

FATHER FRANCISCO, PEACE BE WITH YOU!¹

By Fr. Guillermo Tejon, O.P.

I have just attended your funeral mass at the St. Peter the Apostle Parish in Paco.

And I can hardly believe that you are dead.

Your body is. But your soul is not. And neither is your memory.

The memory of a man like you does not die.

Your beloved people of the mountains, especially your kalingas, will not forget you.

How can they, when you devoted, not just the best years of your life, but practically your whole life, to them?

Sixty years is a long time in the life of a man. And sixty years of missionary work in the mountains of Northern Luzon is something that commands respect and admiration.

Especially if the missionary as a man and as a priest is as worthy of respect and admiration as you were.

On foot, on horse back, by jeep, over narrow trails and rough roads, in good weather and during the dangerous rainy season, among friendly and unfriendly people, in town and barrios, in schools and chapels... Father Francisco was always there, instructing in the Faith, administering the Sacraments, providing medicines for the sick, consoling the afflicted, advising the confused, strengthening the weak..

And, back in the quiet and solitude of his convent, the indefatigable missionary was not idle. He was there again, studying the customs of his people so as to understand them better; or translating the Gospel of Christ into their language, so as to make it more meaningful to them...

¹ Father Francisco Billet, C.I.C.M., born in Zottegem (Belgium) on June 10, 1186, made his religious profession in the Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary on September 8, 1906, was ordained priest on July 16, 1911, left Belgium for the Philippines on October 15, 1911, and died in Manila on June 4, 1971.

Always at their disposal, always a father!

"I became all things to all men, that I may save some of them by any means possible" (I Co., 9:22.)

Father Francisco, when I think of you, I remember the words of the Prophet: "How beautiful on the mountains, are the feet of one who brings good news, who heralds peace, brings happiness, proclaims salvation" (Isa. 52:7).

To how many people did you bring the Good News of the Gospel, peace, happiness, salvations...

Only God knows.

But we do know one thing: That you will continue thinking of your people, helping them, being their father.

It cannot be otherwise. How can you forget the people to whose spiritual and material welfare you dedicated your whole life?

You chose to be buried among them. Your tomb in Lubuagan will be a monument to the love that united — and still unites — you and your kalingas.

And, far away, in your native land, your presence in the "Hall of Fame" of the C.I.C.M. Mother House in Brussels, will be an inspiration to other young men to follow Christ all the way as missionary priests. The sincere, dedicated priests that the Church so badly needs today!

There is something else we know: That the good Lord for whom you worked all your life will not forget you.

How can he? Didn't he say that a glass of water given in his name will not go unrewarded?

In your sixty years as a missionary priest, how many "glasses of water" did you give to the poor, to the ignorant, to the young, to the old, to the abandoned, to the sick, to all?..

And always in his name!

You did not say it. But I would like to say it for you:

"I have fought the good fight to the end; I have run the race to the finish; I have kept the faith; all there is to come now is the crown of righteousness reserved for me, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give to me" (2 Tim., 4:7-8)

Father Francisco: May you rest in the Peace of the Lord.