



Salesians of St. John Bosco



Salesian High School
Netherton Way,
Bootle, L30 2NA.

January, 1985.

FATHER FRANCIS ARTHUR McGRATH, S.D.B.

Dear Confrères,

In the early hours of 10th December 1984, Father Arthur died peacefully in his sleep in Park House. He had entered this hospital only twelve days before with a serious kidney condition and during those days the doctors and sisters there mounted an unremitting battle to save his life.

In addition he was strengthened by the Sacramental life, making his Confession, being anointed and receiving his Lord on 30th October.

The Community at Bootle had been distressfully aware over the previous few months of his ill health. He seemed confident that he would pull through but in spite of visits to the doctors and medication the deterioration continued.

On the day before he died I visited him in hospital with his brother Bernard and Fr. Michael Duggan. We said the Rosary at his bedside. In spite of his weakness he made desperate efforts to join in our prayers. And so it was with lamp resplendant he went to meet the Lord he had served so faithfully during the 68 years of his life and 38 years of priesthood.

The characteristic neatness of his spiritual preparedness was paralleled by the orderliness in which he left the earthly things that had been the scene of his service to his Community for the past eight years. His books were meticulously presented and up to date, the final sign of the conscientious and caring way he had carried out his duties as Bursar.

This sense of service had expressed itself in different ways and at many levels during the course of his Salesian life but mostly in the field of Catholic Education to which he gave long years of dedicated service.

The remote preparation for this service had begun in the bosom of a good Catholic family. Into this he was born the first of four boys on 10th October 1916 to Frank and Nellie McGrath. He was Baptised into the Parish of Our Lady, Birkenhead and educated in its primary school and then at St. Hugh's. He was a regular altar server at Holy Cross as well as a keen member of the Scout troop, all ingredients of a Salesian vocation to be stirred by Father Joseph Ciantar who happened by. In 1931 he went to the Salesian Missionary College at Shrigley and to the Novitiate at Cowley in 1934. He was professed there in 1935 and began his philosophical studies. He was finally professed in 1941. Having previously taught for short spells at Salesian schools in Chertsey and Cowley in the difficult early war years. He went on to study Theology at Blaisdon, Gloucestershire where he was ordained to the priesthood in 1946.

It was at Blaisdon, his brother tells me, that he gained a deep love of the countryside. To walk in the valleys and hills, to climb the next peak, to face the force of a gale or rest beside a stream were things he loved to do. But his joy was that much greater when he could share these things with the young, especially those like himself from the inner city. For this reason he worked hard to establish and maintain the hostel at Bryngwran, Anglesey. Here he made it possible for the poorest children to holiday away from the harshness and hazards of the city streets.

It was, however, back to the reality of the inner city that he was destined after Ordination – to the Salesian College at Battersea where he was to serve as teacher and eventually as Head of Physics until 1972. From here too he would sally forth with parties of boys into the countryside to walk and to climb especially in his beloved North Wales; to enjoy the healthy exercise and so to bring them nearer to God.

In 1972 he returned to his native Merseyside albeit "across the water" in Bootle. Here he was appointed Rector of the Community and he served in this capacity until 1976. He continued to teach Physics in the school and also to make it possible for young people to enjoy healthy exercise, friendship and fun away from the city streets. In 1976 Father became Bursar to the Community, an office he carried out with conscientious concern until the Lord called Him.

"Happy are those who die in the Lord
Now they can rest forever after their work
Since their good deeds go with them"

Our thoughts go out to Father's brother Bernard and his wife and all his family who will miss him very much. We share their sadness but also their gratitude to God for his dedicated and fruitful life in the priesthood. So many who had been helped by his kindness and service were there to give joyous thanks through a beautiful liturgy at his Requiem and Father John Booth gave further expression to this in a moving homily.

His prayer for himself and his request to us would be:

"I have lived my life, and that which I have done
May he within Himself make pure! but thou
If thou should never see my face again
Pray for my soul."

Morte d'Arthur

Farwel i Ffrind da.

May he rest in peace.

Yours affectionately in St. John Bosco

(Fr. J. Kavanagh, S.D.B.) Rector

Date for Necrology:

Fr. Francis Arthur McGrath born on 10th October 1916 at Birkenhead. Died Liverpool 10th December 1984 at the age of 68 years after 49 years of Religious Profession and 38 years of Priesthood.