

*Bro. Alfano Vaser...
... so very human*



GOAL

Among our models of Marist

holiness the most modest and the least known is certainly Bro. Alfano. He doesn't have the prestige of Father Champagnat, the Founder, nor that of Bro. François, first Superior General. He doesn't have the dimension of Bro. Basilio, Superior General: a man who lived in our world, after the historic pause of Vatican II and who crisscrossed and fertilized the Marist world. Nor does Alfano have the glory of martyrdom. His life was spent in houses of formation beginning in 1903: Master of Novices at 34 years of age in 1907, he will remain so for 15 years, then Director of Scholastics for 16 years. Modest situation which should be favorable to a religious whose ideal was effacement in a religious family where humility is one of its characteristics.

Nevertheless, it is not rare to hear it said: "Bro. Alfano is certainly a saint, but of another time, of a bygone style of holiness, based on a meticulous respect of the Rule, on asceticism, and somebody who prayed with expressions of prayer which, to us, are no longer attractive." And it's true.



That surely is one of the aspects of Bro. Alfano's holiness, but it's far from being the most important. There is in him a humanity entirely filled with the goodness of God. We would have to re-open the book, *Pane di casa nostra*¹ to be convinced: very often there surfaces a humanity made of great attention to others, of that love which is the essence of holiness.

Reading his letters and the many testimonies puts us in touch with a Brother who was sensitive, intelligent, attentive to others, a Brother with bursts of humor, a natural and abundant gratitude, a very refined sense of responsibility. We see a heart filled with people and problems, especially when he turned to God and the Virgin Mary. Bro. Alfano was a man totally impregnated with God, Who was for him the source of peace and wisdom, the passion of his life.

We are often tempted to copy his letters, so much do they reveal a saint. Through them there emerges *the other Alfano*, a very human mystic, very close, very attentive and faithful to friendships; the goodness of God, which he often preferred to call "the benignity of God," radiated from his heart, enlightened and warmed others.

¹*Pane di casa nostra* is a biography of Bro. Alfano, edited in Naples, in French, English, Spanish, Portuguese and Italian. It's 48 pages long.

THE LETTERS

We have 263 original letters of Bro. Alfano, two Circulars to the Brothers, his Testament, notes, reflections and comments on the novices. Most of this material dates from the last ten years of his life: 1933-1943; the oldest letter dates from 1899 and the last ones from the end of 1942. Bro. Alfano would never let a letter go without an answer, even if at times he admitted being “turtle-slow” in answering.

Among his letters, there are 101 sent to family members. The most compact group are those written to his brother Sandro,² 86. His brother Pietro dies rather early in 1926. We’ve gathered 12 letters which had been written to him. One letter is for his mother; his sister Catherine received several, but we have only one.

151 letters were sent to various Brothers: former novices gone to Argentina, and especially his two nephews, BB. Antonio Giuseppe [26 letters] and Carlo Borromeo [34 letters]. Brother Emery, Postulator General and his great friend, received at least 20; Bro. Avit, Secretary General, 5; the Superior General, Bro. Stratonique, one.

² Alessandro (Sandro) will have six boys, 5 of whom will become

Marist Brothers:

Antonio Giuseppe, Carlo Borromeo, Pietro Giuseppe, Carlo Emilio and later Giorgio.

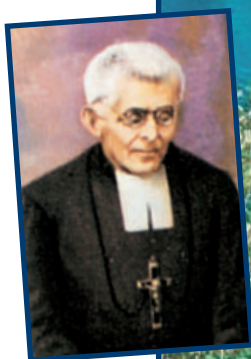
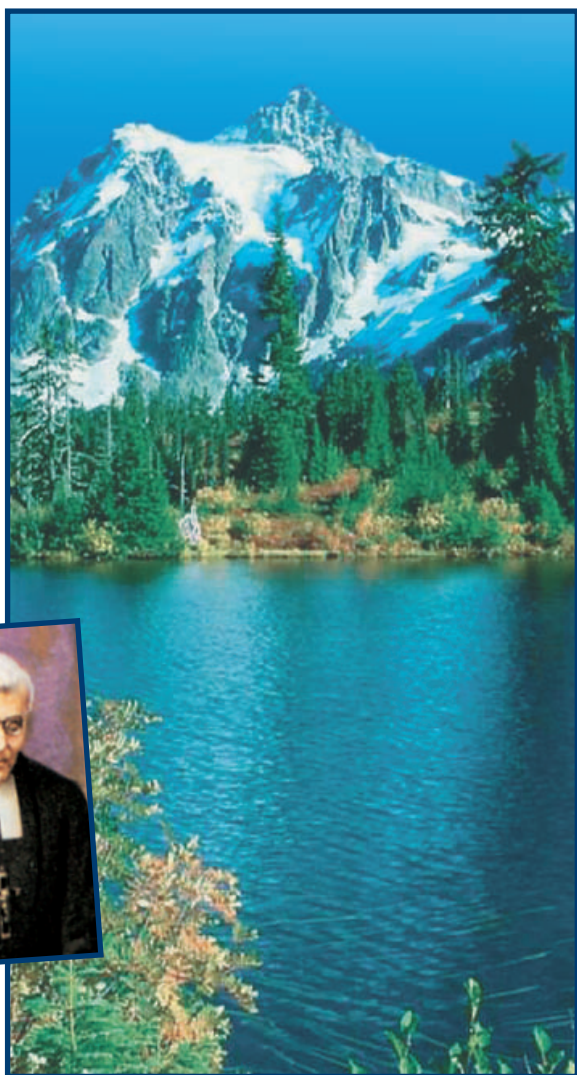
Only Zenone will marry. Pietro’s sons will settle in Paris and ties will weaken.

Three letters were sent to a teacher at Hône, Bro. Alfano’s native village, who was helping to discover Marist vocations.

There are also some precious reflections which Bro. Alfano wrote for the 1920 General Chapter and many notes, plus 8 annual reports to Brother Superior General on the novitiate which reveal a Master who discerns characters and hearts. What he writes on the young men is full of psychological finesse and common sense.



Most of the letters are four pages long, written very legibly though minutely. They allow an edifying and pleasant contact, since we're dealing constantly with a very sharp mind, on daily matters of life and heart. We meet a man who immediately set himself on the road to holiness and remained faithful to it.



FIRST PART: 1. THE STYLE

Alfano as seen in his letters

His letters are in a uniform writing, clear, restrained, precise, in which round characters and short dashes abound. The writing shows a sensitivity wrapped in measure and modesty, as well as a peaceful clarity of mind. Almost no mistakes or crossing out in hundreds of handwritten letters. Brother Alfano's writing evolved a lot. In the first letters, those of 1899, it is fine, pointed, with some characters slender and drawn out, sign of a sensitivity not yet controlled. It will evolve with time towards characters which are rounder, shorter, more peaceful and regular.

Reading his letters gives the impression of being in front of a man at peace and guileless, though he does recognize that he has an impulsive nature and is sometimes too demanding. This impression comes from everything: the quality of his writing, the clarity of his sentences, his rich Italian, sometimes mannered but always smooth, from the goodness of his feelings as well as from the constant emergence of his faith:

« Here I am, having to rest a lot and work always less. I'll have to pay off this debt to nature in whatever way Providence decides: there's nothing to worry about, we're in good hands. »

20 December 1936



When he writes to his family, never any complicated or profound reflections. He uses everyday language, known expressions, stopping on interesting matters of ordinary life: the weather, the fields, the health of family members, the joy of new births... and always the affection and courtesy of noble souls. Brother Alfano's Italian is fluid, expressing the feelings of a sensitive and intelligent person, and who, by nature, is entirely filled with gratitude and admiration.

The letters Brother Alfano wrote to his 4 Marist nephews or to the Brothers take on a sharper religious tone, insisting on the necessity of persons consecrated to God to make the will of God their only goal in life. Deeper because written to religious, they lose some of the lightheartedness and simplicity which were the delight of the letters written to his brothers or his nephews Zenone and Giorgio, men of the earth, without much culture. Alfano knows how to adapt himself, and the spiritual master reveals himself more. The style, however, stays simple:

« *As you can see, with you as with my brothers, I take the liberty of going beyond protocol. Besides, between religious it's the sentiment of charity, frankness and respectful esteem and the desire to do good which must guide our writing.* »

22 January 1940

This letter to his mamma, from 17 February 1900, takes up nine sheets. It is written in French.

Good Mamma,

After the misfortune which has struck our home, (Papa's death) and which I don't want to recall at all, unless it's to recommend the memory of our deceased, it's the duty of all your children (and especially mine,) to console you by our words and our tender affection for you, and by all that we want to do to make you happy, as much as we want to and that you yourself can wish for... With this goal and for this purpose, to help my two brothers who are especially caring for you, and more particularly still the one whom you want to live with habitually, I'm ready to give you everything which might come to me as annual income, your whole life, which God grant very long... One of my greatest desires is to love and feel loved especially by my closest relatives.

Dear Mamma, I would like to be able to send you some pretty gift, but I have nothing you could want. So, I'll only have Pierre bring you a Rosary (my own); when you recite it you will think a little of your Joseph and recommend him to the Good Lord, to the Blessed Virgin and to his holy patron, Saint Joseph...

Dear Mamma, if you want to keep well, use flannel shirts or woollen ones; that's what I'm doing fortunately and I advise all those who are somewhat feeble to do the same, especially to protect oneself from sudden chills...

Pray for me, as I pray for you. Give my affectionate greetings to uncles Jean and Georges, as well as to my good aunts, cousins, likewise to Uncle Joseph...

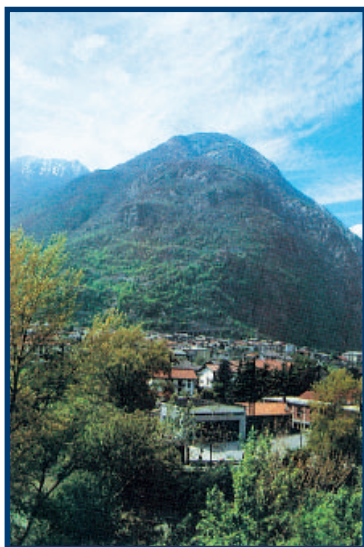


It will never be said that your children were meagrely grateful to you for all you did and suffered to raise them, nourish them, care for them and bring them up as good Christians...

Mamma, believe me when I say I am one of your most loving sons ever; love me a lot and lead me to heaven with you...

