoming a good religious Brother and thus be “a valid help in our Missions”.

In September 1967 he was assigned to the formation community for Brothers in Piacenza, where he attended a three-year theology course for lay people and a course for car mechanics (1967–70).

In the meantime, Fr. Luigi Vitella, the rector of the Piacenza house, was asked by the General Direction to express an overall judgment on Mario for the renewal of his temporary vows. He wrote:

[Passuello Mario] is equipped with a good intelligence and a good memory. His state of health has a great influence on his mood and behavior, causing periods of euphoria and loquaciousness and periods of silence. In spite of this, he has maintained a constant and sociable behavior.

A characteristic feature of his personality is that he seems to become tense and anxious when he is entrusted with responsibility, especially over the confreres or the students of the house, such as the task of prefect.

He is respectful and very well-mannered towards others and willing to help them.

He carefully cultivates his life of piety, the liturgy and pastoral contacts.

At the end of his third year in Piacenza as a Brother, Mario wrote to the Superior General: «I feel more and more enthusiastic about my vocation, which I am discovering more each day in my personal encounter with Christ [...]. I wish to ask you a question: in what mission or part of the world do the Superiors intend to “throw me”, now that I have finished the training-formation as a Brother?».

His first assignment, however, was to the minor seminary in Ancona as a teacher (1970–73) and then he was put in charge of the missionary Exhibitions in Desio (1973–75). He made his Final Profession in 1973 and became a lifelong member of the Xaverian Institute.

INDONESIA

In August 1975 Brother Passuello was assigned to Indonesia, a country in the south-east of Asia. It comprises 17.000 islands and is the largest State-archipelago in the world. It is the fourth most populated country in the world and the most populated country with a Muslim majority.

Expelled from China by the communist government in 1951, eight Xaverian missionaries headed for Indonesia: a «paradise» that was inhabited also by a few million Chinese people. The Xaverians set up home in Sumatra, one of the largest islands. The field entrusted to the Xaverians extended over 133.000 square kilometers, with three and a half million inhabitants, of whom only two thousand were baptized: it was a mission territory beginning from scratch.

After a brief period of getting used to the climate, local language, the urgent needs of the mission and a committed lifestyle in harmony with his vocation, Brother Passuello was assigned to the ministry on 1 July 1976.

From 1976 until 1980 he was in Jakarta, where he was put in charge of the Procura of the Xaverian Province of Indonesia; the parish of Toasebio was attached to the Procura. From 1981 until the end of 1982 he collaborated in the pastoral ministry in Aek Nabara¹, in the diocese of Medan, a village in

¹ «The community of Aek Nabara is one of the visible signs of the Xaverian presence in Medan; from from the very beginning we wanted to have a community there that would be a community witness for the people and the entire diocese. In 1979, the Xaverians began an

the province of north Sumatra. In connection with this, he wrote to his uncle, Brother Zanini, on 24 March 1982:

Our various communities are preparing for Easter here among the Batak², who are very zealous and lively [...]. I share the pastoral activity with Fr. Giovanni Ferrari, who is always very busy, and with four sisters who work in the parish.

To tell the truth, Fr. Ferrari and I do not yet have a really good command of the Batak language, but we manage to hold meetings and this is a good sign of progress.

Among the various activities of the parish, which now has 38 missionary outstations, we must also prepare the *khotbah* (homilies) four times a month because the parish is divided into four zones. Every month the representatives of the various outstations meet and we provide a course of pastoral aggiornamento: this stimulates the various communities to make progress. Usually we speak Batak, but Indonesian is spoken in the most populated outstations, given that there are people of different backgrounds, various groups and races.

On Sundays I lead the *Ibadah Minggu* (Liturgy of the Word) in the missionary outstations, whilst on weekdays I am engaged in social activities, aggiornamento meetings and the study of Sacred Scripture in the various zones of the parish.

In the month of May, Bishop Pius Datubara will join us for the inauguration of the new hall at the center.

Previously, in September 1980, Brother Passuello had returned to Italy for a brief period of rest, aggiornamento and medical treatment because he had contracted typhoid and was showing the initial symptoms of tuberculosis.

«I WAS SICK AND YOU CAME TO VISIT ME»

With the exception of the period in the parish of Aek Nabara, of which we have already spoken, there is no other mention of a subsequent period of Brother Passuello in Indonesia. “Receiving treatment” was the term used to explain his presence in Italy from September 1983 onwards.

experiment with a single community (prayer, reflection, common planning) with the KYM sisters (a Dutch Congregation) that is committed exclusively to pastoral work, the formation of Christians and community leaders and visits to the villages [...]. Nor can we forget how the Xaverians promote the participation of the laity in the life of the parish which, among other things, numbers many missionary outstations».

² *Batak* is a collective term that identifies a certain number of ethnic groups that are located especially in the province of north Sumatra.

He was assigned to the Xaverian Region of Italy on health grounds. In connection with this, the Superior General, Fr. Francesco Marini, wrote to him:

Given that there is no possibility of you returning to Indonesia, at least for the time being, and that you have been in the Italian Region for several months now, it would be best to make your assignment to Italy official so that you can be a full member of your new community.

