

Dear Confreres,

On 26th November, 1982, at 2.45 a.m. our much loved

BROTHER THOMAS O'SULLIVAN, S.D.B.

died peacefully in the James Connolly Memorial Hospital, Blanchardstown, Co. Dublin. He had been in hospital a mere fortnight.

Surrounded by the loving care and attention of his own relatives and community, in his last illness and death Bro. Tom brought together in an unforgettable experience the several branches of the Salesian Family: his own relatives - brothers and sisters from Ireland, England and Australia - his own Salesian confreres, the Salesian Sisters and Cooperators, and several of his closest past pupils of Warrenstown Agricultural College. During his illness the many phone calls to our House and to the Hospital bore witness to his vast spread of friends and spoke of Bro. Tom's own irresistible Kerry enjoyment of life and friendship which made him a welcome and sought after guest wherever he went.

Born in Minard, Annascaul, Co. Kerry on 12th October, 1918, of Thomas O'Sullivan and Mary Kennedy, Tom was baptised the following day. He began attending the National School, Minard, at the age of three. He could never be put off from a line of action once he had made up his mind. In fact Tom promoted himself to first class by wearing down the teacher's resistance as he repeatedly moved from where the teacher had left him into a first class desk.

On 22nd May 1930 Tom was confirmed by Dr. Michael O'Brien in St. Mary's Church.

No horse or sheep was ever let get the better of Tom, and his toughness of spirit was constantly shown by his consistent hard work. No matter how late at night he arrived home, the morning light rose to find Tom hard at work, drawing in seaweed for manure, and all his farm chores done before he would set out with Paddy Joe O'Connor (now a Salesian priest in Chertsey) to cycle the eight miles to the Christian Brothers School in Dingle.

Tom did well in his studies but left school before his Leaving Certificate since he was needed at home to help the other members of the family. He was a keen member of the local Defence Force and a native Irish speaker. He had applied to join the police force but when it was a question of his becoming a cadet his mother put cold water on that, since the times of the Black and Tans were dangerous.

A nephew of Tom's grandmother, T.J. Canon Lyne P.P., V.F. of St. Mary's, Dingle, spoke of Tom as a junior All-Ireland Footballer and a first class farmer when the Canon made enquiries about Tom becoming an aspirant for the Salesians in 1942. It was no easy task for Tom to settle again into the books when he went to the Salesian College, Pallaskeenry, at the age of 23. Almost four years at home from school he was very rusty in all subjects. But he set to it with a will. On 25th May, 1944, at the end of his time in Pallaskeenry as an aspirant, Tom applied for the novitiate. The House assessment at that time says, "he is a very fine character, and outstanding athlete, a grand spirit of piety and displays real sterling qualities."

The cross of Christ wasn't absent from Tom's life, for his mother died on the 19th June, 1944, a few weeks before his novitiate was due to start in Ballinakill, on 30th June.

Tom showed great earnestness during his novitiate and his solid spirit of piety was evident. He made efforts to improve himself and struggled with the studies. His doggedness and courage kept him going and he was known as an excellent worker. He received the religious habit on the feast of the Presentation of Our Lady, 21st November 1944, the day that was traditionally Clothing Day. He made his first profession on 12th September, 1945, in Ballinakill.

The study of philosophy followed at Shrigley, England, 1945-47, and Tom managed that well. He was back in Ireland, at Warrenstown, for his practical training from September 1947. It was during this time that Bro. Tom's health broke, and his ardent character must have found it difficult at that time to accept the superiors' decision that it did not seem he was called to be a priest. Tom was worried by this turn of events, and he fought his corner. Like the horses he had broken in, Tom had a certain amount of rural obstinacy, yet he never showed any bitterness. His Salesian spirit remained undaunted and he spent some years working in Blaistown, England. During that time, July 1950 to September 1954, he set the farm there on a profitable footing, making a profit of £1,600 on the pig section in less than a year, and increasing the value of the herd by £500. On 2nd February 1953, feast of the Presentation of the Lord, Bro. Tom made his perpetual profession as a Salesian into the hands of Fr. T.W. Hall.

