

August 10th 1948.

Dear Confreres,

It is with deep sorrow for the loss of a great Salesian priest that I have to inform you of the death of

FATHER JOHN FRANCIS NOONAN. SDB. aged 69.

But though our hearts are full of grief at the loss of our dear confrere, yet sorrow is by no means the predominant feeling in my mind as I speak to you. It is rather one of gratitude to God for the long and grand priestly life of nearly forty two years, a religious life of nearly fifty years in the service of God; gratitude for all the good that has been accomplished by this zealous minister of Christ, and gratitude, too, for the grace and strength that was given him to fight the good fight to the very end of a long and painful illness, borne with heroic courage and christian resignation.

Fr. John Francis Noonan was born in Islington, London, on May 8th 1879, and he owed much to his devout Catholic parents, Patrick and Mary Noonan, who instilled into him from very childhood the spirit of prayer and the spirit of piety which was the basis of his religious and priestly vocation. He entered our College at Battersea in 1893 and began his novitiate in November of the same year. The Salesians had been established only five years at Battersea, their first house in England, and the greatest qualities of generosity and self-sacrifice were called for from those great Salesians who formed the real pioneers of the Province. Fr. Noonan, as a young cleric, was conspicuous for the lion's share which he always took in any work that had to be done. He taught for some years in the Parish Elementary school, which in those days was partly staffed by Salesians. When, later, the young cleric transferred his activities to the College, he devoted himself to a wide range of studies. He followed courses in Music, Art, Science and P. E. In addition to his philosophical and theological studies he devoted himself to the acquiring of a sound knowledge of French and Italian. He was a painstaking and zealous teacher and, in addition to the many long hours spent in the classroom, he helped most effectively with the music in the school. He was also, for some time, the bandmaster of the artisans band and this meant for him many hours of work after his day's teaching.

Raised to the priesthood on September 12th, 1906, Fr. Noonan soon showed his priestly ability in the pulpit and the confessional. Between the years 1908 and 1920 he preached over thirty retreats and many courses of sermons for special events. During this period he was the headmaster for four years at Farnborough and for three years at Battersea. In 1923, two years after Fr. Noonan had returned to Farnborough from Battersea, the Bishop of the diocese requested the Salesians at Farnborough to take charge of the neighbouring district of Fleet and Fr. Noonan was appointed to this office. It was as Parish Priest of Fleet, a position he was still holding when death came to give him rest from his labours, that his greatest and most lasting work was accomplished. His zeal, his insight into the problems and needs of his flock, his sympathy and understanding, all made him a pastor who won the hearts of his people. The work has now grown and developed and the little mission of 1923 has become a strong and vigorous parish which will be handed over to the Secular clergy.

Throughout twenty-five years of parochial work Fr. Noonan never ceased his Salesian labours in whatever opportunity afforded him. He continued to use his gift as a preacher of retreats and special sermons; and, in his later years, he undertook, at the request of his Superiors, a detailed history of the Province in its early days, which entailed an immense amount of work and which will remain as a monument to his zeal and industry. Father Noonan was physically strong and usually enjoyed good health; but in his later years, approaching seventy as he was, he would often have to rest to get over some increasingly frequent bout of illness. Toward the end of 1947 it was obvious that he was a sick man and, soon after the New Year, he was compelled to take to his bed. A long struggle ensued, but just before Easter, 1948, he underwent a major operation: but the surgeons found only that his recovery was impossible. Fr. Noonan accepted this news and he sat up in bed and wrote a most touching letter to his parishioners.

Such was Fr Noonan's strength that death did not come either easily or quickly. But in the morning of July 22nd, surrounded by his confreres and devoted Nursing Sisters and assisted by all the rites of Holy Church, our dear Fr. Noonan gave up his priestly soul into the loving hands of God, there to receive the reward of a long life of loving service and generous self-sacrifice. He was laid to rest at Farnborough on the 26th July in the presence of the Bishop of the diocese, of numerous clergy, regular and secular and a large number of his faithful parishioners.

Fr. Noonan had always a great love for our saintly Founder and never tired of preaching and talking about him; we may feel confident that he has already entered the joys of that special Salesian paradise which St. John Bosco promised to all his faithful sons. When our time comes too, may we all be gathered together with him in eternal peace and joy.

Yours devotedly in Christ,

F. V. Couche, S. D. B.

Necrology: Fr. John Francis Noonan of Islington, London, died at Farnborough, Hampshire, in the 70th year of his life, the 49th of his religious profession and the 42nd of priesthood.