

Dear Fr. Ronald,

I am indeed heartbroken about the demise of our young Priest Fr. Maria Bala. The words cannot express how saddened we are for the great loss of our beloved Confrere. We consider him one of the best members of our Province and we would like to give thanks to God for his inspiring witness. A gentle soul ascended to heaven, leaving behind a lot of pain and memory. Losing someone is never easy especially at such a young age.

Don Guanella loved very much Alessandrino Mazzucchi and he was taken up by his Eucharistic fervor, Charitable/ tender heart. On June 1890 Alessandrino had a tragic death. That was a dramatic event! When I think about the demise of Bala whom we love and cherish his beautiful memories exactly the same feelings of our Founder I have!

Having heard of the seriousness of Fr. Bala's sickness I reached out to him before I left India to Rome, listening and sharing my closeness and encouraged him to be courageous and to have deep faith experiences. His response was very surprising and he said 'I leave to Jesus everything and I thank him for he was waiting to reveal my sickness until I am a priest for one year. I am ready to die anytime joyfully for I am a priest at least for three years like Him doing something for our good children and people who are entrusted in my life'. Though I know him from his entry to the congregation until today I haven't understood his deep spiritual strength until that day.

I spoke to him on 31<sup>st</sup> January 2020 for few minutes and he said that he is having an excruciating stomach pain and asked me to continue to pray. As I accompanied him very closely during the years of his formation I could firmly say that he was a simple, hardworking, humble, forgiving and enduring priest. I always knew that he loved his religious call and the congregation and the poor. He reminds us of what St. Thomas Aquinas says of a friendship always oriented to the ultimate good of the person, who is God himself.

Just I found out one of his email communications 2 years ago on my birthday, in which he says "you are the good shepherd to this province in which I am very lucky to be the part of this province! May God give you more blessings and strength to continue His work and remember me in your prayers so that I may be faithful to my mission".

Please let his family know, specially his Mother and brothers and friends that I partake in their grief wholeheartedly and that his name, example, Priestly zeal, hard work and his smile will not be forgotten.

'On the tomb of the Deceased'-by Father Guanella asking a powerful assistance from the deceased members and he himself promised in his death bed "I will pray for you in heaven...I will help you and comfort you in heaven. Dear Bala join with him and intercede for us! Thanks for everything!

With sincere sympathy and condolences!

Fr. Soosai Rathinam, SdC