

# Father Francesco Luigi Mazzarella

## 1937-2020



Father Francesco Luigi Mazzarella was born in Grassano (MT) on 29 December 1937 to his father Innocenzo and his mother Annunziata Devito. He entered the Province of Sicily and Naples in Acireale (CT) on 12 October 1952. He began his novitiate at the *Oasi* of Aci Sant'Antonio (CT) on 7 September 1954. On the feast day of the nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary of 8 September 1955 he made his temporary profession and on 6 January 1959, the day of the epiphany of the Lord, he made his perpetual profession, both at Acireale (CT).

On 1 July 1962, at the Parish Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mount Carmel of Taranto (TA), he was ordained a priest with the prayers and the laying on of hands of His Excellency Msgr. Guglielmo Motolese, the Archbishop of Taranto (TA).

After his priestly ordination, in the same year, after a few weeks, he was sent to the community of Aci Sant'Antonio (CT) as the assistant to postulants at the Seminary of 'Mercede' at Aci Sant'Antonio (CT). From July to October 1964 he was the teacher of novices at the *Oasi* of Aci Sant'Antonio (CT).

On 10 June 1971 he was appointed a member of the Provincial Council and the teacher of young priests in Messina. Next year, in 1972, he held the post of Superior of the Camillian community of Messina and director of the St. Camillus Nursing Home. On 12 June 1974 he was appointed the Provincial financial administrator, a member of the Provincial Council, and the local financial administrator of the Camillian community of Messina.

In 1975 he was moved to Naples and in July he was appointed the Superior of the Community of Divine Love and of the Camillian Community of the Mother of Good Counsel of the Second Polyclinic of Naples (NA).

At the same hospital complex of the Second Polyclinic of Naples, on 28 June 1978 he received his diploma as a professional nurse of the Italian Red Cross, matriculation number 8899. During his studies he began to develop an *impetus to mission* and on 17 November 1978 he left to help the sick at the 'La Croix' Hospital of Zinvié (Benin). In that same year he was appointed the financial administrator of the community and in 1986 he was elected the Superior of the community of the 'La Croix' Hospital of Zinvié.

After returning to Italy to take part in the thirteenth Provincial General Chapter, he was sent as a delegate to the fifty-third General Chapter of the Order which took place in Bucchianico (CH) on 2-19 May 1989. The subject of this General Chapter was 'Towards the Poor and the Third World'. The

new Superior General, Father Angelo Brusco, conferred upon him the mandate of being the Provincial Superior for the three-year term 1989-1992. At the end of this mandate he returned again to Africa and left the religious with the famous phrase that has gone down in history: “You met me, I met you, I am going back to Africa”.

After returning to Africa, in May 2005 he was moved to the community of Messina and in October 2006 he was moved to the community of Mangano-Acireale where he became parish priest at the Parish of the Most Holy Mary of Porto Salvo. He left this post on 7 June 2008 (Prot. 21/08) for health reasons.

Towards the end of 2011 he was moved to the St. Camillus Institute of St. George in Cremano (NA), the headquarters of the Province, where he held the post of financial administrator. Every so often he was admitted to the St. Mary of Pity Hospital of Casoria (NA). However, his illness progressed and for his own welfare in November 2016 he was transferred to the Camillian community of Messina for rest and treatment. In November 2017 he was moved to Mangano for a period of rest.

Father Francesco, inside the communities in which he lived, was always a very silent religious and he did not love chatterers; indeed he repudiated them in a very gentlemanly way, with a unique discretion and a calm and peaceful way of speaking, at times with that touch of irony that characterised those characters of London who became so famous as to characterise the legends and history of London. I never saw him lose his patience, not even with the most obstinate of people, and he always looked downwards so as not to cause the person to whom he was talking bother or difficulty. He was a man of peace, of ease, with a dose of sensitivity accompanied by a great tenacity in respecting established authority. I never heard from his mouth complaints about his Superiors; he loved obedience with a poor heart. And only those who have a poor heart know how to love the poor. He had this to such an extent that on 17 April 1991 in his testamentary letter he wrote: ‘wanting to arrange for what I possess and I will possess at the moment of my death, I declare as follows: I revoke and annul any testament of mine and want it to have this sole value: I appoint as my only heir the Province of Sicily of the religious Order of the Ministers of the Sick (the Camillians)’

Proud of being a Camillian, he intensely loved the Order and his Province but above all the Mission in Benin. During the period when he led the Province of Sicily and Naples, he contributed in a decisive way to the building of the seminary of Segbanou, thereby guaranteeing a future fertile in vocations that was able with the passing of time to assure the continuity and expansion of the Camillian charism. Indeed, on the day of its inauguration, 4 April 1992, Father Francesco declared as follows: “Opening a house of formation means thinking about the future of man and offering him hope, laying the bases for a new school of charity for the world of health”.

His life was marked and touched in the last years by illnesses – from diabetes mellitus to degenerative dementia.

Afflicted by Alzheimer’s disease, he gradually encountered difficulty in carrying out his normal daily functions, easily forgetting the events that had marked his life as a man and a religious, having great difficulty at the level of speaking and sometimes with disturbances of his behaviour. A man who gave the whole of his life to the Mission and the Province, we gradually saw him transformed into a man who depended totally on others, that man whom we as young priests called ‘the bricklayer’

because of the simple fact that suddenly he put up or knocked down walls according to need. He was a man who planted Camillian history in the land of Africa and for twenty-seven years (1978-2005) he was in that red land a point of reference who was swift, punctual and effective in solving the small and large problems that emerged every day at a technical, plumbing, electrical level or were connected with carpentry, wall building, joinery and gardening: he was a man who 'did everything'.

Suddenly on Friday 19 June of this year, the solemnity of the *Sacred Heart of Jesus*, Father Francesco left us. The community of Messina was gathered together, towards 13.00, during lunch, at table: Father Francesco bent his head downwards, an attempt was made to do the impossible...but his hour had come.

The funeral room was opened on 20 June at the mortuary of the St. Camillus nursing home of Messina with moments of prayer, memories of the life of Father Francesco, with his religious family and his own family gathered around.

The funeral was held on 22 June at the Parish of St. Camillus of Messina. The ceremony was presided over by the Provincial Superior, Father Rosario Mauriello. His family relatives, his confreres of the Province and the Province of Benin-Togo, the women Ministers of the Sick of Acireale, the novices and the temporary professed, his friends and those who had known him and loved him were all there. At the end of the funeral the confreres of Benin gave their final adieu to Father Francesco, singing a song in the Fon language. His body will rest in the large cemetery of Messina in the tomb of the Camillian religious.

We thank the Lord for the gift of this confrere of ours. From heaven he will continue to love and pray for his Order, the Province and Benin, but above all for vocations, as he always did when he was alive.