



Congregazione dei Rogazionisti
Curia Generalizia

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Rome, May 13, 2020
Our Lady of Fatima

Prot. No. 98 / 2020
Subject: Fr. Pietro Cifuni

To: The Most Rev. Superiors
of the Rogationist Circumscriptions
and Religious Communities

Dearest Confreres,

A month ago, on April 13, Easter Monday, Fr. Pietro Cifuni departed from us. He left "in silence", as someone commented, according to his style of commitment and discretion. He left us in the circumstances of the coronavirus pandemic, as it had happened also to other confreres, with the painful conditions of not being able to gather around his remains to accompany him to the meeting with the Lord and to bid him the last fraternal farewell.

While I speak of him to you, my heartfelt thought goes also to all the other confreres who have left us during these last months: Fr. Vito Girasoli, Fr. Mario Gallucci, Fr. Mario Germinario, Bro. Giuseppe Balice, Fr. Arcangelo Casamassima, Fr. Gioacchino Cipollina, and Fr. Antonio Magazzù. It is tempting to tell you about each of them, to share cherished memories of them that I carry in my heart. We do well to remember them all, as traveling companions, with whom we shared joys, labors, and sometimes even suffering. We have formed a new family with them, with human and spiritual ties. Each of them has left a particular memory in some communities or Circumscriptions. If at this moment we remember Fr. Pietro Cifuni in particular, it is because he has guided and served the whole Congregation for 24 years.

Our memory is not meant to be a celebratory remembrance. We know well that Fr. Pietro, like the other confreres we have mentioned, left us examples of virtue but, at the same time, he too had his weaknesses, like anyone of us. We feel the need to remember him because, for a considerable time, he had been a great gift for the whole Congregation. We cannot help thinking of him as a "talent" that the Lord has given to our Religious Family, a talent that has multiplied considerably over the years.

He was born in Pisticci (Matera) on January 3, 1932. He grew up in the difficult period of the war, in a rural setting, where he was educated to the healthy values of simple and humble life of toil and sacrifice, in a context of great honesty and religious faith. Over the years, he had cherished this link to his origins. He entered the Congregation and developed his cultural interests. He completed his theological studies at the Gregorian University and graduated in classical letters from the University of Messina.

The moment he engaged in the apostolate, after the priestly ordination in 1957, the Superiors saw him as the wise, upright and prudent person, suitable for dedicating himself in the field of formation and teaching, as well as in the field of economy and administration. In 1968, he was appointed Superior of the Mother House of Messina, which housed the Center of Studies for Religious students of Philosophy.

At the end of this mandate, taking part in the General Chapter of 1974, he was elected General Treasurer, a position to which he was reelected during the following Chapter of 1980. At the end of his mandate, in the General Chapter of 1986, he was elected Superior General and then reelected for a second term in 1992.

As briefly recalled in his obituary, "during his mandate as Superior General, he initiated the important path of decentralization of the Congregation, supported the missionary commitment in the Philippines and Africa, and started new openings in India and Albania. Furthermore, the beatification of the Founder Father and the organization of the Laity associated with the Congregation happened in the years of his mandate. He left us several Circular Letters on the history and charism of the Congregation."

We should recall that the path of decentralization was not easy and recognize that Fr. Pietro, assisted by his Council, had been able to guide it with wisdom, prudence, and constant dialogue with confreres, not hesitating to review certain decisions when he recognized them as inappropriate.

He sought good relations with the Daughters of Divine Zeal, sharing with them and with the whole Family of the Rogate important events of the two Congregations.

He had particular care in promoting the Laity associated with the Congregation, which he tried to accompany also with the closeness in particular anniversaries and on the occasion of visits to the Houses of the Congregation.

He paid attention to the Confreres and Communities, especially of the Circumscriptions which were experiencing greater difficulties.

We remember his intuition to promote the missionary openness of the Congregation, in a period when Italy did not have the current vocational crisis. At the level of the General Government and the Italian Circumscriptions, he looked alongside with local needs and the urgent needs that arose from new openings, and met the generous availability of many confreres to leave for the missions.

