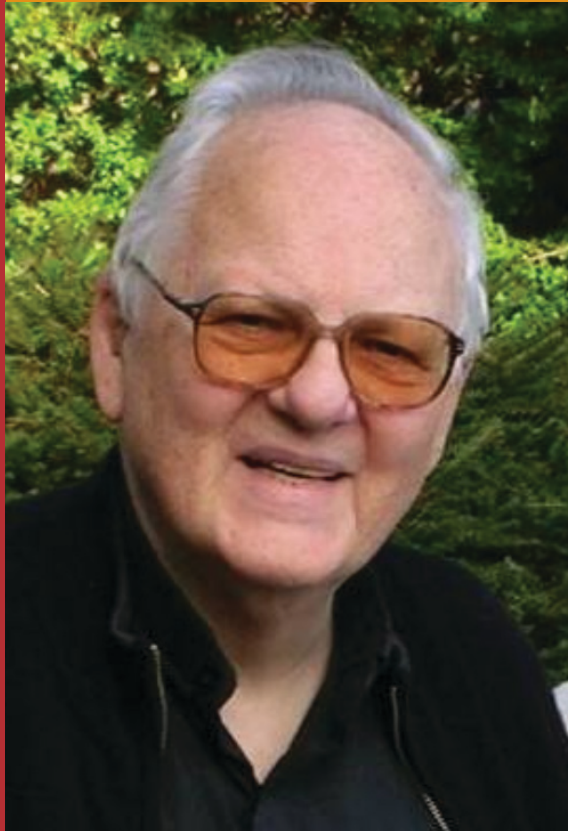


11/2017

In memoriam

Xaverian biographical profiles



Fr. Robert Sarsfield Maloney

16 November 1929 ~ 4 October 2017

In memoriam

Fr. Robert (Bob) Sarsfield Maloney

Lawrence (MA – USA)
November 16, 1929

Haverhill (MA – USA)
October 4, 2017

On December 3, 1976, Fr. Augusto Luca wrote to the Superior General, Mons. Giovanni Gazza:

Rev. Fr. General,

I am writing to let you know that I was struck and negatively impressed by what was written about the elderly Xaverian Missionaries in the latest issue of *Mosquito*.

I, who, like you, have had the opportunity to visit our missionaries and have repeatedly admired the dedication of the hidden heroism of these confreres.

I am particularly sorry for the reference to Fr. Maloney. I've been in Bangladesh three times and I have heard only good things about him. I was told, among other things, how he very humbly carried on his shoulders the government inspector as they crossed the river, to whom, later on, the Fathers had to give up their room and their bed.

A small party was organized when Fr. Maloney was recalled back home. In attendance there was also one of the city's businesspeople known for his attachment to Islam. During the gathering he took the floor and said something more or less in these terms: "I have never set foot in this

school until today, but from my house every day I have been able to observe the missionaries who run this school. I have often seen them come back from the harbor, muddy up to their knees, carrying loads on their back. I saw them working from morning to night with a truly admirable dedication and patience. And this was done without any personal gain”.

I'm sorry I don't remember all that was said, but I can say that up to that time I didn't know Fr Maloney. Yet from the stories I heard I came to the conclusion that he was an excellent missionary, one who was not afraid of either sacrificing himself or humbling himself all for the Kingdom of God [...].

Sincerely, *Fr. Augusto Luca.*

“He was an excellent missionary, one who was not afraid of sacrificing himself or humbling himself all for the Kingdom of God”. This is the common thread that unites “the work” and the “days” of the long human and spiritual journey of Fr. Robert Maloney. His interior life was, on the one hand, uninterruptedly enclosed, submerged and embraced by the gratuitous and saving love of Christ, and on the other, this was inseparably intertwined with apostolic action. In the light of the total gift of self to God and neighbor, he never separated, so to speak, the Ignatian programming motto “To the greater glory of God” and the Pauline preoccupation “Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel”.

Robert Maloney was born on November 16, 1929 in Lawrence, in the state of Massachusetts (USA), together with the city of Salem in the seat of Essex County. The city stands on the banks of the Merrimack River.

The Maloney family had migrated from Ireland to the United States to Lawrence, in 1848, escaping the potato famine. Bob's relatives were very active in politics in the Republican Party.

