

**Br. Thomas Van Laer**

Philemon was born in Pamel, Belgium on February 26, 1898 the son of Petrus Van Laer and of Leonie Dekens who descended from a farming family with six children. He studied with the Jesuits in Aalst and in the Capuchin Seraphic College in Bruges. Philemon was invested in the Novitiate on October 3, 1918 and given the religious name of Thomas. He made first profession in the Order on October 21, 1919 and solemn profession on October 23, 1922. In 1924 he was selected to pursue higher theological studies in Rome. He was ordained to the priesthood in the Church of the International College San Lorenzo da Brindisi on November 29, 1925. At the Gregoriana University he obtained the following degrees: Baccalaureate in Theology (1925), Baccalaureate in Canon Law (1926), Licentiate in Theology (1927) and a Doctorate in Theology (1928).

Returning from Rome he served as Director of the Seminary of Philosophy in Aalst (1928) and as confessor of the novice clerics. Two years later he left for Sialkot to learn English and Punjabi. He remained in the Mission for three years. First he was active as assistant-missionary in Pasrur (1931); after that as a teacher at the school in Dawal (1932) and finally as spiritual director of St. Francis school in Lahore-Anarkali (1933). From the beginning his health failed and up to five times he had to be hospitalized in the Albert Victor Hospital in Lahore. Br. Hugo of pious memory wrote: "His three years stay in the Mission was one long Way of the Cross. His apostolate was almost exclusively the apostolate of suffering. His Superiors are of the opinion that he can suffer in Belgian as well and at the same time can do some other work".

Returning home, he taught at the theological seminary of Izegem (1933) and at the diocesan College in Izegem (1939). In 1940, he was appointed guardian in Herentals and director of Sacred Eloquence. Then he organized in Aalst an "Institute of Family Life" and then a similar one in Gent. At the Chapter of 1949, he was named Procurator of the Missions but one month later this nomination was annulled and he was promoted to Provincial Custos of Central Canada. Br. Thomas arrived in Blenheim, Ontario on January 1<sup>st</sup> 1950 and he served the Custody for seven years ministering in Blenheim, Downsview, Georgetown and Orangeville all in Ontario. He also received permission to allow our Canadian students to receive their theological studies in Washington (1955) in the Capuchin province of Pennsylvania. In January of 1963, Most Rev. Br. General appointed him spiritual director of the Ethiopian College in Rome. For two years and a half, he fulfilled the task of spiritual director of the Abyssinian students as well as confessor for many groups of sisters.



**OCTOBER 27**

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On March 15, 1965 he was admitted in hospital for test and operated for stomach ailments. He left Rome on June 22<sup>nd</sup> 1965 for the infirmary in Edingen. When he was dying he wrote on a piece of paper, his last will: "I do not want any pomp or idle praise around my tomb; only the Cross of Christ who gave me the foretaste of a better life". This last wish was respected at his funeral. He died in the Clinic in Edingem, on October 27, 1965.

