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**In Memory Of**  
**FR. RAYMOND CAMILLERI O.F.M.**



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## ***Contents***

- Editorial
- Message of the Minister Provincial
- Fr. Raymond Camilleri: Appreciation
- Omelija 50 Sena Saċerdot
- Fr. Raymond Camilleri (1948-2022)  
In Memoriam

141 SUPPLEMENT

## ***Editorial***

### **FR. RAYMOND CAMILLERI O.F.M.**

Fr. Raymond Camilleri has been called to the Father's house at 8 p.m. on Wednesday 22 June 2022 at the Nicosia General Hospital in Cyprus, where he was suffering from an acute pneumonia infection since 9 June.

Fr. Raymond Camilleri was born on 4 July 1948 in Ħamrun, Malta, son of John and Marianne Azzopardi. His name in baptism was Michael Paul. On 22 September 1963 he began his Novitiate in the Ħamrun friary, and on 27 September 1964 he made his first Profession, having received the name Raymond, in honour of Blessed Ramon Lull, Martyr SFO. He made his Solemn Profession on 20 July 1969 and was ordained priest on 18 July 1971 by the Archbishop of Malta, Michael Gonzi.

He began his priestly ministry in the Valletta friary between 1971 and 1975, as director of the "Juventus Antoniana" and Vocations Promoter. He attended a Diploma Course in Journalism (Thomson Foundation) in the UK. In 1975 he was appointed Master of Postulants in Ħamrun, and in 1976 he became Master of Temporary Professed in Rabat. He was also Secretary for Formation and Studies. He worked tirelessly for vocations, and a good number of brothers in the Maltese Franciscan Province are also a fruit of his commitment towards vocations.

In 1979 he was at the Porziuncola Retreat House fraternity in Baħar iċ-Ċagħaq, and in 1980 he returned to Valletta as Master of Postulants. In 1982, on the occasion of the eighth centenary of the birth of St. Francis, he was the inventor of new ministries, including Edizzjoni TAU (for

Franciscan publications), Servizz Nisimgħek (for counselling), Żjara Franġiskana (for missions to the people) and the animation of the Holy Land Mission in Malta, with the collaboration of Fr. John Abela, who in the 1990s launched the first website of the General OFM Curia, the Holy Land Custody, and the Province of Malta.

In 1986 he left for the service of the Holy Land Custody, first as Master of Novices for one month in Alexandria, Egypt, then as director of the Franciscan Printing Press in Jerusalem. In 1987 he returned to Malta as Guardian in Ħamrun.

On 6 November 1990 he was elected Minister Provincial of the Maltese OFM Province, a service he concluded on 8 June 1996. During these years the Order celebrated its Plenary Council in Malta in 1995, the Porziuncola Retreat House was refurbished, and the church of Saint Mary of the Angels in Baħar iċ-Ċagħaq was built. He also encouraged two new short-lived experiences of insertion, one at the Pope John XXIII Peace Laboratory in Ħal Far and one in the parish of Mellieħa.

In 1997 he was sent as parish priest in the Maltese parish of St. Paul the Apostle in Dundas, Toronto, Canada. In 1998 he was back in the Holy Land for one year, as Master of Novices at Ain Karem (San Giovanni in Montana). Back in Malta at the end of 1999 he dedicated himself to publications of the brothers and to the Province website. In 2002 he was again in Jerusalem as director of the Franciscan Printing Press, where he remained until 2004.

Back in the Province he was sent to London, at the Malta Catholic Centre in Pimlico. Between 2007 and 2010 he was Guardian in Gozo, and subsequently was posted in London and Valletta.

In 2017 he left for the fourth time to the Holy Land Custody, and was sent to Cyprus in the friary of Larnaca, first as parish priest, and after a few months in residence as a member of the local fraternity. In the

meantime, he developed cancer and in May 2018 had to undergo a serious operation and subsequent therapy in Larnaca and Nicosia. His condition remained stable, although very fragile. Even in the midst of his sufferings, the Lord gave him the grace and joy of celebrating the 50 years of Priesthood first in Larnaca and then in Malta on 23 July 2021.

After a period of 4 months in Malta for a knee replacement operation from January to April 2022, he returned to Cyprus. On 9 June he was taken to hospital in Larnaca and transferred to the general hospital of Nicosia, suffering from acute pneumonia infection. On Wednesday 22 June 2022 Sister Death visited him in hospital in Nicosia. After the celebration of the funeral Mass in Larnaca parish on Sunday 26 June, his bodily remains were taken to Malta for his final funeral and burial on 6 July, celebrated by his brother, Monsignor Robert Camilleri OFM, Bishop of Comayagua and President of the Conference of Bishops of Honduras.

