

BROTHER RORY CUNNINGHAM SDB

The rain, which had been falling all morning, seemed to increase in intensity as we gathered in the small RC cemetery in Bollington, in the early afternoon of April 25th, to say our final farewells to Brother Rory. And that was just as it should be, since Rory, always the farmer and gardener, was constantly praying for rain for his beloved shrubs and plants. For many of us, the rain that fell on that particular Friday was not just a coincidence; it was a sign that Rory had arrived safely at his heavenly home.

During his childhood in County Tipperary he gained that great knowledge and love of the land and the countryside that never left him. Soon after his first profession he travelled to South Africa where he spent the next 18 years working on farms attached to our then Salesian schools. On his return from South Africa in 1957 he spent 10 years in his native Ireland, first of all at Ballinakill and then at Pallaskenry. In 1967 he travelled across the Irish Sea to Scotland, where he spent the following eight years as one of the community at Aberdour.

Eventually in 1975 he came here to Savio House, Bollington, where he was to spend the last 22 years of his life. Although officially 'retired' he was always busy, right up until a few months before he died. Given the sort of property Savio House is, there are always a hundred and one jobs that need doing, and Rory was never happier than tackling them in his own unique way. Top of the list would be care of the grounds and the flower and

vegetable beds that surround the house, and to them Rory devoted many hours and much hard work.

However Rory was not just a hard and dedicated worker. For those of us who lived with him, he was above all a man of prayer. Early each morning he would be found in chapel, and usually he would spend one and a half hours there in his accustomed place near the window at the back. The late evening too would see him there. He accepted readily the invitation of Jesus, 'Come to me'. He was one of those 'little ones' to whom the Lord revealed

the secrets of his presence and his love, one of those blessed by the Father. Christ indeed lived in his heart. Rory has grasped a great deal of the breadth and the length, the height and depth of the love of Jesus.

As the large number of relatives at his funeral showed, he always remained very close to his family. He kept in touch with all the developments in its different branches and he, in turn, was much loved and respected.

He was a man of great kindness, 'gentle and humble of heart'. He was always delighted to be of service, and nothing was too much trouble, whether it was a question of getting you a nail or two from his storehouse, a newspaper from his collection, a piece of glass for the crib at Christmas, or a lift in the car. The kindness was evident in his smile, in his humour, which could be quite impish at times, and in the twinkle in his eyes. In a quiet way Rory cared deeply about people and many are those who have known his concern for them. I don't think he could ever say or do anything that was hurtful. He was one of those people whose presence is a blessing. I am not sure whether there are beds of flowers and vegetables in heaven, but if there are I have a strong suspicion that Rory will be there already hoeing and raking, and probably prodding the good Lord to send a shower of gentle rain. May that same Lord continue to watch over his confreres, his family and his many friends, and shower them with his graces and blessings.

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