I conclude here, for it's 4:30 a.m. and I have to run to ring the bell to wake up the community...

Your most loving son embraces you. Give the little babies in the house a big hug for me.



Hône: at upper right, the spur on which Biel is built.

Salasin, Bro. Alfano's birthplace.



2. AFFECTION

Affection, tenderness, gratitude fill Bro. Alfano's letters:

« I read with great pleasure the beautiful epistle you sent me for Easter. I say 'epistle' because it was a very long letter. And I say 'beautiful' because, not only is the handwriting so neat, but the letter is filled with so much enthusiasm, such poetic thoughts and generous feelings, that I'm deeply moved. Bravo! »

To Bro. Carlo Borromeo, 2 April 1931

When he writes to Sandro's family, the expressions of interest, attention, cordiality, joy, closeness are present in all the letters. He remembers all the members of that big family and says he's interested in all the work in the fields: haymaking, harvesting, grape crop, good weather, rain, floods... We see a man who forgets nothing of his country back home and whose concern for it shows frequently; he evokes the beautiful countryside of Val d'Aosta, the mountains, the valleys... Even in Rome he prefers the hills around the Eternal City to its museums.

He seems often eager to visit his family and he talks about it with joy, with feeling: for him family ties are strong and sacred. He admits to his brother Alessandro:

« I feel that my affection is being concentrated on you more intensely with the passing years, given that the missing in the family are becoming more numerous. (They had experienced the too sudden death of their brother Pietro). Stay healthy, take care of yourself, stay happy. Adieu! »

25 October 1926



He often begins his letters to his brother, “Sandro mio carissimo!” (My dearest Sandro), which in Italian expresses the deep affection we have for our loved ones. Attentive to those who make up the family, he reminds them to take care of their health “which is a first-rate treasure.” Willingly he gives bits of advice on caring for one’s health or recovering it. His brother Pietro is returning to health. He tells him to be prudent, to take it easy, to take light purges to purify the blood, “to do everything calmly, slowly, a little at a time; that way all gets done better.” He reminds his brother Sandro on 26 October 1926:

« You’re no longer young and, so, you have to pay more attention to your work. Now that the cold has set in, rest up for a few months. Besides, you don’t lack good things. So, be calm, be calm!»

25 February 1926

« Spring is showing. That will mean overwork for you and your relatives. But be careful to take everything easy, be prudent. “He who grabs too much loses all,” says the proverb. »

20 February 1927

This advice, to take good care of one’s health, appears frequently, sincerely, motivated also by the fact that he himself knows what it’s like to have delicate health. He’s afraid of trips that are too long:

« I’m neither strong nor robust; while traveling I can’t eat and if I arrived home so exhausted as to collapse, I’d be upset. »

He is spontaneously happy at all good news and is sad with his loved ones at bad news, hurt to the core of his being.

His affection, his friendship, his fraternity are limpid and sincere; they are entrenched in his heart. On the death of Bro. Raffaele (Summer 1937), Visitor for Italy, he writes to Bro. Teofano in Argentina:

« I can't tell you the immense sorrow, the stupor that came to me by the unexpected and unforeseen loss of Bro. Raffaele! Humanly speaking, I should not have survived the blow! »

18 August 1937

This is the way he starts his answer to Bro. Martino Zimei, director of the juniorate in Gassino:

« The good wishes you have deigned to send me are too courteous, affectionate and true for me not to be pleased and I'm obliged to tell you that I didn't deserve so much attention. But I always accept the attention of a good soul and the help of prayers. »

21 December 1931

Same tone in the letters to his brother Sandro. He starts this way in the one of 6 May 1928:

« Your children give me an occasion to greet you affectionately: I do so willingly, immediately, and with all my heart. And I also affectionately greet Anastasia, Giorgio and Lenone! »

“I saw you twice in Ventimiglia, but just by stealth: it's very proper therefore to want to see each other and have the time to speak leisurely. It makes us a bit younger. And it would be a pleasure for me to see the new places you have settled in... If therefore Providence wishes, I'll take the first opportunity possible...”

18 June 1928



He will, in fact, spend two weeks with his brother Sandro, in Tayrac near Agen (France). When he gets back he writes him a long letter which he ends thus:

« Thank you and all for the kindness and attention you gave me. Yes, I thank all of you: Sandro, Anastasia, Giorgio and Zenone. Please accept the most affectionate greetings of Domenico and Filippo, who also send you a thousand hugs with all their heart... Yours, always and with much affection in the heart of Jesus. »

31 August 1928

Often at the end of his letters we find the expression: "All of you, be happy in the Lord!" The letter of 22 December 1928 ended this way:

« My dear Sandro, I stop here, remembering your brother full of love and greeting and embracing all your loved ones very dearly. »

« Remain in the Lord's peace, in His joy. All of you, take care of your health. This advice is especially for you, Sandro, and for Anastasia, because with the passing of years we become more sensitive to the changing seasons. »

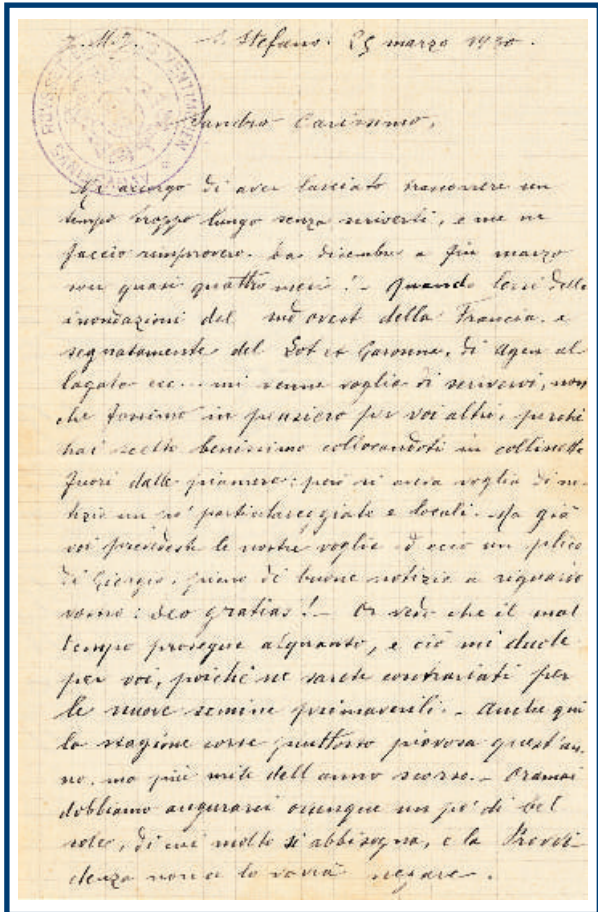
29 March 1929

"In the sacred hearts of Jesus and Mary" becomes his concluding expression in almost all the letters in the last years of his life.

And then, everybody, every day, is in his prayers. He has like a habit, when he prays, of going down the list of all his relatives to recommend them to God, and as he admits, he does that "very often during the day".

« I cannot not pray continually for you, for your brothers, for all my confrères and especially for the superiors to whom we owe so much. My poor prayers, even if they're frequent and long, the Lord knows how miserably effective they are! And yet the immediate need of the District, the Institute, the Church, of all society...drive me ever more to implore the mercy of the Heart of Jesus... »

Bro. Carlo Borromeo. 8 July 1937





J.M.J.

S. Stefano

25 March 1931

Very dear Sandro,

I realize I've let a very long time go by without writing to you; I'm sorry for that. From December to March, that's almost four months.

When I read about the floods in the Southwest of France and more especially in Lot-et-Garonne, about the city of Agen under water, etc... I had an urge to write to you. It wasn't that we were worried about you, for you chose your spot very well on the hills, out of the plains, but we wanted some precise news... Now I see that the bad weather is pretty much continuing; I feel sorry for you since that's going to impede the Spring sowing. Here also the season has been rather rainy this year, but warmer than last year. Now we have to hope for a little sun everywhere, which we need a lot and which Providence can't refuse us...

I was happy you made a beautiful cellar, more solid and cooler than the ones you first thought of doing. That way you'll be able to keep the wine in good condition and sell the surplus at the right time... I was happy, too, over all the good news about the crops last year and the sowing done for this year or which you are thinking of doing. With the help of Providence, even the abundant rains will be good for your garden and vegetables, the potatoes and the corn and, before that, for haymaking and afterwards perhaps even for the wheat...

I'm happy that you're thinking of making a pilgrimage to Lourdes to compensate for the lack of religious life

that hurts you... *Let's hope that this year also you'll have the visit of some Italian missionary, like last year...*

My dear Sandro, try to stay healthy and happy; give my very warm greetings to Anastasia, Giorgio and Lenone, and also the other friends I had the opportunity to see at your place. I always want to visit you again, whenever Providence pleases. Those were really delightful days for me, the ones I spent with you and your family, in those places marvelously peaceful and tranquil...

Adieu! Very affectionately.

Bro. Alfano

3. AFFECTION PERMEATES THE LAST PARAGRAPH

The last paragraph of a letter is sometimes made up of a long list of people to whom Bro. Alfano sends his fraternal greetings. These lists make us think of Saint Paul sending his greetings to the people he knows in Rome. Brother Alfano's heart is not restrictive and his friendships are sincere, sensitive, lasting. Besides, often it's not just in a final paragraph, but in several that he repeats his affection, gratitude, fidelity in friendship with a delicate and intelligent insistence. Reading his letters, one gets the impression of a very noble soul as well as that of a delightful



and sensitive friend. In many letters one can sense that Bro. Alfano's prayers are peopled with many persons; he goes to the Lord, but carrying in his heart relatives, former novices, former students, friends, Brothers gone to the missions, Superiors. In 1917 in the middle of the World War, he writes to Bro. Teofano, his former novice, in Argentina. In the letter a long paragraph lists the names of the Brothers of the Province fighting, either in France or on the Italian front. He cites as many as forty names, often with their rank and situation: in the trenches, prisoners, wounded or dead in battle...(1October 1917, letter to Bro. Teofano). In that same letter he says:

« *I try to encourage our soldiers with letters and I try to introduce religious motives in their hearts and minds.* »

He left San Leone Magno thirty years ago, and Bro. Emery refers to his former students. In his answer Bro. Alfano recalls the names of 26 of his former students, often with the traits that characterized them, their family situation, little anecdotes of their life at the school. Brother Alfano never goes to God alone: his intimacy with God is filled with persons, situations, problems and human joy. He possesses the memory of a heart that prays and lives intense moments of humanness.

