

Fr. Renzo Roccabruna

(1935-2017)



Fr. Ranzo was born on 30 November 1935 in Trento (although resident in Fornace) to his father Andrea Achille and his mother Anna. He entered the seminary of Villa Visconta in Besana Brianza (MI) on 28 September 1948. On 21 October 1950 he went to the seminary of Marchiola where he completed his secondary-school studies. He entered the novitiate at Verona San Giuliano on 25 1954 and made his first profession of vows on 26 September 1955. He then continued with his studies of the classics and engaged in a preparatory year for theology. He made his perpetual profession on 8 December 1959, was ordained a deacon in Padua on 22 December 1962 by the Bishop of Padua Msgr. Gerolamo Bortignon, and was ordained a priest by the same bishop in Mottinello on 23 June 1963.

On 20 July 1963 he began his ministry as a substitute chaplain at the hospital of Treviso. On 4 October of the same year he went to the apostolic school of Castellanza (VA) to be an assistant and a teacher. Meanwhile, in the missionary world the Province of Lombardy and Veneto, abandoning its doubts, had responded to the invitation of Cardinal Concha Cordova of Bogota and sent the first group of Camillians to Colombia, all from the same village of Fornace. Amongst them there was also Fr. Renzo, who rightfully became a co-founder of the Delegation. The date was 28 June 1964. The other two Camillians were Fr. Emilio Stenico, the first Superior, and Fr. Silvestro Caresia, his cousin. At the outset Fr. Renzo was a chaplain at the Catholic Hospital of S. Juan De Dios in Bogota and in 1968 he moved to the Hospital of Santa Clara.

In the year 1970 he went to the San Pedro Claver Clinic of Medellin. In February 1971 he worked in the San Vincente de Paul Hospital and in June of the same year he was appointed Superior at Medellin and chaplain of the Seguro Social Clinic in Itaguì, a part of the same hospital. For four years starting in 1983 he was a member of the Council of the Delegation of Colombia-Peru.

In May 1983 he organised a social work in Basurero, a mountainous refuse tip of the metropolis where the very poor went to collect anything they could, in unbreathable air, dirt, infections...Such stinking and possession-less people were not even admitted to hospital. Near to this, there was 'el Bosque', an area even worse, where Fr. Renzo created another clinic. He would do the same later in Robledo, a hill to the south of Medellin where there was a work of the Daughters of St. Camillus: helped by them he created a clinic which would be run by these sisters.

In 1984 he returned to Bogota as a chaplain at the Santa Clara Hospital. Until the year 1988 he was the organiser of the St. Camillus Social Work in Barrio Juan Rey which would later be run by Fr. Dino de Zan, a medical doctor.

In 1989 Father Renzo was appointed the Superior of the St. Camillus community and in 1991 he went back to the S. Juan De Dios Hospital. In 1992 he became the chaplain and parish priest at the san José Hospital and would remain such until the year 2002. In 1994 he was appointed Superior of the new San José community which had been created to enable the chaplains to live a common life. In 1995 he organised the 'Fiscala' social work, not far from Juan Rey, an inaccessible labyrinth where he built a clinic and a little church.

In 1999 he became the economic and spiritual assistant of the Saint Camillus social work in Villavicencio, which is beyond Cordigliera, now Amazonia, which had been started by businesswomen who were its benefactors. This was a reception centre to give meals and a bed to elderly homeless people. In a state of difficulty, the Camillians were asked to coordinate it, and Fr. Renzo gave his services once a week. This was a well-organised centre, run by volunteers alone, who literally begged from local businesses.

In 2006 Fr. Renzo, who because of his age had retired, continued to help in the chaplaincy of the S. José Hospital and in the work of Villavicencio. On 18 September 2007 he returned to Italy and lived in the community of S. M. del Paradiso. On 1 April 2008 he became the chaplain at the hospital of (BS). On 1 October 2010 he was appointed to be the chaplain of the S. Chiara Hospital of Trento and was a member of the re-formed community of the city, something that he said made him very happy. He did not lose the vice of engaging in other activities than that of the chaplaincy: when he could he went to visit the elderly or the

sick in their homes. After his service finished on 1 February 2016, he worked at the Stella del Mattino Nursing Home of Gardolo until 12 July 2016.

However in the meantime his health had begun to fail him: at the end of the year 2015 he was admitted to hospital for the first time with cardio-circulatory and kidney failure; this was followed sick months later by another admission to hospital. At the beginning of the summer of 2017 he was admitted to the St. Camillus Nursing Home of Cremona and stayed there until 12 September 2017 when he was moved to the community of Verona S. Giuliano and was looked after at the nursing home. A devastating relapse led in a few days to his death at the hospital of Cremona, on the morning of 5 November 2017.

The profile of Father Renzo speaks for itself and is reflected in his work. He was certainly one of those pastors who did not fear to give off the smell of his sheep. And not because he was born in a mountain village but because the gospel entered his head in a stark way, a head that was a little lazy in applying itself to the study of his books but which sprayed the intelligence of charity when he found himself in front of the spectacle of extreme poverty.

He was good company and of very good spirits, of great humanity, and he knew how to goad health-care workers, with fatherly and affable pressure, to give a part of their time and professionalism free of charge to the poor. In the same way as, supported by family relatives and friends in Trentino, he assured himself a solid network of supporters so that his 'collateral' commitments never weighed upon his religious community. He did not want to be at the centre of things – he wanted to be a bridge between those who could give and those who greatly needed to receive.

At the end he understood one thing, that the time had come to leave Colombia "because", he said, "while we are here, they will not grow". He was referring to the new religious of the Delegation. "They esteem us, but they have to walk on their own two feet". And so it is that Father Renzo can now go peacefully to the house of the Father, convinced, as he is, that it is not his leadership that leads people to do good but the crystalline words of the gospel.