“I attended local schools,” Bob would recall in his personal notes “*Sacred Places*”. “I was proud of the city, its people, the work; we all grew up learning from the people who described their work in the factories: sorters, spinners, weavers, cloth inspectors, repairers ... and appreciating the work in the factories done by long lines of immigrants [...]. I have traveled the world, but in my heart and in my mind, I have often rehashed past events, recalled happenings, remembering people, so that this *New England Mill Town* has acquired an extraordinary “sacredness” [...]. Other times, of course, there were other experiences. But Lawrence tells me much about who I am, where I've been and from where I came from. The structure of the buildings speaks, every corner awakens in my mind the memories of people whose lives have touched mine and mine theirs”.



In grades 5–8 of primary school, Bob had the Xaverian Brothers as teachers. Every year he had to write a short composition on the life of Saint Francis Xavier.

In high school, a Marist Brother was experimenting with psychological tests, and almost all the members of his class were classified as “having a vocation to the priesthood”.

In 1946, after completing High School, being too young for military service, he went to work for a year in a department store. In 1947, he had the chance to read the first publication of the Xaverians in the USA written by Fr. Mario Frassinetti, sx. In the background were images of gods with the clear wording, taken from the *Letter to the Romans* (10:13–15): “For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” But how can they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how can they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone to preach? And how can people preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring [the] good news!” On a following message about the Xaverian Missionaries, published in *The Pilot* (*The Catholic Weekly published by the Archdiocese of Boston*), he read: “Be a trailblazer for Christ!” The passage from the Letter to the Romans and the message in *The Pilot* were a “summons” to him.

He entered the Xaverian Institute in Holliston (MA) on September 14th 1947 — the day of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross... and it was raining heavily! His family tried to discourage him from entering an Italian community, partly because one of his cousins had entered the Stigmatines in Boston and then had left due to their overly stressed Italian features.

His vocation to the missionary priesthood finds its origins in a visit to his school by Bishop Raymond Lane, a Maryknoll Missionary, who had grown up in the parish of Lawrence. In 1936 he became Apostolic Prefect and in 1940 he was named Bishop of Fushun in China. He had visited all the classrooms and written Chinese characters on the blackboard.

On October 4, 1952, Robert, at the age of twenty-three, entered the novitiate of the Xaverian Missionaries in Petersham (MA). He made his First Profession, on October 5, 1953. He studied Theology and completed his studies at the Marist Fathers Seminary, Framingham (MA), and Columban Missionaries Seminary, in Milton (MA). On April 21, 1957, he made his Perpetual Profession.

On this occasion, on 23 April 1957, he wrote to Fr. Giovanni Gazza, former Superior General:

Most Reverend Father Gazza,

I wanted to write sooner, but recently, I was busy preparing for my Perpetual Profession, which took place two days ago during the solemn function of the Easter Vigil. I am a Xaverian forever, a son of our Pious Society and of our Venerable Founder! Deo gratias.

I also wished to make my profession in your presence and receive from you the embrace of a true father. If I have received the grace of Perpetual Profession, it is right to acknowledge the part you played in preparing for this “offer.”

During the Easter Vigil, I read once again the many Circular Letters you sent me during these years. Your exhortations, your thoughts, your encouragement have been a direct preparation for my commitment.

Now, Father, I can also communicate to you the joyful news of my upcoming Ordination to the Priesthood. The great day has finally arrived: on June 8, in the church of the Immaculate Conception, in my city, I will be ordained a priest.

You once wrote to me: “When you receive Holy Orders, know that I feel very close to you and rejoice with you. I thank and praise the Lord for the great things God has done in you.” Certainly in such holy days, it is impossible to forget all those who followed me with their prayers and their paternal kindness. In my heart there is a special place for you, Father [...]. Thank you!

Affectionately in Jesus and Mary, *Robert S. Maloney s.x.*

“In my heart there is a special place for giving thanks...” In Robert Maloney the memory of the “gifts from above” received, is never separated from gratitude towards those who have been good to him.

To state, therefore, that his human and spiritual journey was a “Magnificat” — a toast to God — is not at all out of place. After all, he could not but be grateful to God since gratitude itself is God’s gift.

Undoubtedly the “Magnificat” of Fr. Maloney is the leitmotif of his life and of himself, an experience we will never be able to penetrate fully. Still, an echo of his gratitude is continually present throughout his life and can be seen in his writings, where praise and thanksgiving to the Lord and sincere appreciation for those who have been his traveling companions is evident.

