

### FATHER MICHAEL BRASSIL. S. D. B.

At eight o'clock on the evening of Tuesday, 3rd January 1989, Fr. Michael died peacefully at the Nazareth House, Johannesburg – just as the priest attending him was inviting the Angels of God to welcome him.

Michael was born in Tralee, County Kerry on the 28th October 1915. He joined the Salesian Congregation in 1934 as an aspirant at Battersea, London. He entered the novitiate at Cowley, Oxford, the following year. He came to South Africa in 1949, just one year after his ordination. There he spent thirty-nine years in the ministry of preaching and teaching – twenty-eight years in Cape Town and eleven years in the Transvaal. For twenty-one years he taught at Savio College, Lansdowne (a suburb of Cape Town), giving an outstandingly dedicated service to all the boys who came under his care. During that time he became well-known to the families of Our Lady, Help of Christians parish, Lansdowne. His zealous service for a few years as assistant priest in our parishes of Robertsham, Hanover Park and Westridge (Mitchells Plain) was crowned by his achievements as Parish Priest at Westridge (for two years) and Lyttelton (near Pretoria), where he worked during his last five years. The fact that there is such a vibrant Christian community with so many responsible, dedicated, lay workers is due in great measure to the inspiration of Fr. Brassil.

All the people he ministered to realised that not only had he their good at heart, but that also, like the good pastor he was, he kept challenging them to higher ideals. The description that best sums up Michael Brassil is one that is bestowed sparingly by people in Cork and Kerry: He is a "sound man"!

A sound man is one who is eminently reliable. There is nothing flamboyant about him. Quietly, efficiently, patiently, he goes about his work, and invariably achieves his purpose. This means that he has chartered his course carefully: he has set fidelity to some ideal as his life's chief purpose.

This sums up Michael. When he was a student and when he was dogged by ill-health his tenacity of purpose was admirable. The road to the priesthood was no easy highway for Michael Brassil. Perhaps that is why he prized his Salesian and priestly vocation above all else. He had no pretensions to scholarship, but he had the qualities that boys admire in a teacher. During the years that he taught in several Salesian schools he was greatly respected by the boys. He taught Mathematics, and his methodical approach ensured that the pupils assimilated the basic skills thoroughly. Others could build on that foundation. Boys are very perceptive, and they soon realised that this quiet man was a disciplinarian. He was concerned, he was fair, he was just. But even in school life he was always firstly a Salesian and a priest, deeply dedicated to Don Bosco's ideal: "Give me souls, keep the rest!"

When he was assigned to parish work, these characteristics of directness and honesty showed in his dealings with the parishioners. In his district every Catholic home was visited: and, as priests know only too well, this called for dedication and patient courage. Fear that one might interrupt a favourite T. V. programme could suggest to some that home visitation would be inopportune or ineffective: but not for Michael Brassil. Should the occasion warrant it, he would cut through the preliminary pleasantries with devastating directness. Many a Catholic was challenged to face up to the ultimate reality: "What you say is all very well; but brother (or sister) what about your immortal soul?"

This practical realism was also reflected in his sermons. They were simple, very intelligent, well-prepared. He had a fine collection of stories, indeed, modern parables, which he used to illustrate his points especially for children. His Salesian experience gave him a clear insight into the needs of young people. He was comfortable with them; and his honest direct answers based on the teaching of the church may not have pleased the boys and girls, but they earned him respect. In season and out of season he gave them the Good News of Christ.

His people appreciated him and his honest solicitude for everyone, young and old. He was greatly respected and loved. He was indeed "a sound man"!

Please join us in praying that God our Father, through the intercession of Mary Help of Christians and St. John Bosco will speedily grant him the reward of those who die in the Lord.

Pray, too, that our new Salesian Province of South Africa will continue to be blessed with "sound men" of the calibre of our late Father Michael Brassil.

Fr. Thomas Donaghy.

Necrology: Fr. Michael Brassil. SDB. Born on October 28th 1915 in Tralee, Ireland. Died in Johannesburg on January 3rd 1989 in the 74th year of his age, the 41st year of his sacred priesthood and the 53rd year of his religious profession as a Salesian.