

A Tribute to My Beloved Teacher

When I was an orphan of twelve receiving my elementary education at Our Lady's Home for Children in Paotsing, Hunan, China, I saw Father Reginald Arliss, CP for the first time. It was during the summer vacation of 1939, and as we walked around the playground, Father told me the New Testament story of Jesus turning water into wine at his mother's request to save a young couple from embarrassment.

Father concluded with: "Though you have lost your earthly mother, you still have Mary, your heavenly mother. She is merciful and powerful, and loves you as Jesus' little brother. Pray to her for all your needs."

Early in the Spring of 1940 I next saw Father as he received me into Saint Joseph's Minor Seminary. Being without both parents, I was most grateful for his fatherly care.

From 1949 until 1951, Father Reginald was under house arrest and finally expelled from China. Being his Mass server and his only philosophy student, I was with him during those hard days. When I was forced to leave him, he gave me as souvenirs his overcoat and mosquito netting which I have treasured to this day.

Tears were in his eyes as he said farewell: "No matter what happens to you, Johnny, say your rosary each day. If it is taken from you, use your fingers. Mary, your mother, will protect you." My life since is testimony to the truth of his prophecy.

I was unable to contact my beloved teacher for almost thirty years. Then I learned that he had become a Bishop in the Philippines. We corresponded, and when he retired to the United States because of age and illness, I visited him in his monastery. During the Thanksgiving holidays of 1991 and the Easter season of 1993, we talked of seminary days and all that had happened to us in the meantime. We went for walks around the garden, and I sang for him some of the Latin hymns he had taught me.

A few weeks ago, I received word that Bishop Reginald Arliss had died in Holyoke, Massachusetts on April 26, 1996 at the age of ninety. His body lay in state at the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart in Newark, New Jersey where the funeral Mass was celebrated, and then he was taken to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania to be buried in the Passionist Monastery vault where Bishops Quentin Olwell and Cuthbert O'Gara, also companions of his in China days, lie buried.

Thanks be to God for the wonderful blessing of having seen and heard my beloved teacher and benefactor once again before his holy death!

A grateful friend, May 1996