Fr. Raymond was 73 years old. He was a professed Franciscan for 57 years, and a priest for 50 years.

He was the founder of the Review on Franciscan Culture “Spirtu u Ħajja” (1986), which is now an on-line English Franciscan cultural Review “Spirit+Life”.

This special supplement to our Review is dedicated to his memory and to the legacy of his untiring life of work and dedication in the service of the Order, of the Maltese Franciscan Province and of the Custody of the Holy Land.

May God give him eternal rest.

Noel Muscat ofm

# MESSAGE OF THANKS SENT TO LARNACA BY THE MINISTER PROVINCIAL

Dear sisters and brothers,

On the occasion of the funeral Mass held in the Church of the Virgin Mary of Graces in Larnaca (26 June 2022), for the repose of our dear Fr. Raymond Camilleri OFM, I would like to send a short message to you all. I would have liked to be personally present for this touching moment of human and Christian solidarity with a Franciscan brother we all have loved so much, but it was not possible for me to come because of pressing demands of my ministry. However, I am consoled that I have personally visited Fr. Raymond during his time in hospital in Nicosia, and to have been able to communicate with him while he was still alive.

I am sending this message of condolences to you all, members of the Catholic community of Larnaca, and I share in your grief, but at the same time also in our faith in the resurrection. I thank you all for your closeness to Fr. Raymond not only during these last weeks of his life, but during the entire six years he spent with you in Larnaca.

I thank Fr. Jerzy Kraj, the Patriarchal Vicar of Cyprus, for his constant concern and care of Fr. Raymond, particularly during his last agony. I personally witnessed his kindness and fraternal concern and, in the name of the Franciscan Province of Malta, I owe him a debt of gratitude. Thanks to all the Franciscan brothers of Cyprus, but especially thank you to two of the brothers with whom Fr. Raymond has lived, namely Fr. Gabriel Vormawah, the parish priest of Larnaca, and Fr. Lawrence Coblavie, who was parish priest before him. Thank you for your care and for your sacrifices. To all the friends of

Fr. Raymond here in Cyprus I extend my warmest sentiments of gratitude and thanksgiving. I would like to mention them all. However, I cannot forget the kindness and support shown to Fr. Raymond by Mrs. Joanne Gatt and her family, who were so close to him during his moments of difficulty. Together with her kindness, I refer to the kindness and care of Sr. Thomas, a Maltese Sister of the Congregation of St. Joseph of the Apparition, who dedicated her entire life and ministry in Cyprus. Thanks to Sr. Germana, Superior, and the Franciscan Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart, who are in charge of the house for the elderly adjacent to our church and friary of Larnaca. Thanks to Bet, the friary cook, and so many other parish collaborators in Larnaca who attended to Fr. Raymond's needs, and whose names I do not know, but to who I am infinitely grateful. A special thanks goes to the specialists, surgeons, doctors and nurses in Cyprus who took care of Fr. Raymond during these last years. Fr. Raymond would often mention their kindness and professional concern.

I can only conclude by saying that Fr. Raymond used to tell me and the brothers in Malta that he had rarely experienced such love and care as he did in Larnaca. As we say our goodbye to our Franciscan brother Raymond, let us be consoled by these words of Jesus: "Whatever you did to the least of my brothers, you did it to me." May Jesus give Fr. Raymond the eternal joys of paradise as a reward for his life-long commitment of faithfulness to his Franciscan vocation and to the Church.

May the Lord give you His peace!

Fr. Anthony Chircop OFM  
Minister Provincial

# APPRECIATION

## FR. RAYMOND CAMILLERI O.F.M.

### (4 July 1948 – 22 June 2022)

Noel Muscat OFM

“Call no one happy before his death, for it is by his end that a person becomes known for what he is” (Sirach 11:28).

These words from the Book of Sirach describe who Fr. Raymond Camilleri truly was. I have known Fr. Raymond for 47 years, ever since he was a young priest and a vocations animator in the Franciscan Province of St. Paul the Apostle in Malta. Born in the island of Malta in 1948, he entered the Franciscan Order in 1964 and was ordained priest in 1971. He dedicated his life to work for vocations to the Franciscan Order in his Province. Out of 45 brothers who belong to the Maltese Franciscan Province, at least 17 have been the fruit of his tireless work of collaboration with God’s calling. I am one of them. For me Fr. Raymond has been a father and a master of Franciscan life to the very end. What I am and what I know as a Franciscan, what I have been and what I am now, I largely owe it to him, after God and my parents.

