

Dear Confreres,

On Thursday, June 8th, 1972, surrounded by his confreres,

**BROTHER FRANCIS CONNELLY. S. D. B.**

aged 75, left this world as he was saying the "Our Father".

For some months, after the premature death of his friend, Bro. Carlo Gartner, he had been rather depressed in spirit, which was attributed to the loss of his friend. Sadly, we learnt that it came from the same illness as his friend.

Bro. Francis, ever proud of his Irish ancestry, was one of the first group of guides appointed to the Catacombs of San Callisto when, in 1930, Pope Pius XI asked our Congregation to undertake this special mission. Francis was considered the doyen of the Catacombs, since he had expended his considerable energies in this activity for some 42 years. For this he was awarded by the Holy See the Cross "Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice". The Rector Major Don Ziggiotti wrote to him. . "Dear Bro. Francis. . . I have learnt with great pleasure of your nomination to "Cavaliere pro Ecclesia et Pontifice" and I hasten to offer you my most sincere congratulations, for you have indeed well merited this honorable title, with your exemplary life, your constant serenity, your never-failing kindness in your dealings with your confreres and the visitors to the Catacombs. But above all, may I say that it is your spirit of piety and devotion, obvious in word and deed, that has been the edification of all who have had the happiness of knowing you. "

Francis was ever outstanding for his devotion and loyalty to the Pope and to the Church, for his love for the city of Rome. He was gifted with a happy disposition, ever optimistic in his views and never dwelling on the negative aspects of his fellow man. His constant kindness and courtesy to all won for him the community's affection and esteem.

Fr. Thomas Swanzey writing from London says. . "I am sure that the death of Bro. Francis has left a great gap in the community of San Callisto where he has laboured for so many years. For many people, a visit to the Catacombs will never be quite the same again, so much was the pleasure of meeting this good confrere. His apostolic simplicity, his deep love for Don Bosco and for Our Lady, his insatiable desire to do good to all, made a wonderful impression on countless pilgrims. "

Don Battezzati was his Rector for 24 years; he says "His courtesy towards all, manifested more in manner than words, was proverbial. Likewise his piety was manifested to all by example; how often did I see him, kneeling with his eyes fixed on the Tabernacle, tears in his eyes. " Returning from his work in the Catacombs, his first visit would be to the chapel. No one ever heard him say a word of complaint. Whenever there might be some dispute he would intervene quietly and try to smooth over difficulties. Sometimes he would excuse himself for being overlong in explanations, saying that pilgrims have a right to know all about the Catacombs. To him this holy and ancient sanctuary was second only to the Vatican, being as it is, the resting place of fourteen Popes. And what can one say of his devotion to the Pope! Catholic, papal Rome was in his blood, from head to foot!

His family and friends remember him as an open and sincere youth, a daily communicant from his earliest years, even when he started work in the local coal mines at the age of fifteen. In 1922, when he was 25, he was accepted by the Salesians at Cowley, Oxford. He made his first profession as a Salesian in September 1923. In August 1923 he was asked to go to the Catacombs to act as a guide for the English-speaking pilgrims.

The many letters we have received speak of his concern to try to help spiritually all the people he came in contact with; many religious and priestly vocations were strengthened by his words and example. In spite of the passing years he never lost his youthful enthusiasm; to be a Catholic, and a Salesian, and to work at the Catacombs were to him the greatest graces and honours he could receive.

When at last he had to accept the illness that took him from us, he did so with complete surrender to the holy will of God and indeed showed us how to meet pain and the approach of death. The Gospel tells us that "Having come to the evening of that day, Jesus said "Let us pass over to the other shore. "Francis Connolly, in full possession of his senses, at the end of that day and of his life, understood the call of the Lord. "I am now at the end" he said, and died peacefully reciting the "Our Father."

One of his close and long-standing friends, Professor Enrico Josi who for years was the Inspector of the Catacombs and Rector of the Institute of Sacred Archeology, provided these words for the gravestone. FRANCIS CONNOLLOY. S. D. B. Born at Willington in England, July 7th 1897 In Rome for forty-two years, holy and esteemed guide in Callisto Received by the martyrs in Eternity, Here rests in expectation of the Resurrection.

In this sacred soil of the Catacombs, everything speaks to him; many ask of him. We feel him ever present as an angel guardian. Let us give him the charity of our prayers.

The Salesian Community of the Catacombs of San Callisto.