

Dear Confreres,

In the name of the members of this Community I share with you our sadness at the recent death of

FR. STANLEY TYSON

and at the same time ask you to rejoice with us that one of our number has received the grace of being able to prepare in such a thorough and edifying manner for his final act of complete self-giving to the Heavenly Father.

Stanley James Tyson was born on the 9th February 1911 in Liverpool, England. The Tyson home would have enjoyed a deeply Christian atmosphere. Of the five children (three boys and two girls), the third son (Stanley) became a Salesian priest, and the two girls joined the religious Congregation of the Cross and the Passion: Sr. Francis Mary and Sr. Michael Mary are the only surviving members of the family. Stanley was educated by the Jesuits and eventually joined the Salesians in 1930. He was ordained a priest at Blaisdon on 21st July 1940 and in the 44 years of his priesthood was a teacher in several Salesian Colleges in England, a missionary in Swaziland and Iran and a parish priest in England. Fr. J. J. Wiseman S.D.B., a colleague of Fr. Tyson's from those early years, recently wrote to me about him, saying in part:

"He was always a hardworking; conscientious school master and catechist (as the post was once known to us!), of regular life and a cheerful member of the community. I don't think he would be reluctant to be called to Christ and am sure he would be carefully and piously prepared."

In 1972 Fr. Tyson came to Australia and was assistant priest at the Salesian parish in Engadine N.S.W. until 1983 when failing eye-sight and age forced him to retire. We are grateful that the Provincial sent him to Port Pirie where he spent almost two years. He found his first experience of retirement a difficult change after his more active life in the parish of Engadine and he left Port Pirie briefly to do some parish work in Brunswick, Victoria.

Fr. Tyson was happy to return here after a few months, and at once took up his responsibilities with great enthusiasm, quickly endearing himself to all. He celebrated the Sacrament of Reconciliation with the school children each day, and was a true minister of God's word sharing with us the fruits of his own prayer and meditation. Fr. Tyson enjoyed the opportunities to say Mass in the surrounding parishes and the people always knew that they could expect a thought-provoking and entertaining sermon. Fr. Tyson was a Salesian after the heart of Don Bosco. He spent the recesses and lunch hours in the playground where he was a great favourite with the students. They found him affable and approachable.

Here in the Salesian Community we considered Fr. Stan a special gift. His unfailing sense of humour always made it a joy to be in his company. His punctuality, spirit of piety and sense of openness to the will of God were an example to us all. He was loved by the four of us in this Community and he is already sorely missed. His empty place at the table and in the chapel is a constant reminder of the dear friend we know who is already contributing to the merriment of heaven.

But the memories come back to us: of Fr. Stan arriving in Port Pirie one boiling hot February day with all his worldly possessions in two small suitcases; his beautifully modulated English accent; his wit and wisdom and culture; of Fr. Stan at the centre of a group of happy youngsters in the playground telling jokes and bringing a smile to everyone's face; of his not minding at all that the students affectionately called him "E.T!" — as he told us of himself, "I am now one of the circular clergy!" How often he had us helpless with laughter! But how often too his educated and balanced opinions, his loyalty to the teachings of the church and his fidelity to his Salesian vocation came through to us in his conversation and in his example!

Fr. Tyson had experienced some chest pains during early September this year, and after a visit to his doctor was admitted for a thorough check-up. Angina pectoris was diagnosed. After a few days he was released and insisted on resuming his duties. However he had further chest pains early in October and saw his doctor on Thursday 11th.

We have no doubt that he was prepared to meet the Lord he had served so well and for so long, when his heart attack came later that night. At about 11.30 p.m. he called for his Confessor and was given the Anointing of the Sick before being taken to hospital. Tests confirmed that Fr. Stan had indeed suffered a massive heart attack and the doctor's prognosis was not good.

His sense of humour never left him. Fr. Provincial visited him in hospital and he received Holy Communion every day. Cards, flowers and greetings began to arrive from his many friends and from the children. As the days went by without further attacks it seemed that Fr. Stan was rallying. But then, in the early hours of Sunday October 21st, we received a call from the hospital to say that Fr. Tyson had just suffered another, and this time fatal, cardiac arrest. We went to the hospital immediately and administered the last anointing. But the Lord had already said: "Come good and faithful servant — inherit the Kingdom that has been prepared for you." And Fr. Stan was quick to respond. In his own inimitable way he had said only recently, "Don't tell people to pray for me. If heaven is all it's supposed to be — that's where I want to go!"

His Lordship, Bishop Peter DeCampo, assisted by the priests of this community and twenty other concelebrants, offered Requiem Mass in the Cathedral at Port Pirie on Tuesday, 23rd October. Five hundred children from the school and many parishioners attended. On Wednesday 24th his body was taken to Melbourne for the Funeral Mass and burial at our own cemetery in the grounds of Salesian College, "Rupertswood", Sunbury. The Mass was celebrated by Fr. Provincial and more than thirty concelebrants, along with a large crowd of students, novices, Salesians in formation and Salesian Sisters. The Mother Provincial of the Good Samaritan Sisters, representing the Order whose members work with us here in Port Pirie, also attended. It was a vibrant celebration filled with the hope of resurrection.

I found in Fr. Stan's desk a book of reflections and jottings. The last page, which must have been written in October shortly before his heart attack, is a meditation on the Rosary. It concludes with the words: "Things human meet things Divine" — a fitting way to sum up this first stage of our existence, but also a most appropriate description of the life-mission of a Salesian of the calibre of Fr. Tyson.

"What a welcome sound is the footstep of him who brings Good News!" Fr. Stan enriched our community with Good News, with happy news, and we give thanks to God for his life, his priesthood, his spirituality and the wit and charm with which he lightened our days. Let us pray that the welcome sound of his footsteps is already echoing in the corridors of heaven. May the Eucharist he shared with us be, in him and in us, a seed springing up to everlasting life.

Fr. L. J. Moate S.D.B.
Rector.