Taken directly from some of his letters

His letters let us sense the deep reciprocal affection between Sandro's family and Bro. Alfano. His nephew Zenone intends to get married and confides in his uncle. Bro. Alfano writes him on 28 December 1934:

« Concerning your coming marriage, I am unrestrictedly happy. I see you are behaving like a good son, a good Christian and a judicious man: you've thought it over, you've prayed, you've sought the advice of those who wish you well... There's no doubt that God will bless your marriage and will give you and Marguerite abundant graces to fulfill your family duties... Since your parents are happy, I'm perfectly at ease... Nobody can advise you better in this matter than the excellent parents you have. Therefore, all is very well! And I understand better now why you had to enlarge »
the house.

On that same day he writes to his other nephew, Giorgio:

« Each one of your letters always pleases me because they are dictated by an upright and affectionate heart... I never fail to think of you, your excellent parents and Zenone, every day and several times a day, because in my heart I wish »
them all the very best...

When he receives a visit from Zenone and his wife Marguerite he writes to his brother Sandro:

« You can't imagine the joy I had in seeing Zenone again, whom I had not seen in 7 years, and in meeting his wife Marguerite. They're returning tomorrow from a long trip to Italy. They'll remember it their whole life long... »

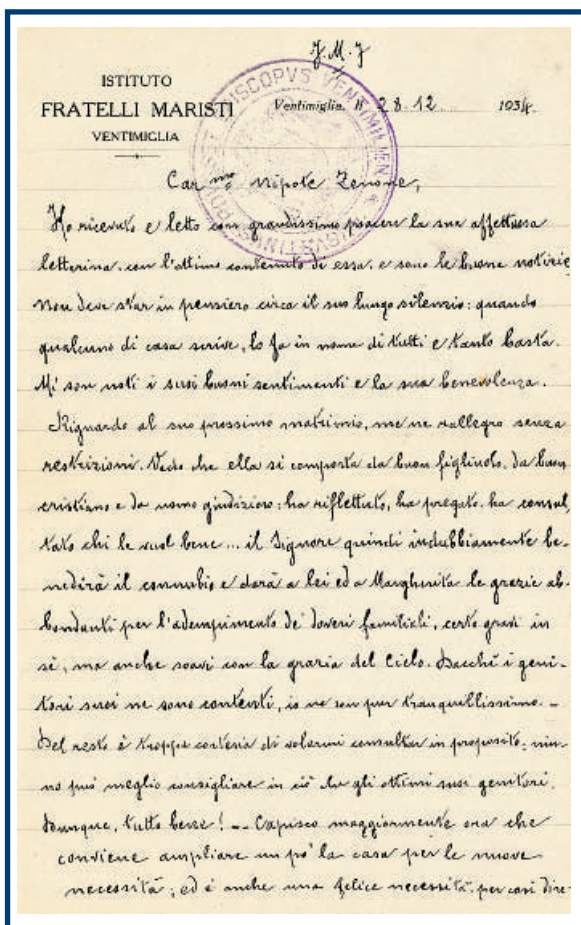
16 March 1935



Brother Alfano learns from Tayrac that a child has been born in the family of Zenone and Marguerite. He writes them:

« I'm happy with all of you for the blessing the Lord has sent to your home, giving Zenone and Marguerite a little angel, born by grace to supernatural life and, therefore made citizen of heaven this beautiful day of the Immaculate. »

5 January 1936



4. A FRIENDLY AND PRACTICAL MAN

Alfano is often practical, especially in matters of health and pedagogy. He writes to his nephew Bro. Carlo Borromeo on 10 October 1938:

« I inquired several times if you had made any progress in putting on weight since July, and I've been assured that there has been a little progress. I'm happy at that, but we can't rest satisfied with so little. You must continue to strengthen your muscles, because your nervous system has stayed too upset these last years, for reasons which you know. And to do good at school and to do it easily and joyfully you must again get back your physical balance and intellectual serenity. You must, consequently, believe you have a very serious obligation to eat a lot...no privations for the stomach, for you must make yourself more robust in order to do all that God asks... You understand me? »

In a preceding letter he gave him pedagogical advice:

« You're going to notice soon enough that the children know much less than you think, and you have to quiz them very often, to make them more attentive, to make them reflect, and to stimulate them. For your part, talk little and never loud; you also know the saying: "What the teacher does matters little, what the students do is what counts the most and is worthwhile." In Catechism class also: no sermons, but brief explanations, clear, straight from the heart. »

12 October 1937

He tells his friends never to do imprudent mortifications:

« Because I see you're not a colossus, don't do anything imprudent, don't deprive yourself of sleep, nor of substantial food. Furthermore, in school speak in a moderate and steady voice..»

Bro. Ugo Roberto, 25 December 1938



« *Never any shouting in class: everything benefits, the teacher's health, the students' progress and discipline.* »

13 October 1938

« *Take care of your health: when you teach speak softly, otherwise it's a disaster!* »

To Bro. Giustino, in Argentina,

24 December 1910

We find this advice again in his pedagogical principles:

« *In class, speak little, as little as possible,... punish little and encourage a lot, always arrive in class well prepared, take care especially of the students at the bottom and pray often for them.* »

He realizes that Bro. Visitor's health is shaky. He sees him and advises him, and he writes to the Brother Bursar in Rome to convince the Visitor to see a doctor and follow his directives. There are too many cases of tuberculosis among the young, so he tells Brother Superior General that we should have an appropriate infirmary. In almost all the letters he writes to his brother Sandro, we saw that he tells him to take care of his health, to leave the work for younger hands.

« *I want to hope that my letter finds you in perfect health. As for me, I use a lot of hops. There are lots of them here and they do me some good. I also take vitamin supplements, and thus I'm moving along.* »

22 December 1928

« *Let younger and stronger hands run the equipment...* »

23 March 1932

Brother Alfano is getting old and so is his brother Sandro since he was born ahead. He writes him:

« There's the one who's rising and who replaces the one getting old and headed to retirement. Let's keep our soul in peace, my dear Sandro: thanks to God we have worked, now let's accept that others are helping and replacing us; as for us, let's be peaceful... »

2 October 1935

Brother Alfano keeps a keen interest in the house, the family, the fields and nature, in what has made the world, the joys and feelings of his childhood. He worries about his village which won't have any Mass at Christmas because the pastor has chosen to live in a nearby village. When later his brother Sandro will be in France, near Agen, in a village with no pastor, Brother Alfano will take steps to have a priest from Val d'Aosta incardinated in the diocese of Agen so that the Italians there can be served. (19 December 1930). The son of peasants, he keeps in mind that simple, laborious life, in contact with nature; he always watches the weather, the rhythm of the seasons, what the fields may yield:

« Hot days have returned, though not every day. The medlars are abundant and ripe, just like the cherries. The grapes and olives are very promising, if God keeps the weather favorable. »

18 June 1928

« Today we had the first threat of rain: really just a few drops. But thanks to the irrigation we have acceptable harvests: figs in abundance, other fruits, grapes, etc. One tomato weighed 1kg400, onions that weigh more than a kilo, sweet potatoes that weighed more than 4 kilos... »

14 September 1928

« I take the liberty of adding some practical advice: the quinces, to be really good, have to be cut into small pieces, then they have to be well cooked, then you have to strain them



to make a purée; then you have to add a little sugar. They're excellent for the health. I also heard that to eat magpies you have to remove the skin which is bitter, but the meat is good. »

October 1928

Because there is no pastor in the village where Sandro lives, he suggests that the children buy a motorcycle or even a car to be able to take papa and mama to the Sunday liturgies.

« Here the vines are still beautiful, they haven't suffered from the bad weather, though they're a little behind. And for you, what do you forecast for the next harvest? And has the sale of wine been good? And what about the livestock? Are the plums beautiful and plentiful? And to think that they'll fall to the ground without being useful to anybody. »

15 July 1932

Alfano does not fail to give advice on matters when he judges it opportune. Is his brother Sandro buying land of little value? He writes him on 15 August 1937:

« You have to convince Zenone that the people are dishonest, cheats (swindlers are numerous, everywhere.—This is written in French.) In an abandoned region land and houses are worthless, they're an albatross, a bother. You mustn't buy or make believe that you want to buy...otherwise you pay three times what you should. And besides, you have enough goods. You're killing yourself working for nothing... »

Sandro had considered moving and selling...

« It's not advisable for you to move... What you have you won't be able to sell at its true value. And besides, you'll find nothing but disadvantages, worries, problems, disappointments. There's a proverb that says so truly that moving twice is as bad as a fire. On the contrary, give yourself time for an

honest rest, some good and relaxing reading, etc. Then you appreciate more the happiness of family life... You'll understand me because I'm writing to you because of the love I have for you, and it hurts me to see you always overworked to the point of ruining your health... (Sandro had been seriously sick.) »

His nephews Zenone and Pietro, settled in France, are inclined to seek French nationality:

« As for the opportunity to acquire French nationality, I believe the opposite: During the World War 24 years ago I saw Germans and Hungarians in France. They were gathered in a camp to work for the French government, but they were paid and lodged, etc. And after the war they stayed in France, masters of their own affairs. Meanwhile those who had taken French nationality were drafted and sent to the front. It was worse than if they had not taken French nationality because they had to confront mutilation and death, instead of guaranteed, paid and peaceful work. That's an eloquent fact! »

6 January 1939



Very dear Brother Graziano (bursar)

San Leone Magno,
Via Montebello — Roma

8 September 1940

I take the liberty of sending you this letter because of common interest and filial piety. You know that our Brother Visitor, these last months (and it's already many months) has had his health a bit shaken: frequent bronchitis which hangs on a lot (you yourself will have noticed this), and for which he doesn't want any medication. On the other hand, the amount of work, preoccupations, and worries have finally caused insomnia, vertigo, and high blood pressure... He finally resigned himself to go see Doctor Trucchi, (very expert and near us), but it seems to me he's not following the prescribed cure, neither did he return to see him two weeks later, as he had been told...

What Brother Director has been able to tell him, as well as my supplications, are not enough... And I'm known for exaggerating and that nullifies what I say... I myself recognize that I have the habit of exaggerating things in my own mind, and therefore that people have to cut what I say in half. But certain things are real, visible, tangible, they cannot be completely denied. And illnesses, taken at the start, are entirely curable; if not, in the long run they become fatal. "Obsta principiis," says wisdom (and that applies to everything). — You have to use human means which science and evaluated experience have found, to stay sound of body and mind and so be able to do all the good the Good Lord wants of everybody. Reason, faith, rules clearly dictate that. (Otherwise we risk tempting the Lord).

