

Thornleigh College,
Bolton,
Lancs.

November 1950.

FR. MICHAEL JOSEPH BURKE. SDB.

Dear Confreres,

It is with deep sorrow that we announce the sad news of the death of Fr. Burke, who departed this life, comforted by the last rites of the Church on Friday, November 3rd 1950, in the 65th year of his age, the 25th of priesthood and the 43rd of his religious profession. Fr. Burke was born at Athleague, Co. Roscommon, Eire, being the youngest son of Thomas Burke and Mary Scott. His home surroundings were everything that could be expected of well-respected Irish parents and in such an atmosphere of religion and genuine piety and also encouraged by the example of many of his family, who had consecrated themselves to God in the Religious Life, it was not surprising that he felt the call to serve God as a religious. His Parish priest was a great admirer of the Salesians and he advised Michael to contact Fr. Macey at Battersea. Michael was accepted as an aspirant in September 1904 and three years later he began his novitiate at Burwash and he made his first vows as a Salesian on December 8th 1907.

Bro. Michael had some doubts at this time whether to serve God as a Salesian Brother or continue his studies for the priesthood. In the meantime he worked with the community at East Hill, Battersea and later in Malta and Farnborough. During this time he did much good work with young people and he was advised and encouraged to continue his studies for the priesthood. He recommenced his studies with energy and good will and he had the great happiness of being ordained to the priesthood in Malta on November 22nd 1925. He was appointed as the bursar in St. Patrick's Malta and, in this capacity he did much good work. His practical sense made many worthy friends for the work he had in hand and his genial disposition and fund of humour attracted both young and old.

In 1927 he was appointed Bursar at the Salesian College Limerick Those were the struggling days of the first Irish foundation and only those who were living through those times can understand the poverty and the hardships that were so willingly endured. Fr. Burke was then asked to go to Farnborough in 1929 and for fourteen years he carried on the work of bursar of the house. He also found time to extend his priestly zeal in caring for the spiritual needs of the troops in the R. A. M. C. camp at Crookham. He was their chaplain and for seven years he combined that duty with that of bursar of the house. He did much good work among the soldiers and he was able to win over the Army authorities to grant better facilities for Catholic services. He was very faithful in giving R. E. classes for the children in the Army Schools. In 1943, Fr. Burke was sent to take charge of the sisters and children from Guernsey who had been evacuated to Knutsford Cheshire. Here in perhaps more than in any other place did Fr. Burke find work that was a pleasure to his large and generous heart. He did much good work and won many friends both in England and America by his efforts to make the nuns and children feel at home in a strange land. These years of strain taxed the strength of Fr. Burke and so in 1945 when the war was over and he had safely delivered the nuns and the children back to their island home, he came to Bolton as confessor and for a period of rest.

When Fr. Burke felt fairly fit again he asked for a job that would fully occupy his time. An opportunity presented itself when he was asked to take over the house at Guernsey, a work which was thought would be congenial and suitable for him. Alas, God had doomed it otherwise. A chronic illness from which he had silently suffered for many years and which for the past two years had intensified, suddenly became acute. The best medical attention was unable to cope with the disease, his work on earth was finished and, within a few days of the first seizure, God took him to Himself.

The good that Fr. Burke did during life will, we are certain, have its reward but to whom much is given, much is expected and we know that the justice and mercy of God are infinite, so, let us pray for the soul of Fr. Burke that he may soon, if not already, be sharing with his Salesian brethren, Don Bosco's glory in heaven.

Yours sincerely,

Fr. F. McCabe. SDB.