

# FONDLY REMEMBERING FR. ROOZEN, SDB (1912-2012) CENTENNIAL



## By Rescina S. Bhagwani

*If he were alive, Father Godfrey Roozen, SDB, the founder of our Parish of St. John Bosco Makati would be 100 on May 20, 2012. It is most fitting for us, as a community, to take this opportunity to celebrate the life of an extraordinary Salesian and so, keep his legacy alive.*

*I am most fortunate to have known Fr. Roozen. Out of gratitude, I feel compelled to share this tribute, especially with those who never or barely knew him. As I was writing this article, I found myself intermittently crying and laughing, sorely but lovingly missing him.*

### Reflecting Don Bosco

My first encounter with Don Bosco was through Fr. Roozen, himself. Before I knew of Don Bosco's life, I witnessed Fr. Roozen's. It was only much later when I got to know the Saint did I realize that Fr. Roozen strongly exemplified the Salesian spirit.

### **Jolly Man**

What attracted me most to Fr. Roozen was his happy disposition and keen sense of humor. Unfortunately, his deep roaring voice and thick, Dutch accent deterred many from understanding his words. Fortunately, his vivid facial expressions and body language more than compensated for the lack of verbal clarity.

### **Passionate Worker**

Fr. Roozen worked long and hard. Even while he was in the hospital, he reviewed the parish financial reports daily. He worked with the strong conviction that the Lord would bless his mission with success.

### **Great Motivator**

Sharing his mission was key to the success of his ambitious projects. Fr. Roozen approached people confidently, not so much to ask for their help, but to allow them to generously give back to the Lord.

He solicited donations, mainly from abroad, and regularly sent project status reports to the donors who trusted him completely. When the parish building was gutted by fire, Fr. Roozen was able to quickly raise needed funds to rebuild a much bigger building in record time.

### **Humble Leader**

Fr. Roozen led by example. He taught his people to work hard and well by doing so, himself. He was never bossy and dealt kindly with both parishioners and parish staff.

I can never forget how, on the Sunday after he had attended the Parish Renewal Experience (PREX), during all the Masses, Fr. Roozen knelt and sincerely begged his parishioners for forgiveness in case he had offended them in any way.

### **Avid Devotee of the Blessed Sacrament and the Blessed Mother**

Like Don Bosco, Fr. Roozen was deeply devoted to the Blessed Sacrament. Despite warnings that the Parish building was on fire, he calmly continued celebrating Mass.

He often talked about Mama Mary's powerful intercession and vigorously promoted the Block Rosary movement. His wish to "go home" on the feast of our Blessed Mother was granted when he died on December 8, 1997, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception.

### Nurturing the Parish

As we prepare for the 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the dedication of the Parish church, it is fitting to recall how Fr. Roozen painstakingly built the church which now serves the spiritual needs of parishioners and workers from the offices nearby and those from the Central Business District.

### **First Priorities**

When the SJB Parish was newly established, Fr. Roozen's first task was to gather his flock. He motivated the regular churchgoers of the small chapel by the school to become active parishioners. He then went house-to-house across the new Parish to personally approach the parishioners who once belonged to San Ildefonso in Dulo, Pio del Pilar. He encouraged them to join the Parish organizations which he had formed.

Within a few months, the Parish was abuzz with life.

The tireless priest lost no time in building a new church — one that would be a fitting house of worship. He tapped prominent architect and parishioner, Jose Maria Zaragoza, and renowned sculptor and



Don Bosco alumnus, Eduardo Castrillo, for the project.

In March, 1978, barely two years since the founding of the Parish, the stylishly modern Parish church was completed, thanks to the substantial donations that Fr. Roozen amassed. Today, the church is a popular Makati landmark, a lush oasis amidst the concrete and glass city of Makati.

#### Great Steward/Administrator

Fr. Roozen had a strong business sense. Having mastered wedding ceremonies at his former post at the Pope Pius X Center, he made SJB Parish church one of the most popular matrimonial venues in Metro Manila.

He opened the Religious Store and built funeral chapels to help sustain the smooth running of Parish operations.

Fr. Roozen taught parishioners how to "give

unto God". Once, I asked him why the Parish didn't offer free baptism and weddings to poor parishioners. He replied that if people can spend for movies and fast-food, they can afford to offer as much to the Lord.

Despite his great success in generating funds, he spent money very wisely, always for Parish essentials and hardly for his personal needs.

#### Good Shepherd

As Parish priest, Fr. Roozen always made time for his flock. He regularly visited families in the Parish and gave inspirational talks to Parish organizations; as a result, organizations, especially those for the Youth, flourished.

No matter how tired he was, Fr. Roozen was always smiling. He loved

administering the sacraments: confessions, baptisms and most especially, marriages. He took pride in having solemnized thousands of marriages and counseled couples to bring them closer to God. He was staunchly committed to preserving the sanctity of marriage and uncompromising in matters of purity.

Fr. Roozen motivated his parishioners to be prayerful and to be of service. He molded his parishioners subliminally – not through words but through his life.

**Maraming salamat, minamahal naming Fr. Godfrey! MABUHAY!**

*Fr. Roozen solemnized the marriage of the author and her husband, the second couple to wed in the new Parish. He baptized all their three children, now grown-up. During the three years he was confined at MMC, Rescy was a regular visitor. She attributes to his indelible influence her continued active service in the Parish he loved.*

Laying of the cornerstone - Aug. 15, 1977



...with Mother Teresa of Calcutta



Dedication of the church - March 4, 1978



...confined at MMC



...solemnizing Mr. & Mrs. Gandhi Bhagwani's wedding