But Tom's heart was in Ireland. Back in Warrenstown from September 1954, Tom threw himself into his work as an Assistant: the dormitory, the refectory, Sports, the Past Pupils Union ... all benefitted from Tom's whole-hearted service. He was unsparing in his efforts and tireless in his work. The many past pupils of that period speak of Tom with genuine love and affection - a great character.

A tribute to Bro. Tom in the December 4th, 1982, issue of *The Meath Chronicle* says that Tom was no stranger to the sporting life of Meath. He was widely known in G.A.A. circles and in fact in 1957 he was a member of the selection committee for the Meath minor football team. Twelve years before that, he won an All-Ireland minor football championship medal with his native county and in later years represented Kerry at junior level.

Around this time another of Tom's characteristics revealed itself - he was a man of vision. The idea of a suitable monument being erected by the Past Pupils to the memory of the late Fr. Pat Collins appealed much to Tom and he bent his considerable energies to arousing interest, enthusiasm and money for this project. Indeed the magnificent sports complex which was opened in 1976 is as much a tribute to Bro. Tom as it is to Fr. Pat.

The enormous success of the American Tea Parties, the Warrenstown Autumn Festivals - with the No. 1 Show bands from Ireland and abroad - was in no small measure due to the hard slog put into the project by the past pupils under the strong leadership of Bro. 'O', as he was affectionately called. And the past pupils turned their attention in particular to helping the handicapped children at St. Ultan's, Navan, providing funds for much needed classrooms. One past pupil commenting on that period in Warrenstown said his name was gold dust around all the area.

But deeper currents began moving in Tom's spirit: he eagerly seized the opportunity offered him in 1977 to do a one-year theology course in St. Patrick's College, Maynooth. In Maynooth he found what he was looking for. He found the centre of his life in Jesus. Tom's prayer deepened through the charismatic prayer meetings he attended weekly. His fervour was blended with a down-to-earth common sense and a warmth of affection which readily created a circle of friends. By the end of that year Tom had once again turned his eyes towards becoming a priest.

For the next two years Bro. Tom worked at the newly opened Don Bosco House, Gardiner Street, Dublin, a home for boys from disturbed families. Here he lavished his love on these boys, and bent his efforts to lead them to prayer and a love of Jesus. His greatest joy was to make Christ known.

Tom's desire for priesthood grew apace, and he seemed immensely happy when his superiors agreed to let him begin his theological studies at Maynooth with priesthood in view. Tom's hard work and application to study, at the age of 58, were an abiding example to the many younger confreres with which God has blessed this Province. My biggest sympathy at that time was for the College professors who had to correct the essays Tom handed in. His eagerness for Scripture made him keen to miss nothing - and to leave out nothing. His essays probably set a new record for their length! Once over his first year repeat exams, he seemed more relaxed and better into the rhythm of study. He passed his second year without any need to repeat exams.

In community Tom's fervour showed itself in an eagerness at community prayer, a humble taking on of the most menial of tasks around the House and a charity that would always forgive, encourage and excuse. He always tried to bring out the positive aspects of people and situations. He was a moderating influence whose good witness was received well by all because of his pleasant manner.

During the Seminar on the Preventive System in January 1982, Bro. Tom had the joy of being installed as Lector by Fr. Juan Vecchi, member of the Superior Council in charge of Youth Apostolate, who had come to give the keynote address.

In all this time, Tom kept his ties with his own beloved Kerry. Closer to home in Lispole his agricultural talent did not go unnoticed, as J.J.S. notes in a tribute to Bro. Tom in the Kerry Agricultural Committee's Magazine. Under Tom's professional eye the finishing touch was put to many a sheep to take the laurels at the Ram Sales in Killarney and more recently in Milltown. His brother Con of Minard East, Lispole, always had a good bunch of rams at the Kerry Blackface Sheep Breeders Show and Sale. "The Brother" faithfully turned up to take Con's best ram into the ring. Brother 'O' was a mighty proud man holding his ram while awaiting the judges' verdict. It was no fluke that the Supreme Champion ram was under his care more than once.

