



Salesian High School,
Netherton Way,
Bootle, L30 2NA.

April, 1986

FATHER JAMES COLLETT

Dear Confrères and Friends,

On the afternoon of Wednesday, February 19th, FATHER JAMES COLLETT S.D.B., suffered a severe heart attack whilst fell walking in the Brecon Beacons. Attempts at resuscitation failed, and he died before the Rescue Team reached him. His sudden and totally unexpected death has come as a stunning blow to all his confrères, family, friends and parishioners.

James was born into a tightly knit and deeply Christian family in Manchester on November 11th, 1928, and was baptised a week later at St. Edmund's, Miles Platting. He had five sisters and two brothers. The love and inspiration of his parents had a profound influence on him, and he frequently referred to their example and support, and that of the other members of his family. In September 1940 he went to the Salesian Missionary College at Shrigley Park, where he spent five happy years developing his mind, his interest in literature, music and sport, and his life of prayer. In 1946 he entered the Novitiate at Beckford, Glos. There he deepened his understanding of the nature of the Salesian religious life, and made his first profession on September 8th, 1947. For the next six years he returned to his native north-west, back to Shrigley. He completed his philosophical studies, taught in the school, and also obtained his B.A. Hons. in English. He was very popular in the classroom, and was constantly active in stage productions, and in the music department, both instrumental and vocal. He made his perpetual commitment on August 23rd, 1952.

For his theological studies and final preparation for the ministry of priesthood, James was sent to the Crocetta in Turin. He spent four years in close proximity to the tomb of Don Bosco and the places which witnessed the birth and early history of our Congregation, and developed a keen interest in Salesian history and spirituality. He obtained his Licentiate in Sacred Theology, and was ordained priest in the Basilica of Mary, Help of Christians on July 1st, 1957. After his ordination he returned once more to Shrigley as a teacher and headmaster (1957-60) and as teacher and catechist (1960-62), bringing to his work his customary energy, enthusiasm and expertise. In the summer of 1962 he was transferred to deep south, to the Salesian College, Chertsey, where he was to spend eleven years. He became head of English, and was also catechist for nine years. These were years of great fulfilment, and James had considerable influence not only on his pupils, but also on staff and parents, Sisters and Co-operators.

In October 1973, he returned to Italy, to Rome this time, and devoted a year at the Salesian Pontifical University to the study of Salesian spirituality. The Retreat Centre at Savio House, Bollington had in the meantime been re-established, and James was asked to spearhead the new venture, for two years as Priest-in Charge, and for three as Rector. These were probably his happiest years as a Salesian priest, as he blended his theological knowledge, artistic gifts and concern for people in the service of the Kingdom. In 1979 he headed south to Chertsey once more to take up the post of Rector for a six year term. During this time he was also a member of the Provincial Council with special responsibility for the Salesian Family. He co-ordinated the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of Don Bosco's canonisation, held in Westminster Cathedral in March 1984, and did so with his usual taste and sensitivity. Finally, in September 1985, James was requested to break new ground and accept responsibility for the new parish community as St. Dominic's, Huyton. In the course of only four months, his warmth, talent and creative flair made a remarkable impact, bringing new life and hope to his people.

The oft-quoted words of St. Irenaeus inevitably spring to mind: 'God's greatest glory is man fully alive.' James was gifted by God with a great capacity for life. He had a keen intellect; he had the spirit and intuition of the true artist; he had developed a refined taste and appreciation for music, literature theatre and art; he had considerable ability with clarinet and pen, and a clear tenor voice; he was something of a connoisseur of cellar and cheeseboard. St. Francis de Sales, our patron, has not infrequently been called a great christian humanist; James was a genuine disciple. His response to the God who so richly endowed him was to accept and celebrate his humanity, and to use his many talents at the service of his confrères and the many people whose lives he touched. As retreat-preacher and spiritual guide he was in great demand; he travelled widely to share his Salesian vision and ideals; he was often invited to speak at renewal programmes for religious and laity; he did much to foster relations between the Congregation and the wider Christian community.

As priest and religious, James was devoted to prayer and to people. Those who have been afforded the privilege of working alongside him and of living with him in community will always remember his kindness and thoughtfulness, his endless concern and availability for all who called upon him, his proverbial hospitality, his capacity for friendship.

One of his favourite pastimes was fell-walking. He completed the Pennine Way on several occasions, and hiked in Wales and Scotland, the Alps and the Lakes. The hills offered him space and relaxation. They were also symbolic of his search for God, the God who beckons us forward, who challenges to growth, who waits in patient and forgiving love, who catches us up in his faithful embrace. It was so fitting, and typical of God's gentle sensitivity, that in the company of a close friend and in the midst of his beloved hills, James heard his final summons, a summons from life into life, 'life in all its fullness.'

The funeral Mass was celebrated at St. Dominic's on February 26th by his grace the Archbishop of Liverpool, together with Bishops Hitchin and Rawthorne, a large number of Salesian and Diocesan clergy, and very many relatives, friends, Salesian Sisters and parishioners. V. Rev. Fr. C. Kennedy preached a most moving panegyric. The interment took place at Chertsey the following day, after a beautiful ceremony at the school. We are deeply grateful to all those who shared these occasions with us.

We thank God for James' life and the enrichment he brought to so many. We trustfully pray that together with his dear parents and sister he may now share peace, joy and fellowship of the Father's house. And we recommit ourselves to the Salesian mission which James so generously served.

Fr. Michael Winstanley S.D.B.

Date for Necrology:

Father James Collett. Born on November 11th 1928 in Manchester England. Died Parish Priest of St. Dominic's Huyton Liverpool on February 19th 1986, at the age of 57 years after 38 years of Religious profession and 28 years of the Priesthood.

R.I.P.