

(August 30, 1910 - November 11, 1987)

Anthony Rotunno worked as a bank teller for fifteen years prior to entering our Marist Brotherhood in January 1944. His investiture took place later that year in Poughkeepsie, New York and he made his perpetual vows in 1950. For many years Roch served the students of Mount Saint Michael Academy and the province as a teacher. He also taught at Saint Ann's Academy, New York City, and St. Peter's, Haverstraw, New York. He died suddenly in Miami, Florida where he was retired.

Brother John Herrmann delivered Roch's eulogy at Mount Saint Michael Academy, Bronx, New York.

I first met Brother Roch in the Summer of 1962 when I was a scholastic. We visited Taconic Lodge Camp in Cold Spring for a day; he talked enthusiastically about his experiences that year as a fifth-grade teacher here at the Mount. I soon perceived that he was a caring, disciplined, and at times worrying kind of person; his students were always uppermost in his mind. From that time until 1972, we met only now and then, but, on each occasion, my initial impression remained true.

Brother Roch died on November 11, the Feast of St. Martin of Tours. The Entrance Hymn for the Mass of that day is very applicable to Roch: "I will raise up for myself a faithful priest [brother]; he will do what is in my heart and in my mind, says the Lord." Fidelity to the Lord was a daily conviction that Roch lived out. Note also the Communion Antiphon of that day's Mass: "I tell you, anything you did for the least of my brothers, you did for me, says the Lord." How often in later years, these words fell from Roch's lips with a raised gesturing finger, as if to warn all of us that this was the very purpose of our actions and activity.

Then, in today's Mass Paul writes to the Thessalonians: "You know very well that the day of the Lord is coming like a thief in the night. . . . Let us not be asleep like the rest, but awake and sober!" Or, consider the Alleluia Verse: "Be faithful until death, says the Lord, and I will give you the crown of life." It is amazing to reflect how appropriate scriptural texts for the Mass on the day of his death and this Funeral Mass are when applied to Brother Roch. Like a thief in the night, death came suddenly. But, he was awake and about the Lord's business that morning. He was faithful in prayer and brotherliness. Moreover, "he will do what is in my heart and in my mind, says the Lord."

What was in the heart and mind of the Lord for Anthony Rotunno many years ago? His call to religious life back in the early 1940s was unique in a way. He was already a young man in his thirties, secure in his bank position, happy and devoted to his family, and, seemingly quite successful in life. However, Christmas Eve of 1942 marked a change in his life. Brother Roch told only a few how, after working late that evening in the bank, he arrived home fatigued. For the first time in years he told the family that he would not accompany them to Midnight Mass as was their custom: he would attend Mass the next day instead. Before the family left for Midnight Mass, Brother Roch was already asleep. During the night, he awoke, and partly dreaming, partly conscious, he thought he saw Our Lady and himself

surrounded by small children. When he opened his eyes wide, the vision was gone.

This experience stayed with Brother Roch and tugged constantly at him. What did it mean? He finally shared the experience with his confessor who interpreted it to mean the Lord through his Mother was calling him to religious life. The confessor suggested that Roch become a Brother so he could teach young children. Since Our Lady seemed to be calling him and he already prayed daily to her, the confessor advised that Roch should enter the Marist Brothers because they are dedicated in her name. And so in 1943 at the age of thirty-three (the same age as the Lord, he would quip) he entered the Novitiate of the Marist Brothers in Poughkeepsie. Later, Roch and his superiors discerned that his apostolate of teaching would be at the elementary level for twenty-eight years: three at St. Ann's Academy in New York City, three at St. Peter's Elementary School in Haverstraw, New York and twenty-two years here at the Mount as fifth-grade teacher.

When I arrived here as principal in 1972, Roch had retired from active classroom teaching. He asked me to assist him in finding work that would be fulfilling, needed, and compatible with his waning energy level. Together we settled on his taking over as Moderator of the Mission Collection. He was given a display case in the cafeteria and exhibited there many mission projects and letters from missionaries, archdiocesan mission officials, and benefactors. Daily he recorded the mission homeroom collections and if the result for a specific class for that day was low, he would fling open the door and announce, "This is the Lord's need, not mine. Dig deep," as he proceeded around the room. In one year he raised the mission collection total to \$5,000, a 75% increase.

In 1977, wishing to serve the needs of the poor, Brother Roch joined us as a member of the founding community at Sacred Heart Middle School in the South Bronx. There he diligently kept accurate attendance records, and assisted with supervision of the yard at lunchtime in both the middle and primary schools. In addition he served meals weekly at the senior citizens center, where for many, he often told us later that evening, it was their main or only meal for that day. He also visited weekly two shut-in gentlemen; this ministry left him both sad and joyful at times for he was a caring and loving person.

It was here at Sacred Heart that I finally gained an insight into his deep prayer life. By this time, when alone, he would often speak aloud and could be overheard, even with the door closed. "O Lord, help those persons; they need your love." "Lord, it's your work here, not ours; come and assist us." If you asked him to pray for an intention, your name was immediately entered into his little black book and you were prayed for daily. Once at Sacred Heart I asked him to pray for something very important. About a month later Roch asked me if the intention had been granted. When I responded, "Yes, thank you for the prayers," he sighed, "I wish you had told me sooner; there are so many others to pray for." Then he permitted me to glance at his little black book. The list of persons and intentions was at least two pages long.

Beginning in 1978, Roch brought this same devotedness to prayer and to others to Marist High School in Chicago. He devotedly assisted Brother Lawrence in the computer lab doing "little things," in his words, and receiving and caring for visitors to the community. He always had a warm welcome and handshake, a high hearty laugh, a sincerity, a worried yet loving concern for others. In his simplicity and fidelity to the Lord's calling, he was a true son of Father Champagnat, our Founder, and through his Beloved Lady, a blessing as Brother to us. The Communion Verse

of today's Mass: "I tell you solemnly, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours, says the Lord," is again so appropriate for Roch's life. And so, dear friend, Brother, now it is our turn to pray: "Lord, may he rest in your eternal love and peace forever. Amen."