Therefore, I hereby inform you, on behalf of the General Direction, that you have been officially assigned to the Italian Region.

I am pleased to take advantage of this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude for the years you spent in Indonesia: *years full of hard work, extraordinary dedication, humble and fraternal service and a great spirit of sacrifice and availability.* (Editor's emphasis).

I am sure that I speak also for the confreres and the many non-Xaverians with whom you came into contact in Indonesia.

I add my sincere wishes for your complete recovery and a fruitful service to the mission in our communities of the Italian Province.

Brother Passuello spent nine years (1984–92) in the service of hospitality at the Centro Saveriano di Formazione Permanente / Tavernerio (CO) and seventeen years (1992–2009) assisting the sick confreres in the Mother House, Parma; at the same time he also worked in the laundry and prepared rooms for visiting confreres. Fr. Luigi Lo Stocco remembers his service to the sick confreres:

Whenever I saw Br. Passuello in Parma, pushing the wheelchair of an elderly confrere, I thought: “Mario has taken to heart the words of St. Guido Conforti: *Love each other like brothers, respect each other like princes.*

He carried out this service very willingly and always with a smile.

Giampiero Sartori, a volunteer in the Mother House infirmary, writes:

My testimony is a gesture of gratitude to Brother Mario, because his edifying behavior showed me how to be near to the elderly and sick Fathers.

Your Founder, St. Guido Maria Conforti, used to say: «there is a homily that everyone can and must do, even without being a priest, and it is the homily of good example».

Brother Mario was a man of simple and radiant humility, clothed with fraternal charity that expressed itself in admiration, respect and help to all the confreres, especially those in difficulty.

He had a profound love for constant and silent prayer, just as he was a silent man. He practiced the virtue of obedience by acknowledging the author-

ity of his Superiors and refusing to let pride take the upper hand. He lived evangelical poverty as detachment from earthly things, from everything superfluous and even from what was necessary. He was indifferent to rooms and clothing and was always content with what he was given.

What can I say to you, Brother Mario? You taught me many things; we worked side by side for many years; we exchanged few words: such was our character, but we gave much love and affection to many Xaverian Fathers.

In connection with his assistance to the sick, Brother Passuello took inspiration from these words of Jesus: «I was sick and you visited me [...]. In so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine [...], you did it to me» (*Mt* 25:36.40). This identification of Jesus with the sick is the key to understanding Brother Passuello's mercy towards the sick confreres. The «“action” of the heart, the “action of charity, the “action” of the mission, is not an optional extra, or just one proposal among many others; it is our human existence revealed in fullness by the Son of God made man»³.

From July 2009 onwards, as his health deteriorated, confreres and non-Xaverians took care of Brother Mario, until the sunset of 10 August 2016, when a “cardiorespiratory failure” opened to him the gates of the Heavenly Jerusalem, where «there will be no more death, and no more mourning, sadness or pain because the world of the past has gone» (*Rev* 21:4).

In spite of his physical death, the day of his departure for the Lord's house was a day of joy for Brother Mario, the day of his encounter with «the God not of the dead, but of the living, for to him everyone is alive» (*Lk* 20:38).

AN IDENTITY AND A HERITAGE TO BE TREASURED

«Blessed is the man who fears the Lord / and takes delight in his commands. / For all time to come he will not stumble: /the just man will be remembered forever» (*Ps* 112: 1.6).

If we cherish in our hearts the life witness of Br. Mario, “this good and faithful servant”, we will find strength when “the bonds of death are all around us, distress and anguish hold us in their grip” (cf. *Ps* 116:3).

Brother Mario Passuello was «the “faithful servant” who truly understood the Confortian spirit of the “religious Brother”: silent and patient, loving and, above all, a man of faith and prayer.

³ Carlo Maria Martini, *Che cosa dobbiamo fare?*, PIEMME, Casale Monferrato (AL) 1995, 176.

He did not love idle chatter or gossip; instead, he preferred to pray his rosary while he pushed the wheelchair of a confrere down to the garden, where he lovingly contemplated the image of Our Lady of Lourdes.

He had chosen to live his religious and missionary consecration as a Brother, not because he was incapable of becoming a priest, or because he was not intelligent enough to complete the long philosophy and theology courses. Quite the contrary! Indeed, often, when we shared a few words and our reflections, in his limpid and innocent simplicity he would touch the peaks of intellectual reflection.

He was a missionary “brother” in Indonesia. Beautiful years, full of great enthusiasm and the desire to work and be close to the people, but always at the service of the community.

He had a great love for the Xaverian Family, overcoming difficult times of doubt and uncertainty, entrusting himself to the guidance of expert confreres who understood him and helped him to live fully his religious consecration in the most genuine and sincere spirit of faith. Above all, he allowed himself to be forged by the God he loved so much and into whose hands he had placed his life on this earth. [...]

Today, it is not easy to find, even among religious, people who make a life program of silence, discretion and unconditional service. Nor is it easy to suffer always with a smile, ready to give light wherever there is darkness» (*Fr. Luigi Lo Stocco s.x.*).

A cura di p. *Domenico Calarco s.x.*

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