I would like you, then, to use all the power you have to persuade Bro. Visitor to see a specialist who will

strengthen his lungs against the sudden changes of temperature and climate, which his work evidently exposes him to. (Suggest to him, at the same time, the right medications.) I would like you also to persuade him to follow Dr. Trucchi's treatment. Bro. Vaolino came several times from Carmagnola to follow the same treatment and has been very pleased. Dear Brother Director in your house will certainly back up with his own insistence (if necessary) what you'll do. We have the duty to be attentive to the health of our Superior and to do everything possible for that: the glory of God depends on it, as well as the general good of our District... Thanks very much beforehand for all you'll do in this case. I stop here. Don't answer me; there's no need to...

Many thanks, congratulations and best wishes for the new school year. My thankful and respectful congratulations to Bro. Director and the whole community. I embrace you all fraternally in the Lord.

Always your very humble and very thankful servant.

Bro. Alfano

5. HUMOR

Brother Alfano frequently slips into his letters some little reflection full of humor. After the rain the figs have their mouth open: "They're like they have dropsy! And there's nothing we can do about it." (To Bro. Carlo Borromeo, 14 October 1928). Good weather and springtime are like "an antiphon of the real Easter when alleluias will never end!" (To Bro. Carlo Borromeo, 2 April 1931). To Bro. Natale, Master of Novices, he



recalls: “a plant (a novice) that has no buds in the spring will never bear fruit in the summer.” (18 February 1940). During his last years he greets young people thus:

« Old grandpa sends his best to all the dear Novices, Postulants and Juniors... Old grandpa is praying to the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary for young people of good will, hope of the Church and the Marist Institute... »

To Bro. Antelmo, 13 October 1939

On 2 April 1940, writing to the same Brother, he admits:

« I am still more and more of a turtle; but with my closest friends I take it even easier. This will explain my excessive lag in your case. It doesn't justify me; unfortunately I risk never being able to correct myself, just like, for that matter, many other miseries weighing me down... »

Very wisely he compares himself to a zero: “The Good Lord wants zeros next to big digits...” (To Bro. Alessandro, 28 March 1932). At other times he admits he's only a poor pick-axe which God has put a good handle on. A young Brother is seriously sick, he prays for him and adds:

« That an old decrepit like me go to another world, that's logical, that's normal, it's perhaps even desirable... but the young have to be able to work for the glory of God! »

To Bro. Alessandro, 24 December 1933

Bro. Giustino, former disciple, invites him to Argentina:

« You're perhaps kidding to talk that way — answers Brother Alfano. — You don't know I'm an old cracked pot... »

18 January 1912

The following year he tells him: “I’m a grandpa worn out ahead of time!” (7 March 1913). Nonetheless, many letters show that he asked to leave for Argentina, Colombia, China... “But I was never worth the cost of travel... (To Bro. Teofano, 14 October 1922). In this same letter, written from Genoa, he remarks that the children of that city are very nice, but they “prefer work done to work that has to be done.” His cousin Brother Jerome writes him a letter from Argentina full of praise. Alfano answers: “Incense must be cheap in Argentina since you send me so many shots so profusely.” (6 July 1909). His Golden Jubilee of religious life is celebrated at the same time as Bro. Isidoro’s. He views the celebrations given him as the shadow which highlights the lifetime accomplishments of his confrère. With age he’s becoming a “schivafatiche” (someone who avoids fatigue). At 69 he’s only the “shadow of a man”, but he adds immediately:

« I rejoice when I see young people, healthy, good, happy, firmly set and generous on the right track. And for them he asks unceasingly, of the Virgin Mary and the Founder, steadfastness, faith, piety, trust in Jesus and Mary. »

**To Bro. Enrico Maria Bordet
30 December 1939**

To Sandro, his brother in France, he talks of the beautiful crèche, the Christmas hymns which attract people and he adds:

« When airplane rides won’t cost anything, and we see them everywhere like cars, we’ll invite you over for midnight Mass, okay? »

21 December 1934



*I thirst
for truth, life,
light, good,
love.*

*And You are
the source, the ocean
of all good...*

*I want to be
with You and Your
Immaculate Mother
eternally.*

Bro. Alfano

J.M.J.

St. Stephen

9 Nov 1927

Very dear Sandro,

I'm so happy to see your children again. They arrived this morning, Wednesday, at 4 o'clock, after a good trip. Right now they're thinking of getting some more sleep to make up for what they lost during the night. They made me happy with the good and numerous news from home and all of you. I found myself with you in spirit, seeing everything they spoke about. Brother Vietro Giuseppe (his nephew) is a good soul and provident; he brought me some gentian and camomile with which he makes me very good tea. I have to thank you also. But what I don't understand is all this money you're sending me and that I have no right to. You know very well what I told you about this. But you immediately found a nice answer

to my protests: “If you want to give me back my money, come and see me.” That’s a lovely invention and I don’t know how to object to that for the moment. If God wills, I’ll go see you when the weather is better. For now, I’ll be satisfied with thanking you, asking the good Lord to bless you and to return it all to you a hundred-fold. You’re much too kind, and I’ll never be able to repay you what I owe...

For you and yours I continually ask all sorts of good things. I’ll write to Hône in December to inquire how our parents are doing over there. A thousand good wishes to Anastasia, Giorgio, Zenone. The house is going to seem a bit empty after the past fortnight (the four sons, Marists, were on vacation). These things happen in life. I advise you to work moderately. You’re no longer harassed by so many needs.

Believe me, I’m always your brother full of love and gratitude, and I’ll meet you in the Heart of Jesus.

Bro. Alfano

6. EVERYTHING IS IMPREGNATED WITH A SPIRITUAL VIEW OF THINGS

Bro. Alfano’s letters habitually open with a religious reflection, nothing heavy or lengthy, but rather in an interior climate, one Bro. Alfano lives in, which shows in fast sentences. And since that comes to him spontaneously, his religious thoughts never seem artificial:

“The years go by fast, and with them life, road, exile, the real war...and so we glimpse peace, victory, triumph,



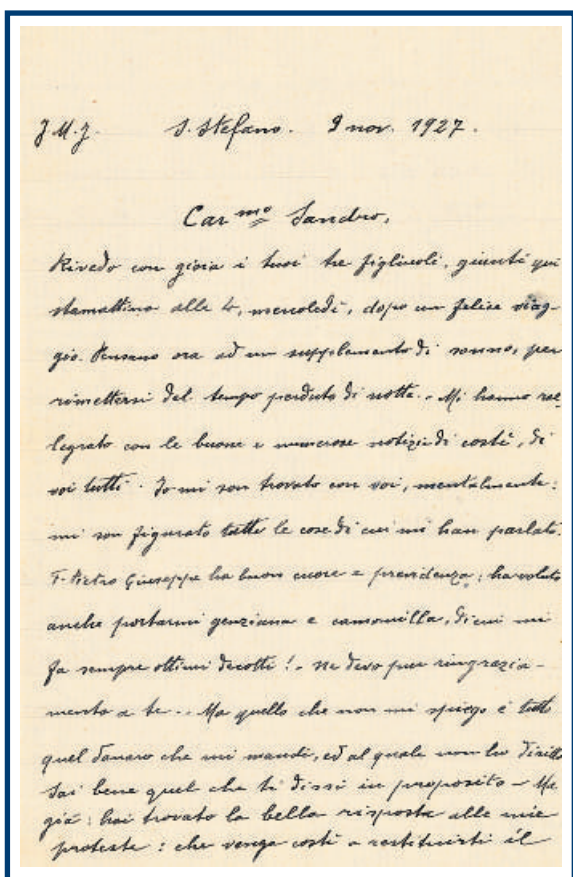
reward, crown, joy, company without end with all our dear ones. »

21 December 1934

The year before Sandro had invited him to Tayrac, but there was no priest in the village and Alfano, refusing the invitation, confessed:

« I can no longer live without daily Mass and Communion. I'm ready to do any sacrifice at all so as to never miss them. »

17 July 1933



Since he writes often on the feasts of Christmas and Easter, he stresses the religious aspect:

« I stop here for the time being, wishing you all the joy of the truly Christian Easter, which means passage. The resurrection of *QLJC* is for us a pledge of resurrection and eternal life. Oh! What a beautiful Easter is reserved for us in heaven, lasting, eternal, absolutely perfect, whereas here below everything changes, fades away, and the cross is here every day in different forms and degrees. It's really true that it's not worth clinging to what passes! »

28 March 1929

If it's at Pentecost that he writes, his letter opens a window on the Holy Spirit:

« How we need the gifts of the Holy Spirit to be holy! What admirable things the apostles did after receiving the Holy Spirit! What admirable works all good Christians do driven by the Holy Spirit. He is truly the Consoling Spirit because He reveals to us all that is important to have us remember our coming and joyous fate. How Saint Francis of Assisi was right to sing out: "The good I expect is so great that every sorrow is a consolation to me." »

17 May 1929

Brother Alfano doesn't forget to be a man of God in his correspondence. Christmas is near when he writes to Sandro on 22 December 1929:

« Christmas is near and I wish you, as well as all your loved ones home, the best good possible. God can and wants to give us the best of everything and, what's more, He knows what's good; therefore, let's let Him do it... May He give you especially His divine peace, so precious because He had the angels sing it over His cradle in Bethlehem! He promises it to men of good will and we want to be men of good will! »



And for Easter:

« *Easter is always a happy feast and April is always a pleasant month. It's not because of the reasons we had so much in our hearts in our youth, but because of what they truly represent and promise. Springtime talks to us of another Springtime, which will be perfectly radiant, prosperous, festive, lasting, eternal, without clouds or storms or fatigue or worries... Easter recalls precisely this definitive passage from exile to homeland, from earth to heaven, it promises us the glorious resurrection of our bodies and eternal joy...* »

31 March 1931

The letter he sends to his sister-in-law Anastasia is filled with the presence of the Virgin Mary. His sister-in-law made a pilgrimage to Lourdes to mark the end of the Jubilee Year and he writes to her:

« *You were lucky to have been able to attend those magnificent religious manifestations, presided over by the Pope's representative, and which were performed with heavenly fervor. How good and merciful the Virgin Mary is to incite so much faith and generosity in the midst of a humanity habitually ungrateful and indifferent. This makes us repeat today that extremes meet: holiness is side by side with impiety...* »

1 June 1935

Age makes him look towards God:

« *With the years come worries about health; but these are providential, they make us acquire merit and they detach us from this poor world and make us think that we have a beautiful home open above our heads, with eternal Springtime, fullness of life and all kinds of happiness. Faith makes us happy, as much as we can be happy here below, with peace in our heart, peace in the family and the guarantee of a future sooner or later.* »

20 December 1937

In the midst of the war he writes to his brother Sandro: »

« Yes, I unite myself always and willingly to the prayers you address to the Heart of Jesus through the Immaculate Heart of Mary. He is our life, our hope, our security and our peace... We pray always that Europe will once again and soon find tranquility in order and Christian justice. The nations will find in Jesus the true healer, »
peacemaker, friend...

