



## *Fr. James Melly SDB.*

It is with a sense of deep sadness that I write this letter announcing the death of Fr. James Melly. In the early hours of Wednesday morning, 6 September 1989, he passed peacefully in his sleep to his eternal reward. He spent the last eight months of his life in the Community here at Daleside. Even though he came to the community as a sick man, his contribution to the life and spirit of the community was very soon appreciated by all. His active presence in all the community's activities, his constant wit and sense of humour, his availability to the community, boys and parishioners for confession and spiritual direction and the silent uncomplaining offering of his pains to God all enriched our community at Daleside. We shall miss him for a long time because of the place he had in all our hearts; for Fr. Melly was the most loveable of men.

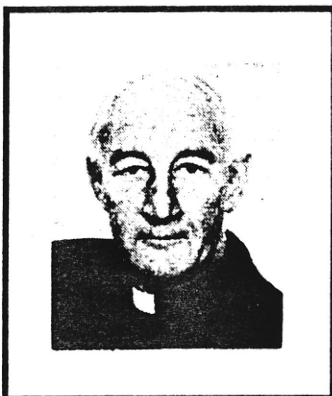
His was a life that we can all be truly grateful for, a gift to many in his long Salesian apostolic life. Fr. Melly was born on 1 November 1918 in Simonstown in the Cape. The quality of the Christian life of his home and schools during his childhood and boyhood years was the environment where his vocation germinated. Before he had completed his eighteenth year, James left family and country on the long trip to the Salesian Novitiate in Beckford, England, where he made his first profession in 1937. After that his training for the Salesian Priesthood followed the usual routine of philosophical studies, practical training and theological studies. His practical training was spent at Shrigley and Beckford during the war years of 1939-1942. He had no fixed abode during his years of theological studies at Cowley, Shrigley and Blaisdon. These were the difficult war years, and James helped at teaching the boys at Cowley while he himself followed the courses of theology. James was ordained Priest at Blaisdon on 14 July 1946, and his long

nine years of exile were over. He returned to his native South Africa where he spent a fruitful 43 years in the ministries of teaching, preaching, administration and spiritual guidance.

While James loved the ordinary humdrum routine of Salesian-apostolate service at Lansdowne as teacher and catechist (1946-1950) and at the Salesian Institute as teacher, catechist and bursar (1950-1958), he was asked to assume the service of authority as Rector for 15 years. He was Rector of Manzini, Swaziland during 1958-1961, the early years of the Salesian apostolate there. During these years the school expanded and developed. Many friends rallied to support the school and help with the development and this was in no

small way due to the person and personality of Fr. James. This period of apostolic fruitfulness in what was still a rural African missionary setting was followed by six years as Rector at Daleside (1961-1967). These were the early days of the college when traditions were being set. Fr. James led by example. He was present in the recreation, in the classroom, seen fixing the lights, playing the organ and generally being part of all that was happening in the College. He was particularly kind to the young people in training. His door was always open and we were received with kindness and given direction and encouragement. His sense of joy created a pleasant ethos and a happy atmosphere.

Then Fr. James was called to serve for six years (1967-1973) as Rector at the Mother-house (Cape Town) of Salesian work in Southern Africa. He had earlier spent 8 happy years there (1950-1958) as teacher, catechist and bursar. The Salesian Institute at Cape Town is steeped in the genuine Salesian Tradition of trade-school, music, sports. Fr. James arrived at a



time when our trade-school was coming under pressure for various reasons. This was a difficult period. The outcome was that the school became a High School and some of the trades survived as small businesses at the Institute. Fr. James supervised the transition and saw to it that the great Salesian tradition of caring for needy, often homeless boys continued. He also saw to it that the Institute's reputation for hospitality to Salesians and other religions working in all parts of Southern Africa was preserved. Fr. James was always the most gracious of hosts and visitors always found a hearty welcome.

But Fr. James' period of responsibility was not over. During the remaining 16 years of his life, he was willingly available to take various assignments in different places.

He served as Bursar at Daleside during two periods (1973-1976; 1980-1982), as priest in charge at the Hostel in Booysens (1976-1978), in Olifantsfontein (1979-1980), in Ennerdale (1982-1983), and as assistant priest in Robertsham (1983-1988). He spent the scholastic year 1978-1979 at Maynooth on a renewal (refresher) course.

Fr. James had a wonderful capacity to enjoy the gift of life and the opportunities it offered. And he enjoyed enormously his "year off" in Maynooth. He came back to South Africa full of zest for the remaining 10 years of his life. And he lived those 10 years to the full in spite of declining health. But Fr. James never allowed his suffering to become a burden to anyone else. He remained the most gracious, the most charming of persons.

At the end of last year he spent some time convalescing at Nazareth House, Johannesburg. During those months he ministered with true brotherly care to the sick and dying, especially to the late Fr. Brassil.

Fr. Melly came to Daleside in February of this year. He was obviously a sick man, but he managed to take part cheerfully and fully in the life and work of the community. He asked for nothing exceptional. He regained his old familiar zest for life. He was very happy to receive the many visitors who came to see him and enjoy their company. He accepted the chance to visit Cape Town in April, feeling well enough to travel the journey by road with some old friends. During July he visited Swaziland. At the end of August he went to Swaziland again to celebrate the golden jubilee of the profession of Bro. Charles Scollard and Fr. Louis O'Dea. Always willing to help out, straight after his return from Swaziland he set off for Lyttleton for a weekend supply. He returned to the community on Sunday afternoon, 3 September. On Monday and Tuesday he was in really good spirits, walking with only minimal aid from his walking stick. It was very unusual when he was not at meditation and Mass on Wednesday morning, 6 September. Soon after Mass he was found to have died in his sleep during the night.

While the news of his sudden death was a great shock to the community, there was also a sense of the great privilege of having had in our community, even if only for a short time, a gracious, kind, humorous and, indeed, holy Salesian Priest who was a wonderful example to us all. His usual remark was "charming as usual" and this summed up his whole life. We shall miss him, as will his family and many friends. All of us will be forever grateful that our lives have been touched by a life as beautiful as that of Fr. James Melly. May he rest in peace with God, and now intercede for all those he loved in life.

*Fr. Pat Naughton SDB. (Rector)*