I would describe Fr. Raymond as a simple, down-to-earth, determined man, who faced challenges with courage and determination. This was evident in his innovative views for our life as Franciscans. Starting from scratch, he began to prepare a new vision for our Franciscan Province. In 1982, on the occasion of the eighth centenary of the birth of Saint Francis, he founded the TAU Edition for Franciscan Publications. He encouraged us to collaborate with him to open up our ministry beyond our friaries, engaging us in popular missions, in night-session counselling on the telephone. His love to the Holy Land was evident from the

start. He gave new life to our Holy Review in Maltese, accompanied pilgrims to the Holy Land, and for various periods of his life he offered his services to the Custody, particularly as director of the Franciscan Printing Press in Jerusalem, as Master of Novices in Ain Karem, and during these last six years, in this fraternity of Larnaca in Cyprus. He was grateful for all the help he received from us brothers and from other persons who went out of their way to support him during his illness.

I phoned Fr. Raymond some days before he was taken to hospital. He sounded tired. At the end of the phone call he said: “Thank you for having called me.” Those were the last words I heard from him. I am confident that you know a person only at the end, and that a person dies exactly in the way he lives. That was Fr. Raymond. He died quietly, free from all and from everything, except from God. That is why God is now making him happy for ever, because he remained faithful to Him to the very end.

Dear Raymond, when you celebrated your 50 years of priesthood last summer, you wrote on your invitation cards: “There is still some way to go.” On that occasion the Minister Provincial kindly offered me the honour of making the homily, and I concluded it with the words: “Courage, dear father and master (*pater et magister*). There is still some way to go.” Today you have ended your life journey. And we can now say that you are happy, because it is at the end of your life that we now know you for who you truly are for God and for us.

May God give you the reward of eternal peace in His loving embrace.

23/06/2022 Palamaner Novitiate, India.

# OMELIJA FIL-QUDDIESA TAL-50 SENA SAĊERDOT

**Knisja Santa Marija tal-Angli, Bahar iċ-Ċaghaq  
Il- Ġimgħa 23 ta' Lulju 2021**

Noel Muscat OFM

**“Qajjem fik id-don ta’ Alla li jinsab fik  
bit-tqegħid tal-idejn” (2Tim 1,6)**

Għażiż Patri Raymond.

Il-lejla ninsabu mdawwrin miegħek, ħutek il-patrijiet Franġiskani, membri tal-familja tiegħek, ħbieb u benefatturi, biex nifirħu miegħek u niringrazzjaw lil Alla flimkien fl-okkażjoni ta’ għeluq il-50 sena mill-Ordinazzjoni saċerdotali tiegħek fit-18 ta’ Lulju 1971. Fil-ħajja tal-bniedem jiġu mument li fihom jieqaf għal ftit mument biex jiftakar, jiċcelebra u jiringrazzja. Dan hu wieħed minn dawn il-mument. Hi grazzja kbira li tasal għal 50 sena ta’ impenn ta’ fedeltà, kemm jekk tkun persuna miżżewġa, kemm jekk tkun persuna ikkonsagrata, u kemm jekk tkun irċevejt id-don ta’ Alla bit-tqegħid tal-idejn fl-Ordni Sagri. Għaldaqstant, l-ewwel dmir tiegħek u tagħna hu li nuru rikonoxxenza u gratitudni lejn Alla li wasslek għal dan il-jum. Naf li int ma tħobbx tikteb djarji u li ftit se nsib evidenza ta’ kitbiet awtobijografiċi tiegħek fl-Arkivju tal-Provinċja. Imma naf li, fil-memorja u fil-qalb tiegħek, hemm ċertament miktuba awtobijografija interessanti, imma li l-awtur veru tagħha hu Alla. U għalhekk, f’dan il-mument, inħallu l-Kelma ta’ Alla ddawwalna waqt li int u aħna niftakru f’dak kollu li għamel miegħek. Għax dan hu l-veru suċċess tal-ħajja tal-bniedem, jiġifieri li jagħraf il-passi ta’ Alla fid-diversi esperjenzi li jkun għadda minnhom.

Għażilt li nibni dawn il-ftit riflessjonijiet fuq il-Qari liturgiku li l-Knisja toffri fil-quddiesa tal-Ordinazzjoni. Dan għamiltu biex inkun żgur li l-kliem tiegħi ma jkunx

ikkundizzjonat minn interessi jew gosti personali, imma jirrifletti kemm jista’ jkun is-sens profund ta’ din iċ-ċelebrazzjoni. Inħalli f’idejk, u f’idejn kull wieħed u waħda minna, biex niġbdu l-konklużjonijiet għal ħajjitna u nħallu lil Alla jzommilna idejna aħna u nitkbu l-awtobijografija tagħna.