14 September 1940

In the last note Bro. Alfano sent Sandro, 5 December 1942 – he was to die three months later – everything shows how bad his health is. The message is brief, the words abbreviated, and the writing shaky:

« My very dear brother and very dear relatives. Best wishes for a h. Christmas. Trust always in the S.S. H.H. o. Jesus and Mary Immaculate in life and in death. Only Paradise is worth it: Our Infinitely Happy Home. The world is a shadow. See you in the infinite »
good! b.a.

Bro. Alfano,
at right,
with one
of his classes
at San
Leone Magno
(Rome).





Bro. Alfano's spiritual climate: the Second Novitiate

Brother Alfano did his Second Novitiate in Grugliasco and he wrote to a group of his former Novices who were working in Argentina.

Brother Teofano — Grugliasco 3 April 1916

“I’m writing you these lines from Grugliasco itself, from the Second Novitiate. Yes, I’ve finally been granted my ardent desire to make the Second Novitiate. I consider myself happy and lucky. I have only one fear; that’s that the current events will not allow me to pursue it to the end. The Brothers drafted increase all the time and the needs of our houses become more urgent, so one is never sure of tomorrow. But in the final analysis we’re in the hands of Providence and we’ll do all we can.

As for me, I value the gains of the Second Novitiate more than ever: to pray with a peaceful soul, to do two beautiful meditations a day, two examinations of conscience (really methodical), to visit Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament more than six times a day, to make the Stations of the Cross every day and every day the Rosary of 15 mysteries... This is no small grace.

And to work every day on the books of the Institute to know them more substantially, to live a life truly Marist, to work at stifling self-love and practice all the virtues: that’s the life of a Second Novice, that’s a beautiful exercise for paradise. To learn to renew oneself in fervor, in the spirit of the apostolate, to do lasting good... What beauty to be able to call ourselves the friends of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and His apostles...”

7. LOVE OF THE INSTITUTE

This love is part of the core current of his spirituality and every occasion is good to lead him to the love, knowledge and imitation of the Founder, to the knowledge of all our documents, to the admiration of our early Brothers by reading their biographies. He has a devotion to what he calls “our bread”.

On 14 October 1918 he sends 16 pages of preparation for the 1920 General Chapter in Grugliasco: pages full of practical and prophetic wisdom. Ahead of his time, he points out the structures to be put in place:

- the Guide to Formation,
- one person responsible for formation for the whole Institute,
- on-going formation,
- he asks to coordinate the religious and secular programmes between the various stages of formation.

Thanks to his experience, in the notes sent to the General Chapter, he reviews the various stages of formation at that time and proposes improvements: recruiting, the Juniorate, the Postulantship and the Novitiate, the Scholasticate... He advises the Major Superiors to arrange that those responsible for the Juniorate meet each other, exchange their experiences, draw up a manual to guide them... He suggests

- That the documents of the Institute and the Circulars be translated into other languages so that all the Brothers can truly benefit. (This will be started in 1967.)
- That the Postulants be mature young men, that they already have some official diploma if possible, because, he says, young people with a certain culture assimilate the values of religious life better.



- He asks that we pay attention to the maturity of the person more than to his age in admitting him to the Novitiate. At that time young men entered at age 15.
- That there be only one group of Postulants, only one group of Novices, so that the formators might be less dispersed. (It was the custom at that time to have several investitures and professions during the same year, consequently different groups.)
- He does not want us to overburden the Novices with studies, so as to leave them time to acquire the habit of intimacy with the Lord in serenity.
- He insists that we never keep mediocre subjects and that we not be afraid to have them leave.
- He is against Novitiates that are too full, if we want to aim at formation in depth.

Brother Alfano will send similar reflections in 1938 in expectation of another General Chapter. He always showed himself responsible and active. He notes that there is no infirmary in the Province at a time when the old Brothers and those with tuberculosis deserve the care they need...

How far did his love for the Congregation go? He writes to his cousin Mr. Eugene Colliard, a missionary in Argentina:

« *When you have white hair like me today, you will love more than ever to be Marist, and you will even want to spill your blood for the blessed Institute, so privileged and so generous.* »

15 August 1910

Alfano is only 40 years old. He is probably starting to have a few white hairs, but his heart is filled with love for the Marist family and ready to pour out his blood for her.

Transmitting love of the Institute, of the Founder, by a deep knowledge of his life and thought, by the books of the Institute and the biographies of the first Brothers was one of his obsessive preoccupations; we find it in all the letters of the last years of his life. Nothing was more painful for him than to see Brothers who didn't respect and know our Founder. He wanted all the Brothers to be proud of the Marist treasure, "the bread in the house," and this as an expression of gratitude to God and the Virgin Mary.

The feelings he had for his family he felt with the same intensity for the Marist family. Brother Raffaele, Superior of the District of Italy, dies in May 1937. Alfano writes:

« We have now been very deeply tried and pained by the immense loss of our Superior in Italy. He was snatched away from us after two weeks of sickness at 53 years of age (ten years younger than I!) and when everything led us to believe that he could live and work another 30 years... For me, I am like lost and stunned! I admired his intelligent and indefatigable activity. Yes, our superior was the main motor of our District, which has so few mature and able-bodied men!... And now we have to manage without him! »

5 May 1937

He looked upon the Brothers with sympathy, admiration. The letter he sent to Brother Stratonique, Superior General, on Brother John, his Assistant General recently deceased, allows us to know the good and attentive heart of Bro. Alfano, perhaps also describing himself a bit.



*Ventimiglia,
the Marist
Brothers'
novitiate
and house
of studies.*



A look full of sympathy

*My Very Rev. Brother Superior General
Ventimiglia* *28 January 1914*

Having been away for two weeks... it's only this past 23rd that I received your very warm answer dated January 15. That's why I wasn't able to send you these few words sooner on our deeply regretted Brother John, Assistant General.

First of all, I have to admit that I didn't have the joy of knowing sufficiently our dear and venerated deceased to talk fittingly about him. I was just about able to glimpse him, so to say, once at Mondovì and several times at Grugliasco during the retreats for the Administration.

Nevertheless, I can state that I keep the fondest and most edifying impression of this excellent Marist

Superior. Everything about him inspired us: dignity without affectation, nobility of comportment, joined to much simplicity; manners always dignified, obliging, full of goodness and graciousness, softness of speech and energy of will united to patience and tactfulness of action. He was the man of God, master of his heart and leading gently, strongly and courteously the hearts of those who surrounded him by the affection and irresistible attraction of example.

His sure and perspicacious judgment enabled him to analyze thoroughly the most difficult situations, the most complex matters, and at the same time the auspicious means for getting around these difficulties and overcoming them.

This is the impression I've kept of him, after a visit of just barely two days which he made to Mondovì,... In a chat we had with him at this happy circumstance on frequent and daily Communion, we all could feel that his soul had a holy thirst for Jesus-Christ, and that he strongly desired...to lead all souls to the Eucharistic banquet every morning.

I add: his modest demeanor, thoughtful but very energetic,...during the exercises of piety; his tone of voice filled with faith and love, urged me to say: "That is surely how our Venerable Father Champagnat must have prayed!"

Good Brother John also left me the impression of a very disciplined religious... Seeing him drink only water at table, I took the liberty of asking him if wine didn't agree with him. With a smile full of modesty, he answered me simply: "Water doesn't disagree with me and it's very good for me!" Thus, nothing affected, unsociable or rude in his virtues, nonetheless very sincere, strong and constant...

But I stop here, my Reverend Brother Superior General, leaving it up to a thousand pens more capable



*and more knowledgeable than mine to describe the Marist virtues practiced by our mourned dead Brother Assistant...
Your very humble and very obedient servant.*

Brother Alfano, Master of Novices

As Provincial Councilor he wrote to Brother Emery, Procurator General and bosom friend, very strong letters to pay more attention to the District of Italy which every year sends dozens of young Brothers to Argentina and the missions, but which itself doesn't manage to grow or get organized. And because these letters displeased some, he requested that he not be chosen again as Provincial Councilor. Nonetheless, he remained so for 32 years. These letters show us with what conscientiousness, what insight, what sense of responsibility, justice, what energy of character he took on that work. We see a man lucid and combative in important matters, intelligent, honest, energetic, serious and profound. These letters all have the style and pithiness of the one transcribed below, written to Bro. Emery: a language clear, forthright, strong, but framed in friendship.

And here's how he understood his work as spiritual guide, which he was for 31 years.

« *Spiritual paternity is a reflection of the divine paternity: it expresses fair authority, strength, protection, vigilance, advice, comfort, foresight, the art of educating and caring... A spiritual director must make good use of his ears, eyes, tongue, activities... The interview must be 'paternal, methodical, simple, discreet'...* »

To Bro. Emery, 29 September 1939 and 10 March 1940

The following letter, cited almost entirely, shows Bro. Alfano's strength, as Provincial Councilor, in dealing with the problems of the District of Italy.

Ventimiglia, October 1930:

Rev. Bro. Procurator General:

First of all, given the circumstances, I offer you my sincerest wishes on the occasion of your imminent patron feast. I also promise to remember you more insistently before God that day. I do this because of my debt of gratitude, especially...

I am still touched by the kindness full of affection and attention you showed me in Viterbo and Rome. This was of outstanding moral benefit for me, just as the time spent in Viterbo was physically and mentally profitable. Thank God we have Brothers of good will, self-denial, frankness, in spite of human limitations. I'll say nothing about the 30 hours I spent in Rome (including an almost sleepless night, my weak head spinning)... Nevertheless I was able to see venerable Brother Filadelfo and other Brothers who are dear to me and lots of others things! All praise to this excellent dean, all best wishes and thanks. Praise and thanks also to the first Brothers in the community: I enjoyed their consideration so much.

