



## **FATHER FRANCIS BOAT, S.D.B.**

IN THE EARLY HOURS of Monday, 16th October, 1967, death came quickly to our dear confrere, Father Francis Boat, and in spite of expert efforts to postpone the end, took him in one swift stroke.

You could almost say that Fr. Boat died laughing. Certainly he joked with the doctor who was at hand when the Night Sister in the hospital noticed a change in Fr. Boat's condition and called the doctor in to examine him. Now for some strange reason it was most difficult to find Fr. Boat's pulse in his wrist. It was not where one could expect to find it. And when this doctor who had not previously attended Fr. Boat, took the patient's right hand, the sick man watched him with amusement as the look on the doctor's face showed a growing puzzlement. When he had quietly enjoyed his little joke, he said to the doctor, his eyes twinkling with laughter: "Here, try it in the left hand. 'Tis easier to find it in this one. Try there." He pointed to the exact spot. And with his face wrinkling with laughter at the thought of his being able to tell the doctor what to do, he settled back quietly while the doctor concentrated.

There were a few more pleasantries exchanged before the doctor and the Night Sister left the room, leaving the door ajar. The doctor was prescribing something to help Fr. Boat when from the big cough the patient gave they knew he was in distress. They hurried back to his side only to find him already grappling with death. A massive clot must have lodged in the coronary artery to bring about the end.

A priest who was a patient in a neighbouring room was hurriedly called and was with him at the last while the doctor and Sister worked energetically to save him. But for Fr. Francis Boat, it was his moment to answer roll-call.

One cannot help thinking that such was the way this shy man would have wished it. In all his sixty-six years of vigorous and full life, this was the first time he had ever been a hospital patient. He was one of those who believed in physical fitness and maintained

himself in peak condition by strenuous outdoor work and games. The big numbers of Salesian boys whom he put through their paces during his years as a Physical Education Master or as a Cadet Officer, will recall how very fit he always was.

This quietly-spoken man was born in Wales in August 1901. His father was Thomas Boat, his mother Ellen Lynch whose family emigrated to Wales from Co. Waterford in Ireland and settled near Swansea. Francis was one of twelve children, four of whom died in infancy. Another son of the family, William, also became a priest and worked for many years in a difficult mission in South Dakota. He now lives in retirement in St. Louis.

Francis spent some time at Battersea as an Aspirant before going to Cowley, Oxford, to begin his Novitiate in September 1923. Twelve months later, immediately after his Profession, he got his first letter of obedience. His diary records that he was excited about his first assignment. Small wonder, for his destination was six thousand miles from his native Wales. He was bound for Cape Town. And so, in November 1924, he caught his first glimpse of Table Mountain which he was to climb many times in the years that followed.

In 1931, the transferred Feast of Mary, Help of Christians fell on May 31st. On that day, Francis Boat and three other Salesians were ordained priests in St. Mary's Cathedral, Cape Town. The following year he sailed for Europe to be present at the ordination of his brother William in Switzerland.

Eighteen years were to pass before Fr. Boat again sailed into Table Bay. During those years he taught in Farnborough, Bolton, Battersea, before returning to South Africa in 1950 to become Prefect of Studies at Salesian Institute in Cape Town. Three years later he was transferred to Lansdowne, and in 1957 back again to Cape Town.

His last years were to be spent in Lansdowne where he was a valued member of the teaching staff. He took a keen interest in the College grounds making it his special hobby to see that grass was cut and pitches marked, to make sure that all was right at the tennis courts and the swimming pool, to ensure that hedges were trimmed and flowers tended. Into this varied work he poured much time, much energy and abundant devotion, though no matter how anxious he was to have everything right in the College environs, he never let this work interfere with his teaching programme, nor with his pastoral work, nor his work for the Sisters in various Cape Town Convents where he sat for patient hours in the confessional week after week.

The very day before he suffered his first heart attack, he was out on his tractor cutting grass on the cricket pitches in the morning and in the afternoon at a Convent in the City for confessions.

On Friday, 6th October, he was in chapel as usual with the Community for Meditation and Holy Mass. The schools in the Cape were closed for a short holiday period and he was working hard to have the pitches in order and the swimming pool refilled before classes resumed. But that morning as he prepared to start his outdoor work, he got a very severe pain in his chest and down his left arm. He weathered this attack on his own. It was several hours before we knew what had happened and were able to bring a doctor.

It was considered more prudent not to move Fr. Boat that night. When the doctor saw him next morning, he would not let him be moved till he had called in a heart specialist.

When he was told that he would be going to hospital, he did not take very kindly to the idea. The Good Lord had endowed him with such wonderful health that he had never had acquaintance with hospitals except what he had gained through his pastoral work. For his first few days he wanted to have complete rest and expressed a wish that nobody call to see him. But when we did call we found that he had settled down quickly and was quite at home. After that he looked forward to seeing us when we called.

When he was a week in hospital, three members of the Lansdowne Community called to visit him. He seemed in very good spirits, talkative and jovial. When we were leaving, he said to me: "If you can, come in over the week-end. I would like to talk over with you some future projects," he said, adding with a smile . . . "if there are going to be any future projects for me." "Your first project," I told him, "is to get well, then we can talk about the others. However, if you want me to come, I'll come." That was on Saturday at lunchtime.

Next day there was Confirmation in the afternoon in the parish church attached to the School, and I could not go to visit him at the usual time. But another member of the Community went with friends whom Fr. Boat had asked to call. They found him in such good spirits that when I rang the hospital in the late afternoon asking one of the Sisters to speak to him and enquire whether he would like me to come that evening, and he sent back word that it was late to drive in so far and to come the following day instead, I fell in with his suggestion.

But an early morning phone call on Monday brought the news that Fr. Boat had died.

We buried him from the beautiful church of Our Lady, Help of Christians in Lansdowne, a sanctuary which he had seen grow under the vigilant eye of his friend, the late Fr. Barragry, who must have looked on with as much envy as one is permitted in heaven as he thought of his own lonely end, away from his English and South African friends, and his burial from a church other than this beautiful one in Lansdowne which meant so much to him.

That church was full for the Concelebrated Requiem Mass for Fr. Boat. The large number of priests who came from Cape Town, the Sisters from many Convents, the present pupils from Lansdowne and Cape Town, the many Past Pupils from both Colleges, who came to pay their last respects to this quietly-spoken Salesian was a measure of the esteem in which he was held by all.

During his illness, he was thinking of future projects to keep himself occupied. May we hope that one of the projects he will direct from heaven will be the progress, spiritual and temporal, of Savio Salesian College, Lansdowne, its Staff and pupils.

We ask the charity of your prayers for the repose of the soul of Fr. Francis Boat, for the Community where his death left a muchfelt vacancy, and especially for an increase in vocations among our Catholic youth in South Africa who will take up the work where men like Fr. Boat had to leave it when death beckoned them away.

DANIEL A. LYONS, S.D.B.  
RECTOR

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### FOR THE NECROLOGY

Under 16th October

FATHER FRANCIS BOAT, born in Wales, 2nd August 1901; died in Cape Town, South Africa, 16th October 1967, in the 67th year of his age, the 43rd of his Religious Profession and the 36th of his Priesthood.