Il-Qari ta’ din il-quddiesa ħadnieħ mit-tieni Ittra li San Pawl kiteb lil Timotju. L-istudjużi tal-Iskrittura jgħidhulna li din hi l-aktar kitba tardiva tal-Appostlu Pawlu. Kitba awtobijografika li fiha Pawlu jħares lura lejn ħajtu, waqt li jinsab fit-tieni prigunija tiegħu qabel il-martirju. Pawlu iqisu ruħu bħala raġel anzjan u prigunier ta’ Kristu, u jrid jikteb ftit kliem ta’ faraġ u direzzjoni lil Timotju, forsi l-akbar kollaboratur tiegħu, li kien jinsab bogħod minnu fil-Knisja ta’ Efesu. Fl-ittra johroġ l-għerf tal-qalb ta’ bniedem matur, misjur bil-ghomor u bl-esperjenza, ta’ bniedem li daq it-tbatija u l-persekuzzjoni, ta’ bniedem li quddiem Kristu u l-Evangeliu qatt ma ċeda l-konvinzjonijiet tiegħu. B’xi mod naħseb li din il-qagħda umana ta’ Pawlu tirrifletti xi ftit anke l-ħajja tiegħek.

Pawlu jhegġeg lil Timotju biex “iqajjem fih” id-don ta’ Alla. Qiegħed jgħidlu biex ikebbes il-ġamar jaqbad tal-vokazzjoni tiegħu. Timotju kien għadu żagħżuġ u kellu bżonn palata biex iżomm il-fedeltà tiegħu. Hi l-istorja tal-ħajja tal-bniedem fiż-żoġġija tiegħu. Imma anke Pawlu forsi kellu bżonn ikebbes il-ġamar tas-sejħa tiegħu. It-tikbis tal-fedeltà ma għandux età, u forsi isir aktar importanti aktar ma wieħed joqrob lejn it-tmiem tal-ġirja. Lil Timotju Pawlu jagħmillu kuragg: “Alla ma taniex

spirtu ta' biża', imma Spirtu ta' qawwa, ta' mħabba u ta' rażan." Huma l-kliem ta' anzjan li l-esperjenza tal-ħajja għallmitu ma jibżax, għax id-don tal-Ispirtu li rċieva, jagħtih il-qawwa biex jixhed għal min jemmen fih.

"Mela tistħi xejn minħabba fix-xhieda għal Sidna, u lanqas minħabba fija priġunier tiegħu, imma aqşam miegħi t-tbatija għall-Evangēlju." Kliem li jista' jgħidu biss min jgħaddi mill-prova tal-fedeltà. F'dan il-kliem profetiku nsibu l-eżempju tal-imgħallem li jmexxi lid-dixxiplu. Fil-lingwaġġ tagħna l-patrijiet nistgħu nużaw l-espressjoni "formazzjoni permanenti", li forsi tant xbajna nisimghuha. L-esperjenza tal-prova fil-fedeltà hi l-akbar xhieda awtentika fil-ħidma ta' akkumpanjament vokazzjonali. Nimmaġina li din kienet l-esperjenza tiegħek ukoll. Il-bnedmin normalment iħarsu lura u jivvalutaw azzjonijiet u deċiżjonijiet fid-dawl ta' interpretazzjoni li normalment tkun pjuttost sugġettiva. Imma Alla, għalkemm ma jħassarx it-tbajja' u l-iżbalji tal-bniedem, iħares fuq kollox lejn ix-xhieda. "Tistħi xejn minħabba fix-xhieda għal Sidna." Kliem li jfakkruna fi kliem ieħor simili: "Min jistħi minni u minn kliemi, Bin il-bniedem ukoll għad jistħi minnu meta jidher quddiem il-Missier" (Mk 8,38).

Lil Timotju Pawlu jgħidlu li l-akkuża li minħabba fiha kien qieghed ibati kienet dik li hu kien predikatur, appostlu u mgħallem tal-Evangēlju ta' Ġesù Kristu. Quddiem dinja li tiċhad l-Evangēlju x-xhieda ta' ħajja kuragġuża favur Kristu tnissel kuragġ u tama. Din hi x-xhieda li kull saċerdot hu msejjah li jgħix. Pawlu joħroġ b'espressjoni qawwiya u mimlija tifsir profund: *Scio cui credidi*. "Jien naf f'min emmint." Quddiem l-għarfien ta' Kristu Pawlu ma għandux dubji. Kristu Ġesù hu dak li dwaru Pawlu seta' jgħid: "He will not let me down." Mhux kwestjoni ta' għarfien intellettuali u dottrinali, għalkemm ta' min jishaq li dan hu importanti fil-ministeru tas-saċerdot. Imma għarfien esperjenzjali, l-għarfien tal-qalb, tal-imħabba, tal-fiduċja