In your answer full of affection, 21 September, (with a stamp of the Pope, which greatly pleased a philatelist), you refer to the recent proposal to establish a house in Trani...through the secretary of the Holy Congregation for Religious... I find myself immediately like caught in the strong meshes of our present sit-



uation. I don't know what to answer and I can't even say if there'll be anybody who'll study the proposals seriously enough to answer. Indeed, whom to turn to today for explanations, discussions and conclusions? As for me, I don't know anybody. Let me give only one example. I wrote to Bro. Provincial from Viterbo, as I was supposed to. Among other matters I told him my rather strong opinion, just as I had already told Bro. Visitor and you. I even asked him to give me an answer, even *viva voce* in Ventimiglia when back there. I could not suppose that that the proposal had been accepted... In any case, I expected some answer... I got none... A lot of good wishes, a lot of kindness... which I don't deserve... but nothing on what interested me the most. I don't want to criticize the work of the Rev. Superiors: they're in charge... and I'm only a bothersome person, but at least give me a clear and blunt answer. I have lots of reasons to think that my ideas don't make people happy, and I try not to nag. On the contrary, I would keep my peace and not butt in at all if I were not Councilor. But why keep me on the Council if I'm a bother? To have a killjoy? Let them accept my resignation and give my place to somebody else: all will be better and I'll thank the Lord. What a great feeling not to have to carry anything... How much less responsibility! I feel more and more that Bro. Provincial has lost interest in our District and is abandoning us!... One would think Bro. Visitor is replacing him, but in practice he can't do that, his hands are tied: often he has the burden and nothing else. That's where the delays come from... Problems are not solved. Who can and who must study our vital issues? We can say doubtlessly that now the appointments have been made, but how long did we have to wait and what damage to the Brothers. You must know. Brother Director in Genoa learned the names of some members

of his personnel from backstage rumors, after August 15, and on September 10 nothing official. Logically it seems that at least after the retreat in Viterbo the Brothers Directors should be able to receive some idea of their staff, and that most of the Brothers should know what to prepare for the coming school year... In this case Bro. Pancrazio learned only on September 10 what his responsibilities were. Consequently until that time he hadn't taken on any responsibility for what was happening; and this certainly hurt overall. Really, even with him present, things went ahead for two months without any direct authority. Then, you can realize how the foundations in Italy must be studied and handled. And we understand: Who gives the Visitor charge of studying the most advantageous foundations and how to proceed? How can he and must he handle them? What foundations must we dream about and prepare?... What should we accept and under what conditions?... I doubt that he himself knows anything about it. Then what? The refusal of the foundation in Milan, unexpected, unforeseen, for vague reasons and without subsequent statements, that looked strange and was felt as a bitter deception. Was there too much to lose? So as to avoid needless expenses, disturb the authorities, waste time, the one who had to handle the matter should have received beforehand precise details on the possibility or impossibility, to proceed at our pace: that way we could have exchanged proposals and started talking and not have to answer: "We're not interested, we're leaving." If such is the case, why bother people? Perhaps we thought we didn't have the experienced personnel for the proposed foundation? That way we could have foreseen matters and therefore avoided discussions. But if that's the way it is, why always most painfully send people out of an exhausted Italy, taking away gleefully the most mature and the most capable? Why do we refuse or delay beyond



measure recalling our Brothers from Brazil? They didn't drag their feet that long to take from us the one from Santa Maria who was helping us in Mansura! We'd be tempted to say very affirmatively that there is a double weight and a double standard. After more than 40 years, three schools in Italy, a school in Egypt and a juniorate and almost all the most promising sent to foreign countries. These are not favorable conditions, nothing good and secure... Doubt sets in, want it or not, when we look at the various houses which, they themselves, are not in conditions that excite us! Rome: the school is already beautiful, spacious, convenient, due in large measure to the munificence of Bro. Stratonique. We failed only to add the little villa nearby when it went on sale for 200,000 lire, with playgrounds completely separate and spacious premises. What is not clear here is the annual debt of 56,000 lire to the Motherhouse, and we don't know if the debt can be paid in 99 years or if it must last forever.

The origins in Viterbo are known and the gifts of an outstanding benefactor, which led the Motherhouse to be generous... but in this instance also we could incur a debt impossible to repay, which would reduce to almost nothing the annual earnings of each Brother and consequently help from the Province, which would be left with the debt. And Genoa? A day school which may become prosperous and help a lot financially, on condition that we be able to come out of that black and questionably moral hole: a constant danger for our young Brothers: a situation against our Constitutions. But here also, until now, every effort has been made to buy a building. We are now spending 12,000 lire a year to rent an apartment without the right to ever buy it. To get out of that situation would require another sacrifice, which I'll call the smallest step, but necessary: an extinguishable

loan which would be added to the debt already incurred, to build something in the same neighborhood where there's air and a healthy independence. Brother Director already has some ideas on this matter; but here again we need more than empty wishes. - Vocations themselves are in real danger. We need the house in mind urgently. Evidently it will not be financially viable if it has to manage alone: the Province would have to be responsible for it. The three primary schools we just spoke about are not in enviable conditions; but that's not their fault either... Should it be said that we need to establish schools in better conditions? Yes, that's possible, but there has to be somebody who can take care of them seriously, visit them, and negotiate matters. Brother Visitor can't add this to his duties if he lives in Rome and is already overworked; he also has to be told what to do.

I shouldn't add anything to what I've said above. And yet, even here in Mondovì I would like to see Bro. Visitor more often, if we can't have the Provincial. Houses of formation are the pupils of our eyes, the future of the Province. In these houses you have to set up, coordinate, test, get things observed, change. You have to take care of the springs in order to have a river later; if this is not done, things head for disaster. We must coordinate religious and secular programs between the different periods of formation and have tests and exams... and a little manly discipline to form characters and religious. This year the Superior's absence hurt us even in what concerns the enlarging of the building, which we needed and nothing more. What happened, such as it happened, I don't like, it even shocks me, and everything would have benefited from the Superior's presence. We could have done something smaller, more economical, more open, better lighted and warm. I'm not going into the



minute details: a visit to the place will be proof enough. We had to address present needs and those of the near future; because, in a somewhat distant future, we will find excessive and useless even what we had previously. The house is not in a central location, and, therefore, it has no future. In the present conditions we have to think about foundations or suspend admissions to the juniorate or novitiate — and this pull back would be defeatist; however, we see no other solution. Foundations abroad are okay when in the home country necessary and sufficient things are afoot: but here precisely we needed a foundation in Milan to have teachers follow training courses and at the same time facilitate the placement of the boys. After one or two foundations in Italy we can also find some in Egypt, in the colonies, on condition that they belong to us and are not pure donations to all the provinces. Zeal and charity? To practice them in due manner and with élan human feelings are not always useless, not even those for the Province's interest. The young especially pay attention, and the elderly as well pretty much. What damage could happen, for example, if Bro. Vittorio didn't come back before the end of 1930!... He would lose the possibility of easily obtaining permission to teach in a private CEG.

I realize, finally, that I've gone beyond all reasonable limits. What do you want? The heart has its rights, and the desire to see the District grow and prosper, to see our young a bit enthusiastic for the Marist family and their noble mission embolden me to speak out. On the contrary, certain misunderstandings surprise me and are even enigmatic to me. In certain countries we do everything, in others nothing... Why? Even the foreign Brothers who pass through and ask how long we've been in Italy and how many schools we have, frown when they hear the answer. Can we really do nothing? ... On

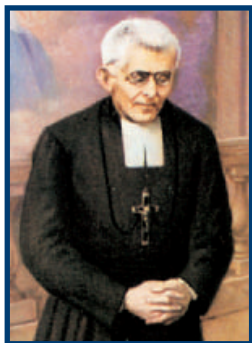
the contrary, we have to say that we are in a particularly favorable situation: no more military service (great advantage); studies well established, the proof is in the exams, students who could be numerous... sympathetic families and people. Vocations have been little cultivated and little sought. By doing better we would get very satisfying results. But here also, where there's a will there's a way...

As for me, already I can do little or nothing. I will work energetically until I can do no more. Human comforts have been very few: that's not important. Enough that God be merciful to me and bless the entire Institute, the Superiors and in a special way our Province and that He give us the spirit of our Founder.

What I write is quite useless to you since you know everything I say and even more. But you know and understand our business and our needs. You can then get the efficacious interest, in what concerns us, of those who hold the keys... Thus, I trust that you will not be offended by what I say and that you will want to apprise our first Superiors, if you judge it useful for the good of all our houses and Brothers. On the other hand, I have only one desire now: to not have even the nominal responsibility (the title of Councilor) in administrative matters: then I'll learn to shut up, I'll leave the responsibilities to those in charge and I'll stop all importunate requests accused of pessimism...

All I have left to do now is renew all my best wishes, my most sincere homage and gratitude, declaring myself with all my heart, very dear Brother Procurator General, your humble and grateful servant.

Bro. Alfano



Echoes of the Jubilee in Brother Alfano's heart

Here are a few passages of the thanks he wanted to transmit to all the Brothers after the feasts celebrating his 50 years of religious life. He chose the day of the Nativity of Our Lady in 1939 to express his deep feelings.

« *The unanimous attentions of religious charity towards my poor person, my dear Superiors and my very dear Brothers, which you have wanted to join to the honors given Brother Isidoro, on the solemn date of his Golden Jubilee of religious life, (though I'm convinced that I deserved nothing but blame and embarrassment), deeply touched me! What marvelous influence grace exercises in noble and upright religious hearts! We note clearly the efficaciousness of the Heart of Mary on the souls of his chosen children: she has the habit of decorating them with indulgent and benevolent charity even towards the one who would need more compassion and commiseration. There's the real source of the attentions given me, though I deserved severity, rudeness and contempt. Faced with this reality, what can I say? First of all, I rejoice over all that was said and done for Brother Isidoro, true Little Brother of Mary, adorned with outstanding merit, virtue and talent. Then, how could I be put next to him? Not otherwise than as the shadow needed to highlight the painting. I rejoice over that and bless Providence which is happy to add another handle to the pickaxes that we are... In any case, I most willingly united myself to all of you, very beloved Superiors and Confrères, in hymns of gratitude to Our Good Lord for the great blessings He has given me in the Marist family for a half-century. And the constant hymn of thanksgiving is a primordial duty which I feel deeply in me... In all this work of almost half a century what can I discover if not an immense motif of gratitude towards*

the Lord and of humiliation towards me... If then I were allowed to address a persistent supplication to my excellent Confrères, I would want to beg them, with all the love they have for our Venerable Founder and for our religious Family to work zealously, with well-timed words and examples to strengthen our young ever more in the interior and supernatural life, to become imitators of our Venerable »
Father in devotion to the Immaculate...