He was ordained to the Priesthood in Lawrence in his home parish on June 8, 1957. He was then sent to Rome for graduate studies in Dogmatic Theology. He graduated in 1959 from the Pontifical University “Saint Thomas Aquinas”, also known as the *Angelicum* with a Doctoral Degree in Theology.



In November 1959, Fr. Maloney was destined to the Xaverian Region of East Pakistan — today Bangladesh¹. He wrote:

In 1959, I received the missionary cross from Pope John XXIII. The Mission was an adventure in the front-lines.

In Bangladesh I found a second home, and “mission” became aid, concern, sharing, cooperation, learning from each other.

Then, I was recalled to serve elsewhere. My “missionary” journey led me somewhere else, but my first love remained “Bangladesh”.

The memories were so deeply embedded that my recent trip in November 1992, 28 years later, allowed me to open once again the album of the realities I had experienced. Names and faces came back to me and events were vividly remembered.

I tried to find a reason why the visit was filled with emotion. Now I know why. I have not been able to forget my years in Bangladesh and the local people have never forgotten me.

When I asked the reason for their reception, I was told: “We must remember what we have received to be able to pass it on to others, so that they too will remember and pass on to others what they receive”.

Is this not the message of the Eucharist, the true meaning of “mission” and “the value of witness” of those who dedicate their lives to this ministry in the “Church which is itself missionary”?

After a brief period of studying the local language, “ennobled by the great poets Robindranath Tagore and Nozrul Islam”, Fr. Maloney was appointed principal of the “Saint Paul” High School of Shelabunia (1960–64).

In the personal notes, already mentioned, he recalled that “during my term, the student body grew to 400 students”. “I experienced riots that have decimated local villages, and endured the yearly severe cyclonic storms. In 1964 I was recalled and sent to serve in a different place, but my mind continued to be connected to the school located at the edge of the jungle. I saw the youth with the eye of my mind. Bangladesh is one of the poorest countries of the world. The fact that I briefly lived there has bound me through a deep affection: to the place, to the people, to the aspirations of the school. And I

¹ Requested by the Pope to open a mission in East Pakistan – Bangladesh, the Xaverian missionaries, from 1952 (the year in which the first Xaverians arrived in Jessore) until now, have contributed with over one hundred missionaries. Some of them ended their days consumed by fatigue; someone else, victim of hatred, received the crown of martyrdom. The growth of this mission was slow, because it started with nothing, it blossomed, as the flower of peace, in the midst of much suffering caused by war, natural disasters, hunger and social inequalities. For further information on the Xaverians in Bangladesh, see Silvano Garelo, *The country of a thousand rivers*, in AA.VV., *Xaverian Missionaries*, Parma, Xaverian Missionary Institute, 1996.

often wonder why [...]. When I left “St Paul’s High School” in 1964, both students and teachers received a gold necklace with a crucifix, made by one of the local goldsmiths. It was something simple yet full of meaning. In the long run, the necklaces have been lost. On the occasion of my 25th anniversary of priesthood I gave them a fine golden necklace with the crucifix, which I held with great affection [...]».

These writings, no doubt, reflect the inner state of his soul and have a great autobiographical value. Sower of evangelical wheat in Bangladesh, Fr. Maloney was a tireless worker in the Lord’s vineyard. His attitude constitutes an important model and point of reference, as demonstrated by the testimonies of the confreres who were with him Bangladesh:

We all remember with gratitude his generous service to the Xaverian Family and we, in particular, cannot forget what he has done in Bangladesh. There are many, especially among the elders, that still remember him.

May the Lord welcome him into His house and grant him the reward promised to His faithful servants and apostles (*Fr. Giacomo Gobbi*, Regional Superior).



In the summer of 1964 Fr. Maloney returned to the US. New tasks awaited him. He was a teacher in the Xaverian Seminary, in Holliston, Massachusetts, and in Wisconsin (1964–65), Rector of the House of Franklin, Wisconsin (1965–67), Regional Superior of the Xaverian Region of the USA, in Wayne, NJ (1968–71) and Vicar General and Procurator General in Rome, Italy, (1971–83).

He carried out these services with a great sense of responsibility always mindful of Jesus’ instructions: “When you have done all you have been commanded, say, ‘We are unprofitable servants; we have done what we were obliged to do.’” (*Lk. 17:10*).