f'xi hadd li qatt mhu se jabbandunak. Din kienet il-fidi ta' Pawlu li wasslitu għall-konvinzjoni li seta' jgħaddi lil Timotju d-"depożitu" li gie fdat f'idejh, jigifieri l-qawwa tal-fidi u l-imħabba fl-Ispirtu tal-Mulej Ġesù fil-ħajja tad-dixxiplu. Deskrizzjoni oħra sabiha tal-vera formazzjoni li tinbena mhux fuq kuncetti u teoriji astratti, jew fuq analiżi psiko-somatika tal-persuna, imma fuq għarfien ta' xi hadd li hu fil-baži ta' kull vokazzjoni għall-ministeru, l-għarfien ta' Ġesù Kristu, veru Alla u veru bniedem.

Jidher kliem ovvju imma nafu kemm hu diffiċli. L-esperjenza tal-ministeru tiegħek, għal diversi snin, kienet dik ta' saċerdot li ħdimt biex tiffirma persuni ikkonsagrati. Jekk fin-nofs kien hemm ukoll formulazzjoni ta' proġetti li, wara kollox, huma dejjem limitati għaż-żminijiet u ċ-ċirkustanzi, l-importanti hu li Alla talbek tiffirma persuni fil-valuri li jibnu l-ħajja Franġiskana. Dan hu li ċertament baqa' bhala riżultat ta' dak li żrajt, bil-fidi li Alla jkabbar il-frott bil-modi u ż-żminijiet tiegħu. Ta' dan trid tkun rikonoxxenti lejn Alla, u lejn il-pjan tiegħu li jaħdem fil-misteru ta' kull persuna umana.

### **"Mulej int taf kollox, inti taf li nhobbok" (Ġw 21,17)**

Forsi xi hadd jista' jikkummenta li s-silta evanġelika li qrajna hi aktar adatta għal waqt l-Ordinazzjoni episkopali, jew anke għall-mument tal-funerali tal-isqfijiet jew tal-Papa. Imma, fil-fatt, hawnhekk Ġesù mhux qieghed jirreferi biss għall-ministeru speċifiku ta' Pietru, li f'idejh halla l-primat tal-imħabba. F'sens aktar wiesgħa nistgħu naraw f'dawn il-kliem il-programm tal-primat tal-imħabba tad-dixxipli tal-Mulej, u b'mod partikulari tas-saċerdot.

Minix se nieqaf fuq il-kummentarju tas-silta evanġelika, li nafuha lkoll, u nifhmu sewwa s-sens profund tagħha. Imma nixtieq nieqaf fuq l-atteggjament ta' Pietru quddiem il-kliem ta' Ġesù. Mill-ġdid għandna għarfien esperjenzjali li jgħaddi mill-konsapevolezza tal-limiti umani, u anke tad-dnub u l-infedeltà, għall-att ta' fidi fil-qawwa ta' Kristu li twassal għal atti erojċi ta' mħabba. Is-saċerdot hu ragħaj. "Irgħa n-nghaġ tiegħi."

Imma hu ragħaj għax iħobb lil Ġesù, almenu b'imħabba li twasslu għall-għarfien tiegħu u għall-kollaborazzjoni miegħu. Ġesù ma jitolbx eroiżmu minn Pietru. Jitolbu biss li jħobbu u jaqdi dmiru bħala ragħaj. Fil-ħajja tas-saċerdot dan hu l-impenn ta' kuljum li hu msejjaħ li jwettaq. Imma anke f'dan l-impenn hemm eroiżmu, jiġifieri l-eroiżmu tal-fedeltà kontinwa fl-ordinarju. Wara 50 sena saċerdozju naħseb li dan hu wiehed mill-valuri li l-aktar għandek għax tiringrazzja lil Alla għalih, il-fedeltà fl-impenn kostanti, xi kultant moħbi, xi mindaqqiet soffert, u anke forsi ippruvat minn tensjoni u inkomprensjoni. U jista' jiġri wkoll li, bħal Pietru, fin-nofs jidhol il-mument tad-dubju, taċ-ċaħda tal-Imgħallem. Esperjenza li ngħaddu minnha xi darba jew oħra. Imma Ġesù jkompli jistedinna, għal darba, darbtejn, tlieta: "Thobbni?" U kull meta jkollna l-kuraġġ ngħidulu: "Inti taf li nħobbok," mill-ġdid jistedinna nibdew: "Irgħa n-ngħag tiegħi."