During his time in Maynooth these last two and a half years, Tom was untiring in his love and his work for youth. He promoted the Knock pilgrimage and the Salesian Cooperators. As National Delegate of the Past Pupils in Ireland, he attended Eurobosco III in Madrid and Eurobosco IV in Lugano. He loved Gardiner Street and wanted to become a priest so that he might return there to bring the boys all that the priesthood of Christ would enable him to do for them. Perhaps he felt called back by the words one of the boys had written him when he was leaving Gardiner Street for Maynooth: "To Tom, I would like to wish you the best of luck in Maynooth and God bless you now for ever more. This will always be your home. (Signed) Declan".

The last time Tom came to speak with me we dealt at length with the preparations he had already set in motion for his ordination. Practical as ever, he had gotten bargain prices for the meal and the serving would be done by the girls of the local secondary Convent School. Even in this Tom's sense of poverty urged him. We joked that even if Tom sent no invitations, all the nuns of Ireland would be at the reception.

The summer prayer camps at Spanish Point also saw Tom in full swing despite his being somewhat hampered by an operation on his ankle.

On Thursday, 12th November, a fortnight to the day before his death, Tom went to bed suffering apparently from a touch of 'flu. By Saturday he had become somewhat confused and rather reluctantly had to stay in bed. After a bad night, during which three of his companions stayed with him, Bro. Tom had the doctor visit him. As the signs seemed to point to a viral pneumonia, it was decided it would be best for him to go to hospital. He walked to the car himself.

In hospital, the diagnosis was inconclusive and Bro. Tom's condition worsened rapidly. He received the Anointing of the Sick with some emotion, and quickly lost touch with his surroundings, lapsing into a coma. During the days that followed, his confreres, family and friends kept vigil by his bed. Those days and nights will be unforgettable for they were an experience of friendship and love beyond words, and they were centred round Tom. Very early in the morning, on 26th November, the last day of a novena to Blessed Michael Rua, Tom entered the eternal life which is had by those who believe in Christ.

The continual stream of visitors to the Salesian House, Maynooth during the all-night vigil kept by Tom's open coffin spoke of the huge sense of loss experienced by his many friends. We reminisced about his cheating at cards with the girls in Auxilia Hostel and the fun he caused with his trick mouse.

Tom's death was the last act of self-offering of a religious who had lived his Salesian life fully and happily, united to the Eucharistic sacrifice of Christ for all, especially for the young whom Tom loved and who instinctively sensed his love.

The funeral Mass in the local parish Church was attended by a big congregation which included many of the old folk whom Tom had often entertained at the Old Folks parties in the town. Present also were some of Tom's professors and the College G.A.A. club. He was mourned too by the young, one of whom remembered Tom as the brother who was always joking and who was always smiling.

Warrenstown College, where Tom had spent the greatest part of his Salesian life, paid its final respects to a beloved confrere. The Hall was used to accommodate the huge crowd that turned up, including a bus load of relatives and neighbours from his native Kerry. It was in every sense a celebration of a Christian's death: a sense that this faithful servant had already entered into the joy of his Lord.

Even at this distance from those events it is still hard for us to believe that Bro. Tom is dead. We miss him sweeping the ref floor or washing up the last cups after the late night cup of tea. In one sense Tom didn't get to priesthood; but then again he didn't need to be a priest to do the good he did in his lifetime. Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam.

Tom's memory will remain. In particular the Past Pupils and the whole of the Salesian Family in Ireland have promised to make a big success of Eurobosco V in Dublin as a fitting tribute to a man who loved Don Bosco and spent his life raising young people's eyes to Christ our Redeemer.

May the Risen Lord pour out his spirit on all his faithful people, and grant eternal life to all those who, like Bro. Tom, have believed in Him who is the resurrection and the life. May Mary Help of Christians and the Mother of the Church intercede for our beloved confrere and for all who have died.

Fr. Pat Egan, S.D.B.  
Rector.

DATA FOR NECROLOGY: Bro. Thomas O'Sullivan born 12th October 1918 in Minard, Annascaul, Co. Kerry, died 26th November 1982 in the 64th year of his age and in the 37th of his Salesian profession.