Aware of being “apostle by vocation and chosen to proclaim the Gospel of God”, Fr. Maloney still always acted as “servant of Christ Jesus” (*Rom 1: 1*), without demanding rewards, honors, privileged places. For he knew that, if he had been able to accomplish something good-true-beautiful, this was a gift from God.

Fr. Bob brought a new energy and focus to his “leadership” role. This was the result of his years in Bangladesh, his powerful experience of the global Xaverian Community during his studies in Italy, his years in the General Direction, his frequent meetings with confreres coming from and going

to our missions as well as his presence at a number of General Chapters. He was able to reflect the particular gift that our Founder Saint Guido M. Conforti is for us in the USA. He had the unique ability of connecting people with the places where our confreres work, thus making us what we really are: global community. He initiated a creative addition to our graduate studies program: an overseas experience which afforded our students of Theology a significant period of time in the Missions to confirm their path to missionary life as priest and brothers. Fr. Bob was always attentive to our students, getting to know them well, getting to know their families and the particular talents and gifts each of them was to the community. (*Fr. Rocco Puopolo*)

I have some good memories of Fr. Robert, of his style marked by fraternity, his serenity in speaking, his attachment to the Xaverian Family.

I remember his election as Vicar General, during the General Chapter of 1971, celebrated in Parma, when I was a student. I remember the conversation I had with him at the Theology House in Parma, when he came for the “canonical visit”. He came knocking on the door of my room! Meaningful exchange! I remember his kindness towards the confreres — he always tried to make you feel at ease. I saw him in Holliston (MA) and in Bangladesh: his calmness engaged you.

May he now enjoy eternal happiness with the Lord, with his loved ones and with all those who have been proclaimers of the Gospel. (*Fr. Gian Alfonso Oprandi*)

The witness of perseverance and faithfulness given by Fr. Maloney is a treasure that we keep alive in our memory. We gratefully acknowledge his long years of generous service which he offered to the Congregation with which he fully identified himself. (*Fr. Juan Antonio Flores Osuna, Mexico – Regional Superior*)

We cannot but remember with immense gratitude the affection and esteem Fr. Robert displayed towards our Congregation during the years he was Vicar General in Rome, and particularly through the research he made for our Mother Celestina. He had a filial affection and a great admiration for her. With his tireless writings and research in order to better clarify her origins, he helped us to know and love her more. We are immensely grateful for this. (*Sister Giordana Bertacchini, Superior General of the Missionaries of Mary – Xaverian Sisters*)

Father Bob was a fundamental instrument in the development and growth of the Xaverians in the USA [...]. We can consider him as the elder brother and almost the co-founder, and if you allow me to use the expression, he was a “living book” about the history of our presence in the USA. We are very grateful for his service to the confreres and for his dedication to the

dream of Saint Guido Maria Conforti: “Make of the world one single family”.

Many of us, Xaverian and not, owe him a lot for his concern that made us feel welcome and appreciated and for his kindness and attentiveness. His example and service to the Xaverian Family encouraged us to, above all, go beyond ourselves and think of others, starting with the confreres with whom we live. Gentleness and dialogue, listening and forgiveness were the ways that would have helped us a lot to achieve holiness together and “make the world one family” [...].

We are grateful to God for “the special gift” of Fr. Bob (*Fr. Marco Marangone, USA – Regional Superior*).

The most extensive testimony about the life lived by Fr. Maloney as a human and spiritual adventure, which becomes an important model and point of reference, is that of *Fr. Gabriele Ferrari, former Superior General*:

When I heard about the death of Fr. Robert S. Maloney, friends called him Bob, I was shocked and was left speechless. Another of my confreres, one of my closest, is gone. Slowly, slowly the ranks are dwindling... But it is not just for this reason that his departure struck me. For Bob was truly my friend.

We did not know each other until the end of June 1971, when we came together in Nemi to prepare the IX General Chapter. He was the delegate of the US Region and I of the Burundi Region. Between us an immediate understanding developed, fruit of that harmony of vision and feelings which continued to grow over the years [...].