**Circular which Bro. Pancrazio,
Visitor, sent to all the Brothers of Italy,
from Ventimiglia, 8 September 1939**

We find an echo of the jubilee in the letter to Sandro on 28 July 1939:

« You are the first to receive an answer for the good wishes which you sent me for this unexpected celebration and which were most repugnant to me. The excessively great kindness of Superiors and Confrères obliged me to accept it. That's the way the Lord wanted it. Now this heavy cross has passed. I can no longer bear certain deeply moving celebrations: the emotion almost gave me a stroke. I wanted or expected only those of paradise. There was nothing missing, not even the Papal Blessing and the best wishes of the Superior General. What a grand and exalted thing it is »
to be a little and humble Marist.



SECOND PART: Testimonies

The man and the saint we have discovered in the letters we find again in the testimonies of his Brothers, his former students, the relator of the Cause, as well as in that of the first theologian censor.

1. TESTIMONIES OF THE BROTHERS

- Brother Constant Delclos, born 20 April 1901, novice under Brother Alfano in 1917, wrote the following testimony from Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux: “Brother Alfano left among those who knew him an indelible mark of seriousness and firmness. Raised in the school of those who had known the Founder or had been his disciples, he understood that his duty was to become an exemplary imitator according to Saint Paul’s example: “I have transmitted to you what I myself have received.”

Faithful to the least observances, exact and punctual at every exercise, he was an incomparable model of regularity for the novices. It has been said of Saint Bernard: “Do you want to know his Rule? Look at his life. Do you want to know his life? Read the Rule.” Without exaggeration we could have said as much of our regretted Bro. Alfano.

As for us, novices of the “Centenary” (1917), we had the happiness of appreciating his admirable and untiring devotedness, making everybody’s daily chores easier. How he edified us at prayer by his behavior and manner of answering! In the morning, always the first in the chapel, we saw him making his Stations of the Cross. Prayer transformed him and just his sign of the cross was worth a sermon.

Under an exterior somewhat austere, Brother Alfano hid a sociable heart and qualities, which in intimate situations showed themselves lovingly and made him a faithful friend. Happy and pleasant in conversation, Brother Alfano knew how to regale the novices in recreation, taking part in their games (the yards all had a croquet set). In walks, when circumstances allowed him to go along, he knew how to interest us, telling stories always amusing and new.

In spite of his delicate health, we saw in him an uncommon energy and a strength of will which nothing could shake. He ate very little at table and seemed to feed off the readings we did during the meals. He was always easy to approach, so welcoming that the novices loved to be near him, opening up their heart with complete abandon.”

■ **Brother Gaetano Vinai** gives us one of his souvenirs: “I was 14... In 1923, at the beginning of Autumn, I had a sore foot and didn’t go out on a

walk Thursday. I was roaming around the house and met Bro. Alfano... He approached me and greeted me with a big smile. That won my heart. I went with him and we started a long dialogue on subjects I liked. He led me into the study hall and we began to talk about studies. He asked me what I

*Ventimiglia:
one of the
last photos
of Bro. Alfano,
with a group
of superiors.*





knew and I was happy not only to tell him but to be able to talk with him. He was very nice. Then we went into the garden... We were practically friends. At a certain moment he left, then returned with sugared almonds. He gave me all of them and I took them very pleased and happy. The day ended with a big goodbye... During recreations he was unbelievably open, with a smile and a way of doing such that everybody sought him out. He had his own very personal way of laughing “in peals” that was fantastic; he was heard far away. He laughed amusedly at the tall stories we told.”

- Testimony of **Brother Antelmo**: “During the war (World War I) he would send mimeographed circulars to his former novices and to the Brothers who happened to be at the front. They were filled with wise advice and news of the Congregation. He was ingenious in keeping them in touch with the Superiors. For Christmas 1917 he sent me a check for 5 lire, to make me happy that holyday. He succeeded and that enabled me to bring joy to all those who were in the trench with me.”

- During supper on 10 June 2006, a Saturday, we were celebrating Saint Marcellin Champagnat. I happened to be at table with **Bro. Flavio Testa**, 95 years old, and some other Brothers from San Leone Magno. The conversation turned to Bro. Alfano. Brother Flavio, who had known him very well, having been one of his Scholastics, told us: “Bro. Alfano was very strict with himself, but for others he had an extraordinary charm and attention. When we went out on walks and we sat in a clearing, we would all gather around him. He always told interesting stories and he laughed easily.”

2. TESTIMONIES OF FORMER STUDENTS

- Bishop ***Giuseppe Della Volta***, witness at the ordinary tribunal, traced in a few words the psycho-spiritual portrait of the Servant of God: “He was a faithful religious, a stranger to all guile and double dealing; he was always coherent in what he said or did, he was of seamless integrity.”
- Doctor ***Mario Colombino*** writes to Bro. Umberto, Provincial: “Brother Alfano was for us like a magnet which drew us. The lines of force which spread from his powerful personality used to transform us and impel us to imitate him and follow him on the arduous path of perfection... If we want to be honest with ourselves we have to admit that our spiritual life was in function of Brother Alfano’s. It was he who would make us taste the beauty of a life given to the Lord. The fascination which Bro. Alfano exercised was that way, and I was so attracted by his imposing personality that when he expounded or commented on the lives of the saints, the Gospel, the imitation of Jesus Christ, I had the impression he was talking about a world which he had never left and in which he lived daily.”

3. TESTIMONIES OF THEOLOGIAN

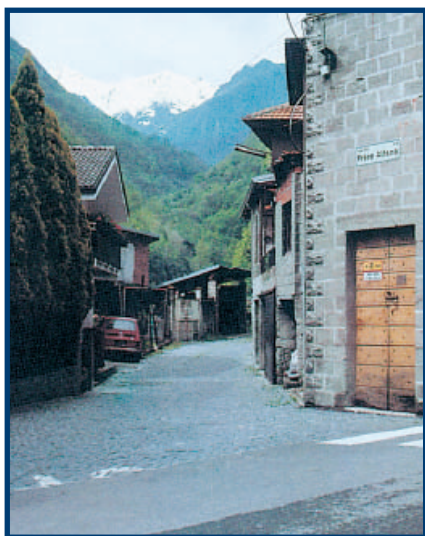
- ***The first theologian*** who had to examine the writings of Brother Alfano stated: “The harvest here is truly abundant, we have trouble choosing. The Servant of God had perfectly understood that religious life, lived fully, is a garden in which, under the light of the Holy Spirit, all virtues can flourish.”
- ***The Relator of the Cause***. The following text is from ***Father Valentino Macca***, O.C.D. He was



the Relator of the cause, the one who guarantees its value for the Congregation of the Saints, for the theologians, bishops and cardinals:

“A careful reading of the documents puts us in touch with a religious whom the early Oriental tradition would not have feared to place among the *“lovers of God”*, in the solid meaning we used to give to that expression. In fact, the Servant of God lives in a fullness of love which seems, in thought and word, to make him forget the years... Excerpts cited from the letters show a line of charity which not only holds its freshness, but which in the evening of life makes itself more generous and stronger. That makes us think of “the old wine,” an expression which in Saint John of the Cross defined “old lovers”...

Though the urges of the young are not frequent among the elderly, Brother Alfano shows an exceptional charity, whose words bind him strongly to the hearts of Jesus and Mary, but also open the spirit to the ends of the world, in these troubled years of war... (1943).



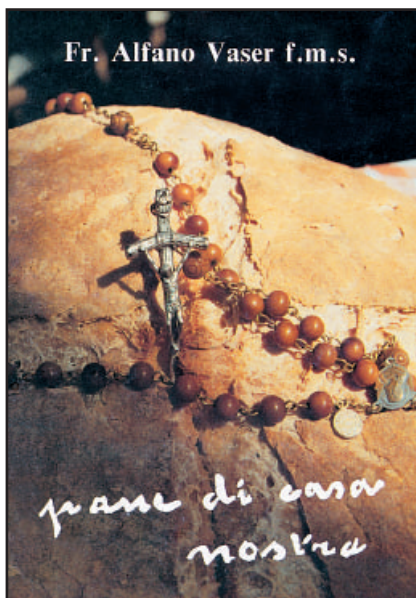
He was always in the presence of God... Prayer seemed to accompany him even at recreation times... He had arrived at what is so difficult: unity of life.”
(*Positio*, p.23)

*Hône: street
dedicated to Bro. Alfano*

4. PANE DI NOSTRA CASA

This book, reedited in July 2001, exists in the four languages of the Institute. It is a life of Bro. Alfano, easy and pleasant to read, only 48 pages, and which offers a well-balanced portrait of our model. The human qualities of Bro. Alfano show up often in this book. Here are some excerpts:

- The path traced in the souls of his pupils and the good influence he had exerted on them was such that, thirty years later, some of his former students will make the trip from Rome to Ventimiglia to see their former teacher. p.19
- He was chosen as formator because of “his perspicacity, his sound judgment, his frank talk, and welcoming of people.” p.20
- “I always have in front of me his austere face, but good and always welcoming, which at times reprimands us by his look, in absolute self-mastery.” p.23
- He wrote: “We cannot forget our martyrs of Catholic Spain nor the way of the cross of the Poles today, nor the Mexicans and Russians which has been going on so long. Let’s pray for the Church, the Pope, Catholic and tortured Poland, for our own country, for Europe prostrated, the Institute, the District, our Superiors and parents. God guides events and people. We are in good hands...” p.25
- In praying to the Lord he tells Him: “I thirst for truth, life, light, good, love. And You are the



source, the ocean of all good... I want to be with You and Your Immaculate Mother eternally." p.26

■ Brother Alfano was very gifted intellectually. At 50 years old, he had to learn Latin and he became an excellent teacher of those classes. He was a man of will, tenacious, a solid block, of great uprightness and broad culture. But joy and goodness were also two characteristic notes.