Forsi nistgħu naħsbu li l-kliem li Ġesù qal lil Pietru: "Ejja warajja," jirreferi biss għall-mument inizzjali tal-vokazzjoni tiegħu, meta Pietru kien għadu sajjied fuq l-Għadira tal-Galilija. Imma hawnhekk Ġesù għadu jsejjaħlu biex imur warajh anke wara esperjenza ta' tliet snin miegħu. Anzi, hu f'dan il-mument li Pietru għandu bżonn aktar minn qatt qabel li jimxi wara Ġesù.

Anke din hi l-esperjenza tas-saċerdot. U jekk tippermettili, Patri Raymond, inħoss li hi l-esperjenza tiegħek f'dan il-mument partikulari ta' hajtek, meta issa tista' tagħmel sintesi ta' dak li għext. Ġesù juri lil Pietru li l-imħabba tiegħu kellha tasal għall-quċċata għolja tal-għotja ta' ħajtu: "Tassew tassew ngħidlek, meta kont żagħżuġh, kont titħažżem waħdek u tmur fejn trid; imma meta tixjieh, int tiftaħ idejk u ħaddieħor iħažżmek u jieħdok fejn ma tkunx trid!" L-Evangelista jżid: "Dan qalu biex ifisser b'liema mewta kien sejjer tagħti glorja lil Alla."

F'dan il-mument tal-ħajja tiegħek nistħajlek li dan il-kliem għandu risonanza partikulari. Imma mhux biex issewwed qalbek, jew tibki l-fatt li issa ma għadx għandek l-enerġija fiżika u s-saħħa li kont tgawdi fil-bidunett tal-ministeru tiegħek. Is-

sens hu totalment bil-maqlub. Proprju fil-mument li fih inti tħossok dgħajjef fiżikament: "ħaddieħor iħažżmek," proprju fil-mument li fih l-ubbidjenza tista' ssir martirju: "jieħdok fejn ma tkunx trid," hu proprju f'dan il-mument li l-Mulej Ġesù jkompli jgħidlek biex terġa' tibda: "Ejja warajja."

Patri Raymond, meta int għalaqt 25 sena saċerdot, int kont għidt lil ta' madwarek: "Issa nibdew mill-ġdid." Illum, fuq it-tifkira informali li ktibt, int nizzilt "Thank you Lord! There is still some way to go." Dan ifisser li int konvint li Ġesù għadu jsejjaħlek biex timxi warajh, għad għandu bżonn tal-fedeltà tiegħek. Forsi mhux iżjed b'mod intraprendenti u organizzattiv. Forsi mhux iżjed biex tagħti xhieda u tiddefendi valuri b'mod profetiku li mhux dejjem tistenna li jifhmuh. Dan kollu, kif diġà għidt, hu frott ċirkustanzi u żmien. Imma forsi, fix-xhieda siekta ta' ħajja sempliċi, fost nies li qatt ma ħlomt li taħdem fosthom fil-missjoni li qed taqdi f'Ċipru, f'mument ta' solitudni u tbatija fiżika u psikoloġika frott l-età u s-saħħa li ssir prekarja, hu f'dan il-mument li l-Mulej Ġesù jħares lejki b'imħabba u jkompli jgħidlek: "Ejja warajja." Jalla tkompli miexi warajh bil-ferħ u l-gratitudni, biex bħal Pawlu tkun tista' tasal għall-mument li fih tgħid: "Tqabadt it-taqbida t-tajba, temmejt il-ġirja, ħarist il-fidi. Mill-bqija hemm merfugħa għalija l-kuruna tal-gustizzja, li biha f'dak il-Jum iħallasni l-Mulej, l-Imħallef ġust, u mhux lili biss, imma wkoll lil dawk kollha li jkunu għexu fl-imħabba tad-dehra tiegħu" (2Tim 4,7-8).

Għażiż hija Patri Raymond. Filwaqt li f'isem dawk kollha hawnhekk preżenti nawgurawlek għal dawn il-50 sena fis-saċerdozju ministerjali, jalla dak li jibqa' minn dan il-ferħ tallum ikun is-sens ta' gratitudni u fedeltà lejn Kristu. Jalla x-xhieda tiegħek illum iddawwal lilna biex inkomplu nħarsu d-don tas-sejha tagħna. Jalla l-istorja awtobijografika tiegħek u tagħna tkun storja ta' kemm irċevejna maħfra u grazzja, u jalla din l-istorja tibqa' tinkiteb sal-aħħar nifs bl-enerġija ta' mħabba lejn Kristu u lejn is-sejha tiegħu. Kuraġġ hija pater et magister: "There is still some way to go."

