

PROVINCIAL HOUSE  
"CITADEL"  
MADRAS 10

*Madras: 14th April 1972*

Dear Confreres,

On 14th November, less than a month after the death of Father Anthony Leo, Sister Death visited this Province a second time and snatched away

## Fr. JOSEPH MURPHY

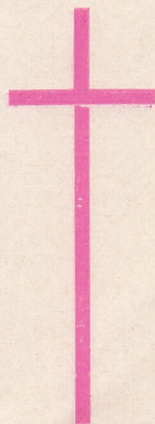
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Born in Newcastle Upon Tyne, on April 4, 1920, he went to Yorkshire, his mother's place, when he was nine years of age. When his father retired from work, the family moved to Ripon. In 1936, his father died of heart-failure at the age of 49. Joseph was sixteen at the time and an aspirant at Shrigley.

His sister, Kathleen, who is the only surviving member of the family, writes about him: "We both started school at St. Andrew's, Newcastle, and it was one of the nuns who taught us, who suggested to my mother to send Joe to the Salesians. She thought that Joe was a little bit different and because we were not well-off, thought the Salesians would take him, and at eleven Joe went to the Missionary College where he stayed until he was nearly seventeen."

He must have been indeed "a little bit different" if his sister pays a further tribute to him: "He was the pious boy who used to run into the church to make a visit. No one had to twist his arm, as we say, to go for benediction in the midst of a game of cricket.

As a youngster at Shrigely, he was nicknamed "cherry" because of his red cheeks and ever pleasant smile. His classmate





recall him as a studious and at the same time, a lively and happy youngster.

In 1937, he joined the Salesian novitiate at Beckford where he made his religious profession on August 31, 1938. Soon after his profession, at the age of eighteen, he came to India, the country of his adoption, the land where he would spend the rest of his life. His sister writes: "He thought of India as his home and while he made three visits home in thirty-three years, and not long visits, he was always eager to return to India".

After completing his philosophical studies at Tirupattur, he was sent to Bombay for his practical training. Then as was customary during the war years, he studied theology and continued to teach and assist. On September 7, 1948 he was ordained a priest at Tirupattur, where he spent most of the thirty-three years of his life in India and where he would end his happy days.

From 1948 to 1952, he was in Bombay and while helping either in the parish or in the school, he finished his B.A., and M.A. In 1954, he became principal of the newly-started Sacred Heart College, Tirupattur. During nine years of hard work and dedicated service at the college, he created an indelible impression on the minds and hearts of the staff and students alike.

Father Murphy was a man of order and a strict disciplinarian. Yet, as a principal, he endeared himself to both staff and students. The measure of his popularity was evident when he left College in April 1962. Though the students were notified only in the morning, the whole college was at the station to see him off. Father Tuena, the then Rector, remarked that he had never seen such a spontaneous send-off.

After a few weeks of rest at home he returned as Rector of the new aspirantate at Lonavla. After two years of pioneering work there, he was appointed Rector and Principal of St. Bede's High School, Madras. Finally, in May 1966, at the death of Father Tuena, he returned to Tirupattur to be Rector of that big and complex institution.

It was there at 12.10 p.m. during a cricket match, that death laid its cold hand on Father Joe. He had taken six wickets and had gone to the position of first slip, confident of victory. Suddenly he was seen to raise his hands to his face and collapse to the ground. By the time the doctor arrived, there was nothing that could be



done. The Salesians and the hundreds of boys who were watching the game were awe-struck. Their beloved Father Rector was no more. He died on "Children's day" and while playing. For, in spite of his age, he had still retained the simplicity of a child. He had played his game well to the last.

His death is a great loss and we all feel it keenly. But we find comfort in the words of Don Bosco, "When a Salesian dies in harness, you can say that that day is a day of glory for the congregation, and God's blessings will descend abundantly on it."

If Father Murphy was loved and esteemed during life, his true personality was revealed at his death. The large crowds that filed past his body and attended his funeral, the many Salesians that came from all over the province bore witness to his goodness. In homage to his memory all the educational institutions in the town remained closed for the day.

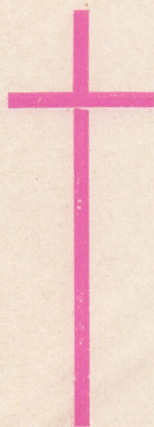
He was a man of simple tastes and habits. Unassuming, jovial and full of wit, he would make friends easily. Probably due to constant work and a keen sense of wanting the more perfect thing for himself and for others, he would occasionally lose his temper. But he would as easily approach the person offended and humbly apologise.

A keen sense of justice, an absolute sense of honesty and a great love for the poor were other human characteristics which no one could fail to notice in him.

As a religious, he was every bit exemplary. A man of prompt obedience, he accepted to be a Rector though this was very much against his nature. To his sister he wrote: "No one really likes this job but someone has to do it. The responsibility is very great and some people in life are cut out for leadership and some are not." He felt that he was not meant for the post and repeatedly asked superiors to be relieved. But at their word he would promptly submit and carry on just because "someone had to do it."

His spirit of poverty was proverbial. In this specially, he kept the fervour of his novitiate. He managed with little, was very careful in the use of money and never failed to give an account of the expenses made.

His piety was simple and unassuming, none the less solid and





fervent. He was particularly conspicuous for his frequent visits to the Blessed Sacrament.

He often complained that though he had come to India to be a missionary, he was never sent to the missions proper.

Yet his priesthood was not fruitless. His simple, well-prepared and original sermons had a power of their own in convincing his listeners. He spent the best years of his life in training and forming future priests and religious. With reason he could write home: "I am not indispensable. There are more worthy and better qualified people to take my place tomorrow." He was a priest, and a good priest at that, in every place and circumstance. He consecrated and sanctified the simplest things of life. No wonder the Lord called him to Himself during the Liturgy of a recreation. He was ready. In a letter to a benefactor a few days earlier he wrote: "We shall also pray for those who passed to the next world -- the world we all are meant for." And on the picture he kept in his Bible: "Death is a new birth to life everlasting."

He lies buried in the small Salesian cemetery where nine other Salesians, an aspirant and a past pupil await the day of their Resurrection.

No conclusion could be a more fitting tribute to the life and work of Father Murphy than what he himself had written in the college magazine of 1963 as a tribute to a professor who was retiring: "Go valiant warrior to enjoy your well-earned rest. Go and live again in memory the years which have passed. And may every memory be one of bliss and happiness, satisfaction and gratitude, that you have been able to do the great work which God, in His almighty wisdom, sent you into this world to do."

By general consent of the Salesian community of Tirupattur, the following epitaph will be engraved over his tomb: "Defunctus adhuc loquitur - Though he is dead, his life speaks."

May the Lord send us many Salesians like Father Murphy.  
Pray for the Province and

Yours in Christ Jesus

Fr. THOMAS PANAKEZHAM

*Provincial*