During the Chapter we were both elected to the general direction entrusted once again to Mons. Gianni Gazza. He as vicar general and I as prefect of the missions. Right away I realized and admired his capacity to work, to govern, to relate with people, with the confreres, especially with those who, for various reasons, were on the margins of the Institute. Bob had a capacity for dialogue and infinite patience in dealing with people's problems and, at the same time, a mix of courage and firmness when it came to reach a conclusion [...].

At that time, I admired another characteristic of Bob, the generous and fraternal welcome reserved for confreres and friends, particularly for the relatives of the Xaverians who passed through the General House in Rome.

In the twelve years spent together in Rome and also afterwards, Bob was a true friend and a great traveling companion in the true sense of the word. First of all because I traveled with him a lot both in and outside of Italy, visiting the Xaverian missions around the world. Secondly, he was a traveling companion also in the spiritual sense of the word. He introduced me to the various dynamics connected to the Leadership of an institute,

like ours, still growing and expanding into the world facing all the challenges and difficulties stemming from emerging multiculturality.

Bob was close to me as a brother especially in times of difficulties when faced with problems connected to mission or my inexperience. He taught me how to deal with confreres with patience and charity, albeit firmly, how to face authorities and how to solve the complicated knots of mission.

Then when I, younger than he, passed him in the internal hierarchy of the Institute, he didn't pull back out of a sense of disappointment, which would have been understandable, but he continued to stay close, showing the same devotion he showed to my predecessor. He doubled in attention showing the same strong affection which was one of his hallmarks. He accompanied me with respect and patience patching up at times, where the rough edges due to my Trentino character had created some trouble. Like in any friendship we had moments of misunderstanding, too. These however, were short lived for they were soon clarified.

The last feature of Bob that I want to remember here — the last in the list but not the least in terms of importance — is the deep love that he had for our missionary Family which was clearly evident in his way of being. Even in difficult times, when he was tempted to give up, he never ceased to believe that we Xaverians had a future open before our eyes, that the Institute had a great mission, and that the real “treasure” of the Institute are the people God has called to join it [...].

Finally, I cannot forget the affection he had for my family, especially on the occasion of my father's passing away. In difficult as well as in joyful moments he was present. My family always remembers him and were moved by the news of his death.

Committing the body of our brother to mother earth, we entrust it to the care and love of God, our Creator and Father “for whom we all live.” We thank Him for giving us and for so many years this Brother who gave us so much of himself.



In September 1983, Fr. Maloney having completed his second term as vicar general, returned to the United States. He was, then, elected Regional Superior (1984–93). At the end of his mandate and after a well-deserved sabbatical, he was appointed Superior of the Community in Holliston, MA (1996–2000). Till his health allowed, he devoted himself mainly to ministry and mission animation.

With his health worsening, Fr. Maloney asked, and in May 2014, moved to the Hannah Duston Nursing Home in Haverhill, MA. He lived this period aware that “to live is to live with the idea that sooner or later all will come to an end. Death is like a sentry guarding the mystery. It is the rock that

prevents us from sinking into superficiality. It is a sign that forces us to search for a destination worth living for [...]. To close our eyes in “eternal rest” means to reopen them in the transparency of the Spring that has generated us, made up even by the tears of our mortal life that are never lost² “.

In all these years, the confreres of Holliston were very close to him and in different ways accompanied him in his “Holy Journey” of life.

On 4 October 2017, around 7.45 am, the Lord called Fr. Robert — the first Xaverian from the USA — home. Pope Francis years ago, speaking to a group of educators, said: “We are not called to be an army of people who know all the answers, but people able to welcome all the questions and encourage others to search for answers”. Fr. Maloney was truly one of these people.

“During all these years every time I met Fr. Robert” — Fr. Mark Marangone writes — “he was friendly, welcoming, kind, attentive. He generously dedicated all of himself and he served the Xaverian Family by sharing all his gifts with many of us Xaverians, with the Missionaries of Mary, with his family, his relatives and friends. He was a “good” servant! Borrowing the words of a Catholic and excellent Christian author, and a disciple of Jesus, we are convinced that “imitating Jesus means understanding that we Christians make sense only if we live for others, if we think of our existence as a service to our brothers and sisters. Then and only then will we have fully understood the Gospel and truly be saints”. Fr. Bob lived this! Even though we suffer because he will no longer be physically present, we rejoice because we know that he now participates in the Eternal Life of the Risen Christ “.

Fr. Domenico Calarco SX

² Carlo Maria Martini, *Ritornare al Padre*, 1998

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