# FR. RAYMOND CAMILLERI O.F.M.

## *In Memoriam*

Noel Muscat OFM

Prophecy is a vocation that is not aimed at success according to human standards. A saying that is placed on the mouth of Jesus regarding the people of his hometown, Nazareth, in Matthew 13:57 states: “A prophet is despised only in his own country and in his own house.”

*Nemo propheta in patria.* No one is a prophet in his own country. This saying of Jesus could easily describe a situation of tension and misunderstanding, but its true meaning is deeper. It does not aim at presenting the prophet as an opponent of his own people, or as an enemy of somebody. Its aim is rather that of showing how the message of a prophet can be uncomfortable to those who are closest to him, in such a way as to make him appear a stranger and a misfit in his own house.

If I have to describe Fr. Raymond Camilleri as I have known him all my life, I would see him in this light. One fine summer day, when I was still a young priest, I accompanied him for a swim on the rocky shore close to Daħlet il-Fekruna, in Saint Paul’s Bay, Malta. Sitting on the rocks in the blazing sun, he was not in the best of moods, and was telling me that he felt a “misfit”. I understood what he meant. He was a man who would not easily accept a *status quo* in religious life, without trying to be pro-active and suggest new and innovative ways. It is normal to suppose that, most of the time, he was misunderstood. It certainly was not the fault of those who could not understand him. Any prophetic reasoning has to face this kind of challenge.

Raymond often spoke his mind. He was convinced that obedience in religious life was not just a question of adapting passively to a situation and trying to live as

comfortably as possible in that same situation. The process of initial and ongoing formation at that time was not conducive to encourage personal maturity in the sense of letting religious think with their own minds and express their feelings without fear. It was not a question of abolishing sacrosanct principles that build religious consecrated life, of course. It was a question of criticising the attitude of a peaceful existence based upon customs and traditions that could not be changed without creating a reaction in those who had been accustomed to them all their lives.

The work of Fr. Raymond at the time was that of vocations promoter and master of formation. It was a bright moment for our Franciscan Province of Malta. In a span of around 6 years more than 17 candidates had joined the Order. Many of them were the fruit of the untiring work of Fr. Raymond. The future looked very bright for us all, except for the fact that there was little room for innovation.

The same social and political milieu in which these events unfolded was not conducive to growth. In the late seventies and early eighties Malta was going through a tough period in which democracy was being eroded and personal initiative discouraged. Polarisation was the order of the day, and political divisions were bringing moments of extreme tension. While Europe was advancing with giant steps towards the realisation of economic and political unity, Malta was still left in the backyard, struggling to come to terms with its identity as a nation, torn between the call to be part of Europe and the insistence that we had to be free from all foreign influence and hold on to a splendid isolation in the centre of the blue Mediterranean.

Such a situation was also bringing with it a tension between a desire to modernise, albeit according to socialist principles which were popular in those days, and the resistance for change on the part of traditional components of society, chief among which was the Catholic Church as an institution. Change inevitably had to come about, and it did in a rather turbulent way. Little did we imagine that it was just the beginning of a change that would continue in later decades, but that would assume the contours of a very peaceful transition from an oligarchy of priests to a new kind of intellectual dictatorship aimed at eroding human and ethical values in the name of inclusivity and egalitarianism.

Raymond lived through this transition period. He did not take part in any official discussion on the social and political level, but understood the problem at its core within the ecclesiastical environment in which he lived. He set out to change things in his own way.

The celebration of the Plenary Council of the Franciscan Order in Bahia, Brazil, in 1983, which published the document “The Gospel Challenges Us”, was a turning moment in the life of the Maltese Franciscan Province, coupled with the celebration of the 800 years since the birth of Saint Francis in 1982. Fr. Raymond encouraged the group of young brothers in formation to respond to the new calling of the Order by an effort to spread the Franciscan message as an outreach, away from the fairly safe haven of the Franciscan friaries. For this reason, he invented a number of new apostolates. These included the telephone counselling service, called in Maltese “Servizz Nisimgħek”, in which the brothers were available for counselling during the night hours, at the service of persons suffering from solitude, sickness and old age. The same service was also offered live at the Catholic Institute in Floriana, where during that time another Franciscan innovative brother, namely Fr. John Abela (passed away on 19 December 2010) was working. Indeed, John was one

of the pioneers who collaborated with Raymond in these ministerial ventures. Another great success in outreach ministry was the organisation of the Franciscan Visits to parishes, called *Żjara Frangiskana*. Fortunately, this venture continued for a good number of years, even though it changed its original style. It was an experience based upon Franciscan presence in a parish for a number of days, having as its characteristic element the ideal of a poor and simple lifestyle among the people in all walks of life, including the religious-liturgical, family, social and educational spheres. The brothers would accept to live for some days in a house provided by the parish, begging their daily food in the streets, and being close to the people.