Those who knew him acknowledge: "He would show himself affable, especially in interpersonal relations; at recreation and on walks he was very pleasant, his joy was contagious... This man of strong character showed himself comprehending of those who made mistakes, sensitive to the needs of others, attentive to the problems of those near to him." – To the confrères called to military service during World War, I he would send letters full of news of the Congregation and sound advice, but he would also add money to make the holidays more pleasant. One of his disciples writes: "Brother Alfano's severity is a myth spawned in some heads." If we entered in dialogue with him, we found a father full of goodness, who knew how to swoop up passing difficulties and had words of comfort for all." pp.30, 42

Bro. Alfano's Testament

*J.M.J. — Villa Santo Stefano
Vintimiglia*

1 April 1930

1. *By divine goodness I own nothing personally. Everything put to my use is given by the Institute and belongs to it: Deo gratias!*

In this Institute of the Little Brothers of Mary I hope and desire to persevere till death. It will be sweet for me to die a member of the Family of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary and under the protection of that Mother of mercy, life, sweetness and our hope. We can rest happy and trusting in the arms of Jesus, Mary and Joseph.

2. *I'm leaving a few poor writings. It would probably be a good thing, and even a duty, to burn them all... But I'm keeping them and consider them as things not belonging to me; I am in debt to the Institute for everything; the decision, then, is up to the Superiors...*

It's all paper to be burned. But if in this jumble somebody thought he found something of use to somebody, all the better: laus Deo!... I'm not aware of having written in bad will or through lack of love for the very holy truth. This last sentiment is a pure gift of the Lord's divine kindness.

3. *I confess having, perhaps even often, saddened the heart of my venerated Superiors in many ways, and even without knowing it or wishing it, given my very imperfect character and my weaknesses: of them all I very humbly ask pardon...*

But I would want to beg all my confreres to be willing to always show the Superiors profound respect and perfect submission, as proof of a good, thankful, humble and

Bro. Alfano's Testament

pious spirit. And for that, let them think of praying for them continually, that the Good Lord may bless, strengthen and help them. This filial spirit will be rewarded by the Virgin Mary by outstanding spiritual favors and by an increase of Marist virtues...

4. I ask pardon, also, of all my confrères for the bad example and unpleasant things I caused them in any way whatsoever, even involuntarily and without realizing it. If, however, they want to remember me to the Lord, they will witness great charity for me. I thank them for it, I beg the Good Lord to reward them amply and generously.

I beg them all to look for the right spiritual advantage... To hunger and thirst for the Word of God is the sign that we are sons of God... True sons of Mary will always feel themselves more and more happy to belong to her, and they will grow in feelings of gratitude and love towards her.

I also would want very keenly that, in their wise and boundless solicitude the Superiors could always in all the Provinces of the Marist Institute provide adequately a solid religious formation to the young aspirants and young Brothers, in the houses of formation and later as well. We know only too well that great attention to the sources assure the future prosperity of all the houses, an increase in all the Institute and progressive spread of the apostolic spirit.

If we work this way, the Venerable Founder will not fail to smile down from heaven on those who continue his work, blessing them and smoothing out the most arduous difficulties.

Vaser Giuseppe Carlo — in religion — f. Alfano

Conclusion

Many brothers and other persons who knew Bro. Alfano, people from his home town where his memory remains green, have turned to him to request favors from the Lord, and there is already testimony concerning favors attributed to his intercession.

Some people today may be amazed to think that a humble, simple Marist Brother has become a powerful intercessor with God. But amazement may turn into a strong stimulus at the realization that what is outstanding in this humble son of the Aosta Valley, is that he lived an ordinary life in an extraordinary way. For us Christians, that is both consoling and educational, because we have in Bro. Alfano an example of generous loyalty even to the point of heroism in doing our daily duty, in loving God through Mary, in sanctifying ourselves by living our own "daily grind", even in an extraordinary way, whether it be: the daily life of a father or mother, son or daughter, at home and at work, in our free time, everywhere!

We Marist Brothers have in Bro. Alfano an example of our Rule, lived in unconditional love for Marcellin Champagnat and for the Institute which every day gives us our "home-baked bread", the example of a rosary-sayer" who filled the empty moments of his day by scattering Hail Mary's along life's way, putting us and others in contact with our Good Mother, so we can be led to her son Jesus, and so we can learn from her to practice the spirituality of the three first placed: in Bethlehem and Nazareth, on Calvary and at the altar.

"Home-baked bread": this simple expression which was so dear to Bro. Alfano, thus becomes for everyone an invitation to perfection and the formula for a simple, solid and secure type of holiness which takes a shortcut through Mary and rapidly leads us to Jesus.

(Pane di casa nostra, pag. 45)



PRAYER



*Lord, you gave
your servant Bro. Alfano
all the strength he needed
to accomplish his daily duties,
and great zeal for
the Christian education of youth.
Help me, too, in every moment
and every circumstance of my life
to know how best to love you
and serve my neighbor
simply and joyfully.
Through his intercession,
grant me the favor I am asking for...
Queen of the Holy Rosary,
my loving mother,
hasten the glorification
of your humble son
who worked so much to make you
known and loved.
Amen*

Our Father, Holy Mary, Glory be

*Venerable Brother Alfano
Pray for us.*

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

- 1873** 10 September: birth in Hône, Val d'Aosta, Italy, of Giuseppe Carlo Vaser (Bro. Alfano)
- 1886** Little Vaser goes to Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux.
- 1891** He professes the vow of Obedience.
He is the first Marist Brother from Italy.
- 1891-1903** He teaches at San Leone Magno and is taken up with the city of Rome: the art, the culture, the faith which this city offers.
- 1894** 16 October: He professes his Perpetual Vows.
- 1903-1941** He will be a formator.
- 1907** He professes the Vow of Stability.
- 1907-1922** Master of Novices for 15 years.
During these years he takes in 226 Novices, 144 of whom will persevere in the Marist life.
- 1925-1941** Director of the young Brothers studying.
- 1920 and 1932** Dates of the two General Chapters in which he took part as elected member.
- 1909-1941** He will be Provincial Councilor. He was appreciated for his balanced, clear and sure judgments.
- 1943** 1 March: He dies in the middle of World War II.
- 1988** His body is transferred to Rome and rests in the chapel of San Leone Magno.
- 1991** 22 January 1991: The Church publishes the decree on the heroicity of Bro. Alfano's virtues and he receives the title of Venerable.
- Briefly: Bro. Alfano was a formator for 35 years, Provincial Councilor for 32 years, Steadily progressing in holiness.



THE MARIST BROTHERS

A Family without frontiers:

At the heart of the World, at the heart of the Church
4,200 Brothers, from all continents, present in 76 countries.
Working as Christian educators
for the children and youth
to make out of them men and Christ's disciples.
A religious family that opens its spirituality,
its charism and its mission
to all Christians who want to live
and collaborate with the Brothers.

Guided by the pedagogical principles of Marcellin Champagnat :

- To educate well one must love!
- To educate well, one must train the whole person:
the citizen and the Christian!
- To educate well one must live with the young ones!
- To educate well one must offer
God's paternal and maternal tenderness.
- To educate well one must allow himself to be inspired
by Mary, Christ's Mother and Educator.
- To educate well, one must open his heart
to children and youth in difficulty.

Guided by Marcellin Champagnat's Spirituality

We go to the young ones
because we ourselves are loved by Jesus:
We go to the young ones with our eyes turned to Mary,
the Good Mother: "Our apostolic action is
a participation in her spiritual maternity." (Const. 84)

Our motto is:

"All to Jesus through Mary, all to Mary for Jesus."

With Marcellin's ambition:

"All the dioceses of the world attract us.

And with the aim of

"making Jesus known and loved".

Marcellin Champagnat (1789-1840)

We look at Marcellin as our father,
and learn from him
the values that he held dear.
We see in him:

- **a heart in love with God:**
a man of God, passionate for Jesus and Mary,
a man of prayer, a pilgrim in faith.

- **the heart of a father and a mother:**
a father who cared for his Brothers
as if they were his children,
a man of strength yet full of gentleness,
a man who knew how to bring joy
and laughter to others.

- **the heart of an apostle:**
a pastor who would listen to
and welcome others,
an apostle burning to proclaim
the Good News of Jesus,
a friend of children and youngsters,
an educator who was both firm
and compassionate,
a man of creativity and daring.

- **a heart without bounds:**
a man whose vision
extended beyond his own era,
embracing the whole world
and preparing missionaries;
a man who lived out his ideal
so intensely that many others wished
to be like him and to live like him.



The canonisation of our Founder,
18th april 1999, gave us great joy,
confirming that Father Champagnat
chose a path that leads to life.

We are even happier to see
that thousands of men and women
from all corners of the world
are enthusiastic about him,
including members
of other Christian churches and faiths,
and non-believers as well.

The plea of the prophet applies to us too:

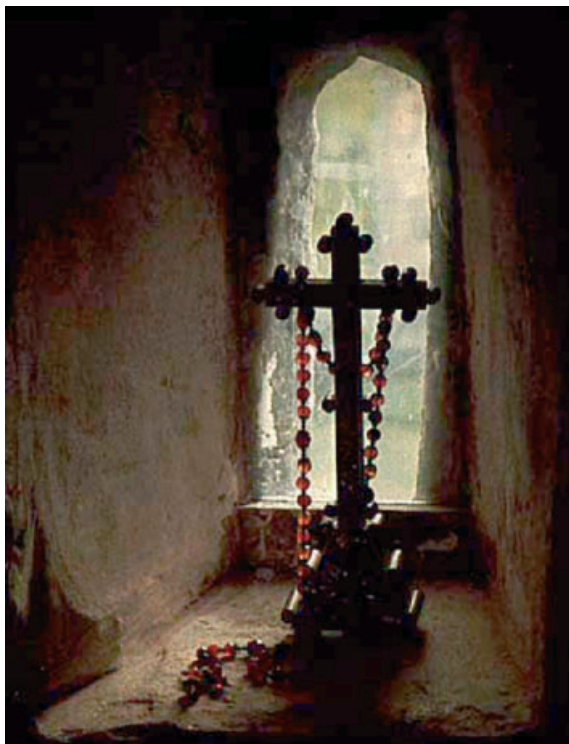
“Widen the space of your tent, ... for you will
burst out to right and to left” (Is 54: 2,3)

Father Champagnat is a saint
for the whole Church and the world.



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Other models of Marist holiness

Bro. Bernardo

Bro. François

Bro. Basilio

Bro. Henri

Bro. Crisanto

Bro. Lycarion

Bro. Eusebio

Bro. Laurentino

Bro. Virgilio

