

Dear Confrères and Friends,

In the Office of Readings for today, Thursday of Easter Week, we recalled some words from the Book of Ecclesiastes, Chapter 3: 'For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, a time to die'. Just one week ago, on Holy Thursday it was 'time to die' for our dearly-loved and highly-respected

BROTHER HUBERT LYONS, SDB

He had, only one month previously, completed eighty years of life of which almost sixty were spent in the Salesian Congregation that he loved and served so well.

Hubert was born into a 'Protestant, theatrical family' (his own description) on 1st March 1910, in Graiguenamanach, Co Kilkenny. His mother's own birth certificate, which Hubert kept among his personal treasures, shows that there was a theatrical tradition in the family, her father's profession being identified as 'vocalist'. Hubert, as he would sometimes recall, made his own first appearance on the stage at the age of three. His father was also from the world of entertainment, and mindful of the constant need to be on the move and of the disruptive effect this can have on a child's education, he wisely placed Hubert as a boarder at the age of seven in the theatrical school at Langley Hall, Buckinghamshire, where he was to spend the next ten years. Hubert's only extant comment on those years is contained in the pithy phrase 'learned my cricket'. The comment is a codicil to a hand-written curriculum vitae made as late as 1985 and no doubt gathers in an old man's gratitude for a gift that had brought him much personal satisfaction and, at the same time, opened many avenues for his life's work.

At the age of eleven, Hubert, with other members of his family, was baptised into the Catholic Church. At seventeen he left the Langley Hall School and became a laboratory assistant at The City of London School. Photographs of Hubert taken about that time show a smartly-dressed, debonair young man, with that warm, confident smile that so often lit up his face to the end of his days. At nineteen his life took on a new direction as he asked to be accepted as an aspirant for the Salesian Congregation at Battersea. Two years later, having now completed his novitiate, he made his first Profession as a son of Don Bosco, sealed finally with his Perpetual Profession six years later. So began a Salesian life that would span almost sixty years: eleven at Burwash, twenty one at Battersea and twenty six at Farnborough.

As a Salesian, Brother Hubert's exceptional skills at cricket and soccer gave him an immediate opening into the lives of young people, and one can surely say that for many hundreds of boys who came under his care, their best memories are captured in a team photograph with the tall, fine-featured, smiling figure of Brother Hubert at the centre. His other special scene, as for most Salesians of his generation, was the classroom, more especially in the junior school, where as a form-master and teacher of English he won great affection and loyalty from his pupils.

Brother Hubert knew Don Bosco's secret of being young with the young, sharing their interests whilst remaining a true mentor, and he had that exceptional gift of making the ordinary seem quite special, whether it was learning a poem, knowing how to pass the ball or making a drive through the covers off the back foot. It was the gift of the true educator who knows how to draw the best from his pupils. The 'Twenty courtesy points' still taught to young boys in Farnborough, are a telling heritage from Brother Hubert, who, like his patron St Francis of Sales, combined in his personal life that most gracious blend of human and Christian refinement. Etched in the memory of those who knew him is the deep integrity that was the hallmark of his faith, his religious life, his work and his wide circle of friendship.

There were few doubts or ambiguities in the main areas of his life; he saw clearly the way to go and made firm, decisive choices. His was an ordered, disciplined life that commanded respect and admiration, and if personal preferences were expressed - and they were - they were far removed from any faddiness or fastidious intolerance. Never was he heard to speak in anger or negative criticism: often - very often - he was heard to speak in gratitude and appreciation of things done well. For Brother Hubert life was God's gift - and that included the gift of his own life which he treasured with dignity, cultivated sensibly and used to be of service and to give pleasure to others.

From his personal diary it can be seen that it is just a year since his health suffered a major set-back; twice in one day he collapsed and probably suffered a heart attack. Then began a slow steady decline: no more could he travel to his beloved Ireland; soon he could no longer ride his familiar bicycle, and finally even walking was too much for him. His time amongst us was drawing to its close. Though still able to be physically present at community prayer, he apologised to his rector for not having the energy to join in Divine Office vocally.

In the final weeks of his life he was cared for lovingly by Mrs Pearce, to whom the Farnborough community are deeply grateful, whilst our own Fr Douglas was so often at this side, gently and patiently attending to his needs.

As I commend Brother Hubert to your prayers, I pass on to you the advice he left in one of his many cards, beautifully inscribed and ornamented with his own hand. They capture the story of his life.

Yours affectionately in Don Bosco

Fr Robert Coupe, SDB

*Think deeply
speak gently
love much
laugh often
work hard
give freely
pray earnestly
and be kind.*

For the Necrology:

Brother Hubert Lyons, born in Graiguenamanach on the 1st March 1910, died in Farnborough on the 12th April 1990 at the age of 80 years, after 59 years of Religious Life.

R.I.P.