Fr. Raymond’s dream was that of forming us, who were young friars at the time, with this new mentality, in order to be able to reach out of our traditional apostolates in our churches and friaries, to new forms of Franciscan presence. It was not his intention to undermine the sterling work that friars of older generations had accomplished in the field of traditional apostolates. It was just a prophetic vision of a changing society, in which ringing church bells and organising *festas* was no longer going to be the religious characteristic of our society. Indeed, Raymond has been proved right. Whatever has remained on the outer core of our religious expression is, more often than not, a result of cultural and social traditions that have degenerated into a religious farce in which the Church is called to participate by the higher echelons of political and economic power whose aims are certainly far from the Christian values that our ancestors cherished when they celebrated their humble village *festas*.

The far-sightedness of Fr. Raymond was at its best during the years in which he was called to lead the Province of the Franciscans in Malta as Minister Provincial. It had been an uphill climb to convince the Province that a change was needed. In a certain way Raymond succeeded in convincing the brothers, and

also found a good deal of cooperation from many of them, including also from brothers who were elderly and who dearly loved the Province. The achievements of his Provincialate have yet to be documented, and it will be history to judge how effective they were. Unfortunately, we do not envisage a possibility of this happening in our life-time. One thing is certain, namely that Raymond's predictions regarding the future of our Franciscan presence in Malta and abroad have largely materialised, challenging us to make painful choices for our future. What we resisted from the grassroots will now be imposed upon us by the institutional framework of our own Order, which will take into its own hands our future destiny.

Raymond tried to show the way forward. He opened up possibilities for future presence in parishes, in a new form not linked with the establishment of a conventual church, in order not to enter into competition with the secular clergy. Alas, times have shown that this kind of attitude has now led us to admit how blind we were to our present state, both regarding numbers and energies, in both religious as well as diocesan life. Raymond foresaw all this trend, but was often silenced. His attitude to open up to missionary work was prophetic. Whether it was our presence in Central America, in Libya or in the Holy Land, as well as our presence among Maltese migrants in Canada and Australia, or ministry among Maltese hospital patients and their families in London, Raymond was always struggling to get things moving, to open up new possibilities. He did so in the face of opposition, even from the same general government of the Order, which criticised his way of handling the future of our missionaries in Honduras. Raymond remained adamant in his beliefs, and reasoned that his duty was that of protecting the vocation of the brothers, not the projects done by people in the General Curia who could not understand the situation at grassroots level.

When he ended as term as Minister Provincial Raymond moved on to new forms of active presence. He had to go through the experience of seeing many of his initiatives falter or slow down because of lack of enthusiasm on the part of people who should have known better. He was not a man to be defeated. He continued to work tirelessly, offering his service in Toronto and London, and going four times as a missionary to the Holy Land. He never gave up his ideals. I can be a witness to his inner suffering, and yet I can state that he had no hard feelings about those who did not continue to follow his ideals. He trudged on, hoping against all hope for better times.

Prophets normally end up dying outside their native lands and in exile. Raymond died in Cyprus. He was not in exile. He never felt far from his country and his Province. He only wanted to respect the freedom of those who had the responsibility of leading, and although not always sharing their views, he chose not to interfere. His love for the Holy Land was evident from the start. He revamped the publication of the Biblical Review "L-Art Imqaddsa", which remains the main publication of the Maltese Franciscans. He is the founder of "Edizzjoni TAU", which since 1982 has been the publishing house of the Maltese Franciscan Province, encouraging many scholarly brothers to contribute both by publications in Maltese and English, as well as by their on-line contributions in the websites created by John Abela and by Raymond. Indeed, not all that he initiated is over. This is the hope that moves us forward in our sincere quest for our identity as Franciscans in Malta.

Sickness and suffering have taken their toll on Fr. Raymond during these last years. In silence he would follow things and reflect over them. Whenever I saw him quietly intent in his hidden life-style, whether in Cyprus or in Malta, I would always remember the words of Jesus in the Gospel of John 12:24: "In all truth I tell you, unless a wheat grain falls into the earth and dies, it remains only a single grain, but if it dies it yields a rich harvest."



**Fr. Raymond Camilleri in front of S. Maria delle Grazie Church, Larnaca**  
(From [www.custodia.org](http://www.custodia.org))

