

BROTHER DERRECK STEPTOE. SDB.

Almighty God has suddenly called Bro. Derreck to eternal rest at the early age of 26 years. May he rest in peace.

Derreck was born in London on the 16th June 1920, his father being William John Steptoe and his mother Elizabeth Doris, nee Vanstone. In the 1922 he was under the care of the Sisters of Nazareth at Southend, and he remained with them until 1934, when he left to take up a position in the provision trade. In 1935 he went to the Salesian Hostel, known as the Thomas More Hostel in London. The priest who was then in charge wrote. . "I first knew Derrick Steptoe when as a boy of 16 he came to live with us at the hostel of which the Salesians had charge. Derreck was a very good natured boy and though much more refined than most of the boys at the hostel, he always tried to treat them kindly and he acted as an elder brother for some of them. He was ever a source of good example and it was in great measure due to his example that I was able to encourage daily Mass attendance. Derrick nearly always served my Mass and scarcely ever missed receiving Holy Communion. He would frequently give up his half-day to scrub and polish the chapel and could often be found praying there. I was not surprised when he first mentioned to me his desire to become a Salesian priest. I did all I could to encourage him, and it was a great consolation to me when I heard that he had been accepted as an aspirant."

In 1937 he went as an aspirant to the Salesian College near Limerick. In 1939 he returned to our house at Battersea and he made preparations for entering the Novitiate at Beckford, Glos, in August 1940. Fr. Simonetti, writing at the time said. . "He entered into his training at once and whole-heartedly kept up his holy enthusiasm to the very end when he made his first vows. He had a great desire to make himself useful in the Congregation and, before the end of the novitiate he asked that the care of the lepers might be his missionary apostolate. Bro. Derreck made his first profession on the 31st August 1941. From Beckford he went to the Salesian Missionary College at Shrigley, Cheshire, for a two year's course of philosophy. He was then given his obedience to proceed to Malta as a teacher and assistant. This he accepted very willingly. Before leaving England he paid a visit to his mother but did not tell her that he was going overseas for fear of causing her any anxiety. At that time there was great danger to shipping from mines and submarines. The journey to Malta was made amidst the dangers of total war. The ship sailed in convoy and did not arrive in Malta until three weeks later.

During his triennium he was all that a Salesian assistant should be, diligent, punctual, always where he was supposed to be. He was a cheerful companion and one found it easy to get on with him. He was always anxious to do his best for the boys entrusted to his care. In class he was patient and painstaking. If he had a difference with someone he made it up as soon as possible. About this time his general health deteriorated and gave cause for concern. He had varicose veins which made standing a torture to him; nevertheless he was always at his post no matter what it cost him. He assisted the boys during the long recreations and on the weekly walks. In a playful mood in the dining-room one day he wrote in the Salesian Necrology. . . "Ch. Steptoe Luigi Derreck da Londra - St. Patrick's(Malta) 1946, a 26 anni di eta, 5 di professione; . . he was quite a good chap but you need to pray hard for him." No one took much notice of this at the time, but it did seem to be a strange kind of humour.

On Thursday, 28th November he was joking and laughing as usual and seemed to be very well. On Friday morning, just before the boys got up, he went to the Catechist and told him he was not feeling too well and that he would go back to bed as soon as the boys had left the dormitory. He returned to the dormitory and got the boys up, but after a few minutes he found he was unable to carry on, so he sent for someone to relieve him. When his temperature was taken it was found to be very high. He had an eruption on the side of his face which was causing great irritation. When the doctor called he immediately arranged for him to be admitted to hospital. Although he did not think that there was any danger of death, he thought that an application of a new drug would put him right in no time.

He was taken to hospital about noon. At 2. 30. p. m. a telephone call came to say that his condition had deteriorated. Fr. Rector went to the hospital to anoint him. Next morning he was sinking fast so Fr. Rector, Fr. Catechist and Fr. Mizzi went to the hospital and recited prayers for the dying; at 10. 55. am. Bro. Derreck breathed his last. He had been unconscious all the time he was in hospital and died without recovering consciousness.

Prayers were immediately offered up by the whole school. On the following morning the confreres from both houses recited the Office for the Dead and this was followed by a Solemn Requiem Mass. The funeral took place in the afternoon from the hospital to the beautiful Adolorata cemetery. The confreres from both houses and all the boys went to the graveside. A company of the Salesian Boys' Brigade formed a guard of honour.

The death of our dear brother has been a great shock to us. We feel sure that he has earned the reward promised by Our Divine Lord and has merited those words. . "Well done thou good and faithful servant. . . enter thou into the joy of thy Lord. " I ask your charitable prayers for the eternal repose of his soul. Pray also for the spiritual and temporal welfare of this house.

Yours devotedly in Christ,

Patrick McLoughlin. (Rector)