Fr. Pietro, with the respective Councils, was careful to seize the opportunities that arose to acquire lands and build the Houses that favored the development of the new missions. Likewise, in Italy, following a previous practice and his economic vision, he promoted the increase in the Congregation's real estate assets. We recognize that, as is the nature of things, some of these choices were not unanimously agreed by all, and yet have been driven by the keen interest for the good of the Congregation.

Without any doubt, for Fr. Pietro, the aspect of the Congregation that was closest to his heart was the Confreres, whom he welcomed with great respect, attention, and concern; listening to them, sharing any difficulties, supporting them with a truly paternal closeness. He naturally felt inclined to take care of human relationships, not only with the Confreres and their family but also with the members of the Family of the Rogate, as well as with the people, who for various reasons, crossed paths with his life and work. His relationships were not anonymous but were particularly close, especially towards those he encountered in difficulties and suffering.

For his character, he was emotional and impulsive, but during his life, he had learned to manage his emotions and to deal also with difficult situations with great balance and serenity.

From the Circular Letters that he left to us emerge his fidelity to the priestly ministry, the religious life, and the attachment to the Father Founder and the Congregation, but he handed over to us his most important teaching with the exemplary witness of his daily life.

Fr. Pietro was a great gift that the Divine Superiors gave to our Congregation. I confirm what I wrote informing of his demise: "Surely, with all the limitations and frailties that accompany us throughout our individual life, he had contributed in writing an important page in the history of our Congregation and for this, we are grateful to him. "

The confirmation of the great humanity of Fr. Pietro, if needed at all, is obtained from the countless testimonies of affection that were received on social media at the news of his death.

I wish to quote some words of his successor in the government of the Congregation, Fr. Giorgio Nalin: (Fr. Cifuni was) "a competent person in the economic field, cultured, simple, affable, attentive, and helpful; a man of profound humanity who expressed attention and support for his confreres; a Religious attached to the Congregation and a profound connoisseur of its history; a faithful priest: he had always been a father and a guide for me."

The Superior of the St. Hannibal Province, Fr. Alessandro Perrone, after recalling the reasons for gratitude that we have towards Fr. Pietro for what he did for the Congregation, specified: "Father Pietro was above all a dearest Brother, cultured, simple, affable, attentive, and helpful towards those who approached him, always faithful to the commitments of religious life and the priestly ministry."

Still some more testimonials :

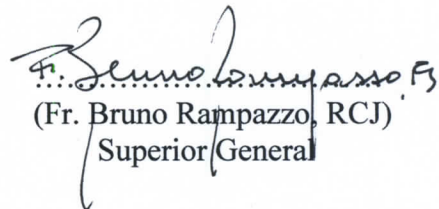
"We are truly indebted to him for his noble vision and magnanimous support for the starting of our Congregation here in India. Being a committed and passionate son of our Father Founder, with great love and concern, in the year 1987, he sent our great pioneers Frs. (Antonio) Barbangelo, Filippo (Puntrello), and Vito (Lipari) to India to start Rogationists Journey in this mission land. From then onwards, he had given tremendous support and efficient effort for our growth here. Being the Superior General for two consecutive times, he manifested a special concern and care for this mission. As a matter of fact, he made several visits to our land during his mandate and expressed his deep love for India" (Fr. Joby Kavungal).

"A lovable and beloved man has gone; he had marked the history of the Congregation of Rogationists for the last forty years, with a passionate dedication to it, with the weight of relevant culture and considerable experience, with an affability beyond the 'ordinary', with the nobility of the heart and an incomparable generosity" (Fr. Angelo Sardone).

Dearest ones, we can continue on with other edifying testimonies. We want to express our feelings to the Lord to tell him that we miss Fr. Pietro and that we renew our gratitude for having given him to our Congregation.

With Fr. Pietro, and with the confreres who have left us behind, when we fraternally remember them, we express the strong sense of belonging, a bond that does not end when they leave us to return to the Father's House but acquire a different dimension.

With these sentiments, renewing the invitation to keep the memory of our dear departed ones alive and remember them in the prayer of suffrage, I greet you with affection in the Lord.


(Fr. Bruno Rampazzo, RCJ)
Superior General