

Father Natale Bizzotto (known as Father Mario)



Father Natale Bizzotto was born on 26 December 1934 in Rossano Veneto (VI) to his father Luigi and his mother Maria Bragagnolo. He entered the seminary of Villa Visconta in Besana Brianza (MB) on 6 October 1947. He entered the novitiate of San Giuliano in Verona on 11 October 1952 and this led on 12 October 1953 to his temporary profession. His perpetual profession took place in Verona on 1 November 1956. He was consecrated a deacon on 8 December 1960 at the seminary of Padua by Msgr. Gerolamo Bortignon, the bishop of the diocese of Padua. He was then consecrated a priest on 25 June 1961 by the same bishop in Mottinello di Rossano Veneto (VI).

After a summer working as a substitute at the Hospital Ca' Foncello of Treviso, at the beginning of October 1961 he was sent to the Hospital Borgo Trento of Verona and at the same time attended a year's course on pastoral work at the seminary of the diocese. On 1 December he became a teacher at the seminary of San Giuliano where he continued even after his transfer to the sanatorium of Chievo on 29 January 1962.

Described as '*in studiis assiduus*' by the teacher of young priests, Fr. Mario was sent to Vienna in the summer of 1962 to learn German and in the middle of October he enrolled at the university, at the same time having a compatible post in the chaplaincy. On 2 July 1968 he was awarded a degree in philosophy at the University of Vienna. After being transferred to the seminary of San Giuliano, he began work as a teacher at the Theological Institute of S. Zeno in Verona and this would only come to an end when he reached retirement age. He very soon flanked this work with teaching history and philosophy at the Scuole Stimate in Via Montanari. From the 1990s onwards he was a lecturer at the Roman Institute of the Theology of Pastoral Care in Health, the 'Camillianum', and in September 2001 he was appointed a consultor of the Pontifical Council for Health-Care Workers.

At the beginning of the new millennium, Fr. Mario began a period of many years of problems with his prostrate until having an operation that dealt with the difficulty. In the meantime, he had to forgo for many years his lively walks because of an operation on his ankle. However, he never held back from his commitment to study and publications.

Indeed, an article of his has always been present in the section on formation of the press organ of his Province (first '*Vita Nostra*' and then '*Come Tralci*') and in the periodical '*Missione Salute*'. Starting in the year 1984, he began to publish the fruits of his lectures in the fields of the hermeneutics of knowing (*Conoscere e interpretare*, Dehoniane, Bologna, 1984); of ethics (*Rinascita dell'etica*, Elle Di Ci, Leuman-Turin, 1987; *I valori e il cuore dell'uomo: un'incursione nella vita quotidiana*, Camilliani, 2014); of the biblical meaning of pain (*Il grido di Giobbe*, S. Paolo, Milan, 1995; *Male, sofferenza, malattia. Saggi sul dolore*, Camilliani, 2015; *La risposta del cristiano alla sofferenza*, Sant'Antonio 2017); of old age (*Vivere la terza età. I ricordi, le emozioni, il compimento*, Studium, 2011) and death (*Esperienza della morte e speranza*, Vita e Pensiero, Milan, 2000); and of anthropology (*Il volto e il corpo*, Ed. Studium, Rome, 2005; *La vita nel quotidiano. Tra abitudini, maschere, aspirazioni*, Aracne, 2016).

Fr. Mario flanked his first commitment (as a lecturer and author) with a readiness to engage in ministry: first with the Combonian Sisters in Cesiolo and then at the Church *della Sorte* in Chievo. During the summers he was a substitute in Austria to keep his German up to scratch and during the festive periods he worked in the parishes of Illasi and Grezzana. He was called on, and esteemed, for preaching during spiritual exercises; his talks were always rich in quotations from his preferred thinkers and philosophers. His heart became warm when he had to present man and his character, his genius and his virtues; he disdained 'weak thought', nihilism and the relativisation of every

truth. He was not interested in following the trends of the moment or achieving applause or success. Indeed, he seemed to want to do everything to avoid attention and he was humble and kind with a little smile under his eyes that were made smaller by the size of the lenses of his spectacles as well as worn out by reading books.

He was a shy man who never talked about himself using the pronoun 'I'. He only did so in a reflected way through the authors that he quoted and the truths to which he dedicated his life. Intimate glimpses of him were only for the four faithful friends of his whole life – faithful for life as some clothes are. His dearest things were eternal: his walking sticks, his knapsack and his boots for his walks in the mountains. In his look there was no space for self-indulgence. Defined as '*rudes sed bonus*' by his teacher, at times he had clothes that had been recycled, with shoes retrieved from a dead confrere which, like a good Thales of Miletus, did not suit the clothes he was wearing. He did nothing to appear attractive, he had a monotone voice in his talks, he gave his lecturers as though he was reciting them by heart, and such was the case because he had just gone over them: it was the force of thought that had to emerge!

He loved to set himself aside, to be isolated in his 'castle' (the old Sironi house!) where he could engage in his studies without disturbing noise and from where he could observe the world and interpret it from the right distance and a certain underlying humour. However, at times he allowed himself to be moved by a burst of emotion involving disdain, for example when he saw his 'vandal' confreres throw old books of the school out of the window in order to free up space. He kept all his books and needed more than one room to keep his personal library under his surveillance, and he knew this library perfectly.

The hours that he stole from his studies were only for his trips on foot to the mountains when he went up inclines with a rapid pace that left his unfortunate companions out of breath, even though they were much younger than him. It did him good to release the tension that he had accumulated in his studies. He was disciplined, a man of habit, and his holidays were always taken at the same time of the year in the same places and with the same people. He loved the countryside which he never lost an opportunity to praise: the land, the simple things, hard work, the austere life...He inherited and developed the home distilling of grappa and perhaps he wept at the scene of the cutting of the vineyard of the old religious business. *O tempora, o mores...*

His confreres will certainly have fine and pleasant memories of him. His best legacy is to be found in his writings and there is no danger that his heirs will squabble with each other to get them: that legacy is available to everyone. To adopt this legacy is the best way of honouring him, as well as fraternal remembrance in prayer, naturally enough.