

Father Francesco Spagnolo

1931-2018



Francesco Spagnolo was born on 29.06.1931 at the hospital of Vercelli, to his father Giuseppe and his mother Margherita Rosati who lived in Trecate (NO). He was the last of seven children. Unbeknown to his parish priest – who was surprised by the request for a letter of introduction – Francesco entered the seminary of Villa Visconta in Besana Brianza (MI). This was on 03.10.1941 and there he went to the fifth elementary school and attended the five classes of primary school. After this, on 16.10.1947, he entered the novitiate in Verona at the House of S. Giuliano. On 17.10.1948 he took his temporary religious vows. He continued at Verona with three years of secondary school and then in the autumn of 1951 he went to the seminary of Mottinello in Rossano Veneto (VI) to study theology for four years. On 30.06.1952 he made his perpetual profession in Cles, in Trento. On 18.12.1954 he was ordained a deacon in Mottinello by the Bishop of Padua, Msgr. Girolamo Bortignon, and on 09.06.1955 he was ordained a priest in Pavia, in the chapel of the S. Matteo Polyclinic, by Msgr. Carlo Allorio, his old parish priest who in the meantime had been appointed Bishop of Pavia – a pleasant anecdote in his life.

According to those in whom he confided, Fr. Francesco greatly wished for a missionary life during those epic years when the Chinese mission in Yunnan had been active for a decade before being exiled to another place in the Far East. But his proven application to his studies and his self-discipline made him more suited in the eyes of his Superiors to teaching, which at that time was done within the Institute itself. Indeed, after a summer when he had a replacement position at the chaplaincy of Pavia, on 14.09.1955 he was sent to the house of S. Giuliano as a teacher of Latin and Greek to the professed students, with an enrolment at the Faculty of Ancient Humanities ('the fine humanities') at the University of the Sacred Heart in Milan: he was a teacher and a student at one and the same time until he was awarded his degree on 04.07.1961. His first principal service was to accompany ministry at the 'Little Shelter' Work in Parona, a neighbourhood of Verona. His literary education also led to his being appointed a member of the Provincial Committee for the Revision of the Constitution of the Order for the two-year period of 1966-1968.

With his appointment as the Superior at the city hospital of Padua, on 01.07.1968 Fr. Francesco exercised ministry full-time in the hospital chaplaincy, also becoming the member of the Provincial Council responsible for the field of spiritual assistance. On 01.07.1971 he was moved to Verona to the house of S. M. del Paradiso as the Superior and as the first Provincial Councillor, a post that was confirmed for the next three-year period. He continued to attend to pastoral care in health because in October 1973 he became the director of the course of pastoral care for the sick at the Church institution of Saval.

But then the turning point that he had had so awaited occurred. A century after the historic expedition of the Camillians in the footsteps of Don Daniele Comboni, for the Province of Lombardy and Veneto the possibility of a missionary foundation in Africa presented itself on a silver plate: the diocese of Cremona asked the Sons of Saint Camillus to manage a hospital that it had already inaugurated in Kenya, in Tabaka, in the Province of Kisji.

Fr. Francesco went to London to study English in July 1976 and on 02.09.1976 left for Kenya, making for Tabaka. On 06.07.1977, for a three-year period, he was appointed the Superior of the first house to be canonically erected there. On 12.07.1983 he was once again the Superior at Tabaka and this appointment was confirmed for the subsequent three-year period. On 31.08.1989 he became a chaplain at Kenyatta Hospital in Nairobi, a residence of Bolech House. On 04.11.1998 he returned to Tabaka as the Superior. On 20.07.2004 he returned to Nairobi and to Bolech House, this time as a chaplain at the Mathari Mental Hospital.

On 17.10.2008, after thirty-two years in Africa, he returned to Italy because of the onset of a form of Alzheimer's disease and was sent to the S. Pio X community of Milan. Because of a slow but steady worsening of his condition, on 05.10.2013 he went to the community of Capriate S. Gervasio

(BG) where he was cared for by his fellow religious, until in July 2017 it was necessary to transfer him to the RSA and a protected ward. The unstoppable advance of his illness increasingly left itself etched on his face and thus his confreres ministered the sacrament of anointing of the sick to him on 02.01.2018. His earthly life ended on the morning of 08.01.2018.

Fr. Francesco had a rather Teutonic trait, devoted to duty, inclined to discipline, to correctness, to precision, to respect for the rules and for roles. Those who had him as a teacher remember above all this trait of being a demanding person, tempered, however, by love for walks in the mountains and even more for football, in which he excelled as a centre-forward. During his period in Africa he did not change his character but he greatly softened it, investing in his ministry his best resources. He was loved by the local people and by the sisters, but also esteemed by his confreres, notwithstanding a diversity of characters. Leaving Italy, going from 'Greek to potatoes', as Msgr. Ercole Brocchieri of Cremona wrote, after the classical languages he also wanted to learn Swahili in Tanzania, which is its cradle, but he found himself in difficulty because the people of Tabaka – not used to the rules of grammar – spoke the language in their own way. The limitations of the precise! He was also caused some suffering by those confreres of his who in his view threw themselves with too much ease into new ministerial adventures: he wanted prudence!

In recent years, when the first signs of incipient Alzheimer's disease became evident, he suffered a great deal because of his loss of memory and because he was no longer able to control his mind, which had been his strong point. God, on the other hand, does not lose His memory and will now give Fr. Francesco the eternal prize for having given the best of himself in a scrupulous way.

Funeral Rites

- ✓ **At Capriate (BG), at the church of the 'O. Cerruti' RSA, on Wednesday 10 January 2018, at 10.30. The coffin will then be buried in the local cemetery of Trecate (NO) in the family tomb.**
- ✓ **At Trecate a suffrage Holy Mass will be celebrated on Friday 12 January 2018 at 17.00 at the succursal Church of St. Francis in the central square.**